

How to make health simple guide

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This guide covers diet + exercise for:

1. Mental health
2. Physical Health
3. Long Term Health

This is an overview of the topics covered. If you have any medical conditions, disordered eating or wish to implement any of the topics discussed please seek the advice of a registered healthcare professional.

Topics covered:

- Intuitive eating + ditching diet culture
- Nutrition for health
- Gut health
- Myth busting
- Exercising to feel good
- Creating simple habit changes

Intuitive Eating

What is intuitive eating?

Intuitive eating was designed by registered dietitians Evelyn Tribole and Elyse Resch. The process of intuitive eating was originally devised to aid health which doesn't result in a rigid set meal plan which lacks autonomy and freedom of meal choice. Although weight loss and normalisation of weight can result from intuitive eating; weight loss is never the goal which is aimed to be achieved through this process. Instead intuitive eating focuses on how you feel, allowing you to reclaim decisions about your own food intake, free from the voice of diet culture and the dieting world.

Diet culture is prominent in western society, with women being highly influenced by this pandemic. Media, family, friends, partners and society values can all directly or indirectly contribute to diet culture whether they realise it or not. Ninety to ninety-five percent of diets do not work. The other 5% are thought to be maintained through severe restriction in calories and deprivation. If you look closely to societies messages; you will see that diet culture is everywhere. From mixed messages regarding nutrition to phrases such as 'guilt free' to before and after pictures of aesthetics. The fact is that weight is not the only determinate of health. In fact, BMI has many limitations when it comes to assessing someone's weight and health. Weight also does not tell if a person has a good

relationship with food, healthy cholesterol levels, normal blood pressure or has any other indications of future disease risk.

The problem is that you can have a set meal plan, with recipes, times of day to eat and ingredients but that still creates restriction in that you need to adhere to that set plan and that set time with those set ingredients. This is fine for the short term and may even work to lose weight. Some time later, the weight will return, the eating habits will change, and you will be back to where you were at the start, with the best intentions and the best will in the world. The problem isn't your will power but fact that underlying issues on how we approach, and view food have not been met. Through tuning into our intuition, honouring our bodies need and freeing ourselves of any restriction, we no longer crave the food we 'cannot' have or strive to achieve a body ideal. We just eat for satisfaction, nourishment and pleasure.

There are ten main steps you can work towards within intuitive eating. For some, depending on your relationship with food, it may be beneficial to work with a healthcare professional in achieving these stages:

1) Reject the diet mentality

Diets do not work. Dieting has one goal in mind: weight loss. However, what if I was to tell you that not only do 95% of people who embark on diets gain back the weight they lost but they do so with more weight than they started. Diets can decrease metabolism and put the body in a starvation mode which causes us to savour each calorie and utilise is more efficiently. The body was made to survive so you can live, not for a primary goal to lose weight. Plus, who wants to live their life worrying about the number of calories, sugar and fat in each food we consume and restricting food. It's tedious and unnecessary.

2) Honour your hunger

Hunger = your bodies need for nourishment. There is a reason we get increased hunger after a workout and its not because your body is trying to ruin your weight loss goals. It's because your muscles are repairing, your glycogen is being restored for future energy need and you need fuel to gain strength, nourish and thrive. Honouring your hunger means tuning into your hunger signals, respecting them and trusting yourself to know when you need to eat. If you haven't felt these signals for a while due intentionally or unintentionally ignoring them, this may take practice.

3) Make peace with food

Giving yourself unconditional permission to eat allows you to make peace with food. If you are restricting any food, your mind will fixate and obsess about that food. When you give into that restricted food it can lead to overeating and bingeing. Nutrition shouldn't be about what you need to restrict in your diet, all foods have their place. To be healthy you do not need to punish or deprive yourself!

4) Challenge the food police

Challenge your own thoughts. Question diet mentality. To become totally free of food rules you need to see products, influencers, media and diet talk for what it is. If its focused purely on weight loss or body goals, its most probably a diet. To trust your own intuition and to honour your hunger you need to question how you think and feel towards food.

5) Feel your fullness

Feeling your fullness requires you to be mindful of your fullness signals. This means slowing down, tuning in and feeling when you are getting full and when you feel like you need to stop eating because you will eat past comfortable fullness. In today's busy world it's easy to not pay attention to fullness or to be distracted whilst eating.

6) Discover the satisfaction factor

It's ok to take pleasure in eating. Discovering the satisfaction factor means eating for enjoyment a pleasure. It's savouring food and not denying yourself foods which you crave and enjoy. By not denying yourself these foods and savouring them it will take less to make you feel satisfied and you won't come back craving more.

7) Cope with your emotions without using food

Find other ways to cope with your emotions without the need for food. Sometimes it can be difficult to separate food and emotion. Food has been used by people to comfort and soothe for a long time, especially if this is how you were brought up in childhood. Don't get me wrong sometimes food can bring back memories, remind us of younger days and bring joy and comfort but when it is being used as a treatment for anxiety, loneliness, stress or emotional pain then those feelings need to be recognised and addressed in other ways to food. Eating for emotional reasons will only make you feel worse in the long run. Managing emotions may mean gaining professional help or it may mean looking at your work/life balance, ways to manage stress, mindfulness or journaling your feelings.

8) Respect your body

Respecting your body means letting go of that perceived body goal and accepting your body for all it is. Health and aesthetics can become so interlinked that we can't see the difference between them. Genetics has a large influence on how we look and most of the time people will have the same body type no matter which way they eat. Yes, nutrition and physical activity are important, but you can be healthy and be different size from your body ideal. Question why you believe the perceived body ideal is what you want to aim for. Who wants this, or do you think it's an expectation because of media body standards and how you think you're supposed to look? Respect your body for what it is whilst supporting and nourishing it to enjoy life.

9) Exercise – feel the difference

Exercise for you, not for weight loss. Exercise has so many different health benefits that have ZERO to do with weight loss. Exercise can boost endorphins, decrease stress, increase strength and muscle mass, decrease and manage pain, improve balance into older age, improve concentration, help gut health and digestion and improve overall quality of life. To feel the difference of exercising you need to be properly nourished. This means honouring your hunger, providing your body with energy to thrive and fitting exercise into your daily life. This doesn't mean a set exercise regime but a regime that you can flexibly manage around your day to day without the guilt or stress of not being able to exercise for a certain length of time. If you haven't been able to exercise for a set period due to life responsibilities, you need the knowledge and trust in yourself that it's ok, you will start again once you are ready and can factor in the time again. It's not about giving up completely but about consistency and trust within yourself. The thing that will drive you back is the feeling you miss whilst having exercised. Exercise can also be consciously incorporated into daily life such as parking further from work and walking, going for more challenging walk at a weekend, doing Youtube 10-minute

practices or taking the stairs. If you exercise whilst malnourished on a diet, your mind will associate exercise with pain and fatigue.

10) Honour your health with gentle nutrition

You don't have to be perfect. Nutrition should be used to help physical and mental health, not as a test of willpower. What you eat at one point in time will not determine your overall health. It's what you eat over a consistent period, this includes adding in foods that will help you achieve adequate nutrient levels, allowing your body to achieve energy balance, hormonal balance and prevent and manage long term conditions. This should be achieved in an evidence-based manner, whilst a good relationship with food has already been obtained.

Nutrition for Health

When it comes to nutrition, focusing on what you can ADD to your diet instead of what to restrict is the best way to aid physical and mental health. No food is off limits, but your body does need a combination of different food groups to nourish and thrive. When the body lacks a certain nutrient, deficiencies can occur, leading to health symptoms. The best way to know you are achieving your nutrient goals for the day is by combining your big food groups with a variety of colours. This ensures you are gaining carbs, fats, protein and a range of vitamins and minerals.

Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates come in the form of complex and simple. Complex carbohydrates are made up of chains of sugar molecules that take longer to be broken down by enzymes, think wholegrains and vegetables. Simple carbohydrates are easily broken down into sugars which are quickly up taken in the body and used as energy or stored as fat. Fruits are technically classed as a simple sugar, however they also come with fibre and vitamins and minerals so should be regularly consumed. Simple sugars such as sweets and refined carbohydrates although not problematic in the short term, will cause a sharp spike in blood glucose level and don't come with the gut loving fibre, vitamins and minerals that complex carbs do. Therefore, its best to stick to complex carbohydrates most of the time, with the occasional simple carbohydrate if enjoyed. It is recommended that 50% of our calories come from carbohydrates.

Protein

Protein is made up from amino acids that are considered either 'essential' or 'non-essential' to the body. Essential proteins are not made within the body, therefore will require us to consume them as part of our daily diets. There are 9 of these amino acids and foods can be high or low in certain amino acids and we need all these amino acids for correct bodily functioning. This includes making hormones, antibodies and for every cellular process in your body. As you will know, it is also essential for muscle growth and repair to gain strength. Each person should intake approx. 0.75g protein per kilogram of body weight. Most people achieve this per day and meat and dairy have all the essential proteins required. However, that's not to say you can't achieve all your protein needs on a plant-based diet. You just need to pair certain foods correctly with different amino acids such as grains and legumes.

Fat

Despite the 'low-fat' food movement, fat is essential to our diets. Our brains are made up of 60% fat. Fats also help carry fat soluble vitamins round from our digestion, such as vitamin A. These fat-soluble vitamins play a vital role in our cellular processes, metabolism and health. The 'low-fat movement' came around due to research suggesting that fat is what makes us store fat and promote weight gain. This has long been disproven but the diet culture loves still to play on fat and a way of marketing produce. The trick is to intake the right kinds of fats. Omega 3 fatty acids from fish, nuts and seeds are known to be beneficial for brain health, are anti-inflammatory in nature and may help with mood disorders. Most of the population are deficient in omega 3 fatty acids and the anti-fat culture doesn't help. Other foods which contain polyunsaturated fatty acids have also been shown beneficial in reducing risk of conditions such as stroke and heart disease. Saturated fatty acids which are high in certain meats have been shown to be linked to these conditions, however new evidence suggests dairy consumption in moderation, due to the way it is metabolised may not influence cholesterol levels which lead to these diseases (which is where the confusion comes in). Research within nutrition is constantly evolving and the media putting out conflicting advice does not help the situation either. Furthermore, it seems to be more about what we ADD to our diet rather than restrict that plays the part in our overall health and wellbeing.

Eating the rainbow

It's no surprise that fruits and vegetables are good for us. We have known this for a very long time. Fruits and vegetables can provide a large variety of vitamins and minerals that our cells need to do their thing and create energy. Without these we can start feel fatigued and have a variety of health symptoms indicating something is off balance from mental to physical health. There is however no need to obsess over making sure you have the correct amount of every vitamin and every mineral. This would be extremely exhausting and unnecessary. Instead a wide range of fruits and vegetables, combined with a balance of carbs (50% of the diet), fats (35% of the diet) and protein (15% of the diet) will help you achieve your nutrient intake for health.

Many people talk about the expense of adding these foods into our diets, a good way to lessen the cost of fruits and vegetables is to buy canned versions of legumes, pulses and vegetables. Frozen fruits can be stewed and added to breakfasts or snacks. They can also be incorporated into smoothies well. Look out for discounted fruits and vegetables as well as misshapen ones for cheaper. Also, learning how to use herbs and spices to season vegetables can make all the difference to taste and satisfaction factor. Working with a dietitian or AFN nutritionist can help to analyse your dietary intake of food groups to determine whether you need to increase/decrease certain factors if you are unsure.

Gut Health

Gut health is known to affect our mental and physical health including chances for developing anxiety, depression, immune dysfunction and bowel disease. Having a large diversity of foods can help the bacteria in our guts flourish and provides a large garden of good bacteria and can help stop the growth of bad bacteria. This is especially relevant for high fibre foods which will provide food for growth of healthy bacteria species which promote normal digestive function. When certain bacteria species take over and overgrow this can lead to an imbalance which has been associated with irritable bowel 'IBS' symptoms. Certain factors can affect the different species of bacteria that live in our guts. These include antibiotic use, C section delivery at birth, the type of food we consume and our exposure to nature and bacteria.

For most of the population eating a wide range of foods high in fibre, especially prebiotic fibre, can aid gut health. Foods can also be high in natural probiotics, including fermented foods such as sauerkraut, kombucha, kimchi, kefir, pickles and natural yogurt. However, if you already have a diagnosed condition, taking probiotic (live bacteria) supplements and/or prebiotics can assist in aiding this bacterial balance and reducing digestive symptoms. Working with a dietitian or AFN registered nutritionist can help in the management of digestive symptoms. Functional gut conditions, such as IBS, can also be influenced by stress and anxiety. Meditation, yoga poses and working on managing everyday stresses can be beneficial in activating the parasympathetic nervous system, relaxing the bowels and reducing bowel symptoms. It also redirects blood flow to the gut to aid digestion.

Myth Busting

- Gluten free Diet

Gluten is a protein found in Wheat, Barley and Rye. It helps maintain their shape and is never fully broken down by the body's digestion. However, this is where confusion lies. The fact that gluten is not fully 'digestible' does not mean that it is bad for the general population. The only two groups who should be concerned with gluten are those with coeliac disease and non-coeliac gluten sensitivity.

Coeliac disease is an autoimmune condition where the slightest crumb of gluten can cause an autoimmune reaction which the body's immune system literally turns on itself. The antibodies produced can damage the villi of the gut wall. This leads to the body not being able to absorb nutrients, which can cause a whole host of health issues within the body. These aren't just limited to the gut but can also cause issues with the rest of the body such as neurological issues. Coeliac disease should be tested for anyone who presents to their GP with issues with gluten or IBS/digestive issues, as it is largely missed in the general population. This is done typically by a blood test.

Non-coeliac gluten sensitivity is a relatively new condition in which the research is still emerging. Studies have found that in gold standard trials patients have reacted negatively to gluten, showing some relationship between gluten and symptoms in people without coeliac disease. Some people with non-coeliac gluten sensitivity will have the genes for coeliac, however not all.

The research is not clear as to whether these people are reacting to 'FODMAPS' which are present within foods. FODMAP stands for "Fermentable Oligo-, Di-, Mono-saccharides And Polyols". These are short chain carbohydrates that are poorly absorbed within the small intestine. People who have IBS have been shown to react to these carbohydrates.

Wheat is essentially a FODMAP, therefore it is unclear to tell whether it is a FODMAP intolerance or whether people are reacting to the gluten protein itself. More research is required in this area. It may be that there could be two separate groups of those reacting to gluten without coeliac and those with FODMAP intolerance. Either way, both groups may not have to avoid gluten as strictly as someone with coeliac disease as no damage to the gut is present with either of these conditions.

Saying this, symptoms of IBS and gluten intolerance can have a profound effect on a person's quality of life, therefore this depends on the severity of your individual symptoms.

Do to the confusion between non-coeliac gluten sensitivity and FODMAP intolerance, it is important to be reviewed with a health care professional if you feel you react to gluten.

- Intermittent fasting

- Alternate day fasting

There are different types of 'fasting' in which the human body can experience. Alternate day fasting is complete absence of food and food restriction for 1-2 days. Evidence on this is lacking and has shown to be no different to that of simple calorie restriction in reducing obesity, fasting insulin and glucose concentration. It has also been shown to reduce cholesterol, triglyceride concentration, inflammatory gene expression and beneficial effects on cancer.

However, it is important to remember there are limited clinical studies in humans and the data has shown varied results. Studies have also reported increased distraction levels, lower mood and reduced perceived work performance. Participants also noted considerable hunger which did not reduce with time. The energy restriction can produce adaptive responses that hinder weight & fat loss. This is known as 'starvation mode' and produces excess fat storage due to severe reduction in calorie intake. Modified fasting such as reduced energy intake a couple of days a week may reduce these responses.

- Modified fasting

Modified fasting uses 20-25% of energy needs on regularly scheduled fasting days. This has been popularly known as the '5:2' diet.

In mice, 85% energy restriction resulted in reduced abdominal fat, leptin (hunger controlling hormone) and reduced adipocyte (fat cell) size. In humans with a fasting duration of 2-6 months a large majority of studies have shown weight loss effects. Studies have also shown reduction in fasted insulin and glucose. Studies have further shown an improvement in LDL cholesterol (indicator for heart disease) and improvement in inflammatory markers which are associated with chronic disease.

Feelings of fullness increased in these studies and only a very small portion of irritability, low energy or hunger. There was an increase in mood, reduction in tension, anger and fatigue. However, in the current state of evidence these effects are not superior to that of energy restriction/ eating less calories. There are limited numbers of clinical trials and mixed results on metabolic/inflammatory markers with small sample size. This means to take all these benefits with caution as more clinical trials would be needed to say for sure that the fasting causes these health benefits, it could just be to simple calorie restriction.

NOTE: The 5:2 diet is obviously still a diet, it's still restriction of energy intake so if you have an already poor relationship with food or any disordered eating approach with caution and seek advice of a registered professional.

- Detox

Detox diets are promoted as part of weight loss techniques to cleanse. Unfortunately, the only cleansing they do is through emptying the bowels as a laxative. The liver and kidneys detox the body naturally everyday and no one food, tea or supplement can detox the body. Having a balanced diet and keeping well hydrated will assist in providing organs the nutrients necessary for this process.

- Alkaline Diet

The alkaline diet suggests that the PH of the blood can be influenced by the food and nutrients we consume, therefore influencing disease status. The blood stays between a PH of 7.35-7.45 and if it varies from this, you have bigger problems than what food you are eating. The lungs expel carbon dioxide when there is an increase of lactic acid in the blood and the kidneys expel organic acids found in proteins through the kidneys. There is no evidence to support this diet and it is thought that people feel better on this diet due to the increase of fruits and vegetables.

- Keto diet

The ketogenic diet is a high fat, high protein and low carbohydrate diet. The aim of the ketogenic diet is to utilise fat stores in the absence of glucose. In the absence of glucose for energy the body is forced to mobilise fatty acids from the liver in the form of ketone bodies. The ketone bodies are used by skeletal muscles and the brain. The ketogenic diet is used as a therapeutic treatment for epilepsy. Glucose is the main source of energy for the brain and side effects may be constipation, bad breath, loss of energy, dizziness, cravings and loss of concentration/attention. The keto diet is still a diet and the likelihood of being able to continue this restriction long term is minimal. In other words, I would not recommend this as a long-term diet for health in the general population. If you have a medical condition, then make sure you attempt this diet with the instruction of your doctor and dietitian.

Exercising to feel good

Somewhere along the line, exercise got caught up in diet culture and the world became obsessed with exercising as a form of aesthetics and to lose weight. Exercise became more about #gains and less about focusing on increasing joint mobility, stabilising joints, reducing chance of injury and moving for mental health. Bringing exercise back in your life to help you live more and cope with everyday stress can be a good way to create consistency in movement. Moving can be enjoyable if you have the right fuel to power you through. This means using the concept of carbs, fats and protein. If you have a low intake of calories, carbs specifically, your body will fatigue easily, and it won't be all that enjoyable. Complex carbs help to provide that steady release of energy.

Using workouts from YouTube including yoga and Pilates workouts can be a great way to save time and money of having to use a gym. Another great way to create a consistent habit of exercise is to find someone else to exercise with and making it a habit in a timely manageable manner, for example a 20-minute quick walk after or during work. Getting an exercise band or free weights for home can be advantageous. Just make sure you know how to do different exercises correctly to

reduce chance of injury, find which ones work for you and make it a habit you want to come back to, basically in the words of Yoga with Adriene, 'find what feels good'.

Arranging walks at the weekend with friends, or a run, swim or a cycle can also be a great way to move your body. Challenging yourself a bit more with a bit harder workout, being distance, time or resistance can be great for promoting confidence and self-esteem with exercise. It makes you feel proud and makes you want to challenge your own fitness instead of a number on a scale. Finding someone qualified to discuss these goals with can be helpful, if you have any injuries or pain from exercising make sure you consult a registered physiotherapist.

Creating simple habit changes

My first point to make is think about **WHY**.

Why are you doing what you're doing? what is your goal? what will drive you forward?

For me, my incentive when I changed my diet was my immediate health, including digestive issues, fatigue and food intolerances. For you, you must think about why it is that you are wanting to create a new lifestyle, be it a new way of eating or implementing exercise into your daily life.

Certain issues may include:

1. To reduce digestive issues
2. To increase energy levels
3. To reduce joint pain/ improve mobility
5. Reduction of risk factors relating to long term disease
6. Reduction in stress/mental health issues

There are several health reasons in which you want to improve your diet, some may be achieving a healthy diet to prevent future complications of ill health and others may be more immediate in nature.

Whatever your reasoning when it comes to goals, your long-term goal needs to outweigh the short-term gain e.g. the short-term gain of not having to make the effort to get to the gym or not having to cook. Therefore, it's important to decide exactly what that long-term gain is, make it realistic and timely and always have it as a driving factor.

When it comes to goals planning is a big factor.

Research has highlighted that planning for when you fail is also a big factor for success. Thinking about the things that may stop you from achieving your goals will hopefully help you recognise them once they occur and most importantly help you overcome them. You will need to know how to deal

with barriers when they arise so plan out exactly how you would get back on track if you say didn't have enough time or other life commitments got in the way.

Micro goals are the smaller goals in which we need to help achieve the big goals. Think of them as your steps to getting to the top. These needs to be made small, think daily or weekly. They can literally be things like, buy a bag of spinach with the food shop. If they are helping you progress, then they need to be there.

You will then need detailed instructions of how to help you achieve the goal

Let's say planning weekly meal plans, creating a shopping list of the foods you want to try and incorporate into your meals or buying that swimming costume as the first step to going swimming. It may also be good to plan reactions from your external environment and how you will deal with these. This can include opinions of your spouse, friends, family.

Think about how you will react to this to maintain your own plan.

By looking at your choices as a loss rather than a gain will create a negative mindset from the start and can hinder your progress.

When it comes to diet, I urge you to think about what you can ADD to your diet, not what your taking away. By cutting out foods that are associated with pleasure, this will create resistance and a loss will be felt. This can have a negative effect on future choices.

Think of how you can incorporate more foods such as wholegrains and fruits and vegetables in a way that is enjoyable to you, without restricting you. You may also want to try and find tasty alternatives in your normal diet which cut down on the amount of sugars, saturated fats and increase micronutrient (vitamin and mineral) consumption. Getting creative with foods is also great for this, it's all about breaking the habit you have already formed when it comes to food.

By planning your meals, you will also reduce food waste, ensure the spinach you have bought gets used and reduces confusion and time spent when in the supermarket.

Your habits need to be attached to your original motivating factors.

If they become detached, habits may be lost and no longer can influence behaviour. So, you need to realise why you are doing what you are doing and remind yourself every day for success. Once you start achieving real results this also will be the driving force behind sustaining change.

I hope this gives you a little insight into the world of goal setting and habit forming when it comes to health and fitness.

The main thing though is that nobody can do it but you, hold yourself accountable for planning, and ensuring that even if you revert to hold habits you will know how to find your way again. **It always helps if you can consult a trained professional to implement the plan with you too, just make sure you check their qualification status first.**

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