

Steps to a Healthier New Year

Tallahassee Democrat

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A new year is now upon us. This is the time that we resolve to make some changes in order to start the year off right. And of course, dieting ranks right up there in the resolutions made by many. However, we all know the result of most of these resolutions come February or March. Instead of plotting a grand resolution to diet or lose weight this year, why not just resolve to adopt healthier eating habits? These are the sorts of habits that can both lead us to the goals we want to achieve as well as provide a framework for healthy living that can last a lifetime. And how do we get there? Literally, one step at a time!

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) had the same idea for the 2005 Food Guidelines subtitle: MyPyramid – Steps to a Healthier You. If the goal is to make healthy lifestyle changes that will last a lifetime, the best approach is to set smaller, short-term goals that are attainable and easier to maintain.

Let's look at an example. The long-term goal is to eat foods lower in fat, especially saturated fat. This may be the goal of anyone who is concerned with heart health. What are some steps that a person could take to eventually meet this goal? Here are some options.

- Choose milk with a lower fat content.
- Try a low-fat or fat-free version of other dairy favorites.
- Order a smaller version of your favorite fast food item when you eat out – like a single burger instead of a double.
- Try foods cooked using a lower fat method, like baked, grilled, or broiled.
- Substitute olive oil or canola oil for margarine, butter, shortening or lard in cooking or baking.
- Use a smaller plate when eating so you still get a full plate, but less food.

Take it one step at a time as you move toward a healthier you in 2007. Choose one or two options at which you think you can be most successful and make those changes first. When they become habits, move on to something more challenging.

For example, suppose you chose to drink milk lower in fat than what you now drink. However, if you currently drink whole milk and leap straight to skim or fat free milk, chances are good you won't be successful. However, if you first move from whole to 2% milk, this adjustment might be better accepted. Once you have gotten used to drinking 2% milk try mixing equal amounts of 1% and fat free milk before gradually moving all the way to fat free milk. Congratulations! You have reduced the fat from your milk consumption by 100% and the calories by 50%.

Making gradual changes that are manageable is the best way to make habits that will last a lifetime. Break down long-term goals into short-term, comfortable steps and move toward a healthier you in 2007. And have a very happy, healthy new year!