

The Diet Detective: 7 Ways to Stay Healthy This Fall

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For Active.com*

It's happening--it's getting dark earlier, our kids are going back to school, and it's getting cooler. Fall is here.

And get this, according to John de Castro, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at Sam Houston State University in Texas, we eat about 200 calories more per day in the fall, and not because of Thanksgiving--this is in addition to that weight gain.

The likely reason we do this is in preparation for the winter months of famine. What famine, you say? These days there is none--probably another reason we keep gaining weight as a country. But in the past, we ate when foods were plentiful--like the time of the fall harvest.

Perhaps we eat more simply because swimsuit season has ended, and we can start hiding behind bulky winter clothes. Whatever the reason, here are a few tips to keep you healthy and living well during the fall months.

Make Soup

Healthy vegetable-based soups are great (see: DietDetective.com for a chicken soup recipe). Make sure to avoid high-fat soups loaded with fatty meats, cream and/or cheese.

Not only are they high in calories, but recent research from the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom shows that high-fat foods also lead you to be "stupid and lazy."

The researchers fed mice high-fat diets, and after nine days they "took longer to complete a maze and made more mistakes in the process than their low-fat-diet counterparts."

Watch What You Eat

Avoid unconscious eating while watching football and the new TV fall lineup. Never bring the whole bag or bowl of anything to the couch or coffee table-- pre-measure it in the kitchen beforehand.

When it comes to chips, make sure they're--baked, not fried. For pizza, watch the toppings--they can double the calories.

Eat Apples, Pears, Sweet Potatoes and Butternut Squash

Apples have been shown to reduce the risk of some cancers as well as cardiovascular disease, asthma and diabetes. Apples are loaded with flavonoids such as quercetin, which is important for keeping blood vessels healthy and reducing inflammation throughout the body.

Butternut squash and sweet potatoes are excellent sources of vitamin A in the form of beta-carotene, which is said to have antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties.

A medium pear has 5.5 grams of fiber, 212 milligrams of potassium and is a good source of vitamin C. All these fruits and veggies are also low in calories and loaded with nutrients.

Pack a Healthy Lunch

While there are signs that the recession is ending, it doesn't hurt to pack your own lunch. What are some good brown-bag choices for you and your kids? Make sure to avoid processed foods with added sugar, and always include a fruit such as an apple, orange or pear.

Avoid fatty lunch meats like salami, bologna, roast beef or ham. (See more brown-bagging tips at www.dietdetective.com/column/brown-baggin'-it.aspx.)

Opt for lower-fat foods such as white-meat turkey or chicken breast. Avoid high-calorie drinks, including juice, and try to get your kids used to drinking water. But be careful about restricting your children's junk food intake too much, says a recent study reported in the *Journal of Pediatrics*.

A combination of "high parental restriction and low self-control" puts kids at the highest risk for weight gain. The best advice is to teach your kids to control their own behavior. Also, keep in mind, children copy their parents--so if you eat healthy, they will probably eat healthy.

Eat Big in the Morning

Recent research reported from Sam Houston State University in Texas found that eating in the morning reduces total calories eaten for the entire day. What should you eat? It's getting colder, so how about a nice bowl of oatmeal with blueberries?

Oatmeal is a "whole" grain, which means you get all the health benefits, including plenty of protein and soluble fiber to help you feel full and restore your glucose levels after a long night's sleep.

Oatmeal is also low in saturated fat, as well as high in potassium, magnesium, calcium and zinc. Make sure to avoid the extras like brown sugar, butter, salt, honey and whole milk.

Enjoy the Fall

Go to museums, go hiking, take long walks and bike rides, and use a pedometer. Keep in mind that once we set the clocks back, it gets darker earlier, so there are fewer outdoor options for physical activity in the evening.

Make adjustments by joining a gym, planning evening walks at the mall or becoming an early riser. Walk your kids to school.

Make it interesting by using mapmywalk.com or maps.google.com, which has a drop-down menu where you can choose "walk" to directions and the distance to anywhere.

Also, check out the following sites for hiking: Trimbleoutdoors.com (offers thousands of day hikes), Localhikes.com (lists local hikes around the United States), Trails.com (has more than 38,000 trails but charges \$49.95) and Recreation.gov.

Relax and Stay Calm

Try to readjust to the fall work and/or school schedule. A recent study from the Netherlands' Maastricht University appearing in the journal *Obesity* showed that even when a person is not hungry, he or she will eat when under significant stress. This is especially the case when the summer ends and the "back to school/back to work" pressures mount.

You don't have to avoid eating altogether, but you do need to make healthier choices. Try to keep junk food out of your office and home, and make sure to have plenty of fall apples and pears on hand. If that's all you have, that's what you'll eat. Also, consider air-popped popcorn.

In a first-of-its kind study, scientists at the American Chemical Society reported that snack foods like popcorn contain "surprisingly large" amounts of healthful antioxidant substances called polyphenols.

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