

Dieting for Swimsuit Season or Eating for Life

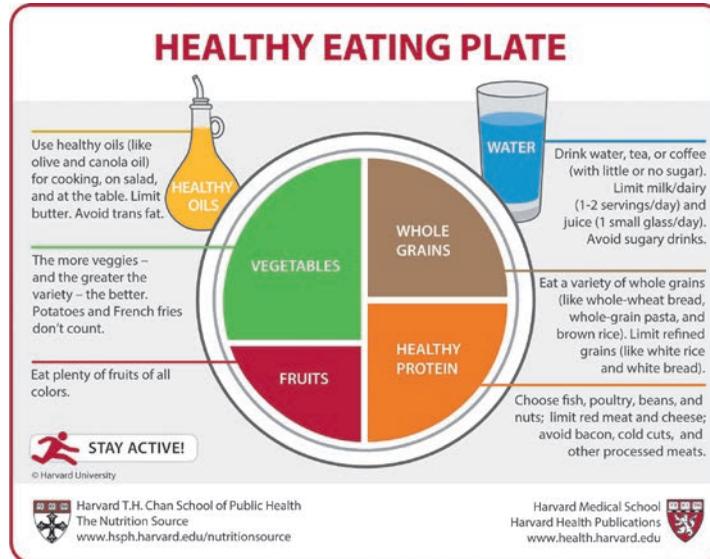
BY BIJANA KADAKIA, ND, TRUE HEALTH MEDICINE PC

It's summertime and that means swimsuit season. Swimsuit season means time for the multi-million dollar diet industry to ramp up advertising. They want to convince you that their program, their supplements, their specially designed food, their health coaches are the key that will finally result in you losing the weight and keeping it off. But as a consumer, it's hard to know who to trust and it's easy to get sucked into the hype. For me, as a naturopathic physician, my priority is your health. In this article, I've identified the top three rules which contribute to health from the various diet programs. Hopefully, these guidelines can help you navigate a diet choice, not just for swimsuit season, but for a lifetime of health.

First, I have to make clear that no one diet is right for every person. Not only are their individual differences in preferences, culture, food sensitivities and genetics but some disease states result in symptoms even when consuming the "healthiest" of diets. Even increasing your water intake suddenly can have serious consequences. I recommend that you start making dietary changes gradually and speak to your health care team if you have any diagnosed health conditions or are taking any medications to ensure that the diet you are adopting is safe and healthy for you.

Now that that's out of the way, without naming names, let's review a few basic tenets of every diet program I've ever investigated. Every single one suggested three basic rules: 1. Don't drink your calories and/or drink more water. 2. Stop eating junk, or in the words of Michael Pollan, "eat food." 3. Eat more vegetables. I'll be surprised if you can find any diet that doesn't have those rules in it in some way. Just starting

with these three rules means you're already doing what most diet programs recommend. If you aren't already doing these, call it "The Three Rules Diet" and use that as a starting point. Why give it a name? Because there is evidence that naming your program increases your ability to stick to a diet and the results you get from it.



Rules 1 and 2 are both about satiety and nutrient density. High calorie drinks don't often come with much nutrition and are often sugar-laden. Because drinks don't generate the same levels of satiety as solid food, despite drinking a few hundred calories, you may still want to eat regular amounts of food. And junk foods, by which I mean the foods everyone agrees are junk, highly processed items laden with salt, sugar and/or fat, are often just as void of nutrition. While these may make you feel full, they aren't providing nutrition, so the body often develops cravings to encourage you to seek foods that do contain nutrients you need. If we aren't eating whole, healthy foods regularly, these cravings just seem like more hunger and can justify eating more junk.

The answer to this cycle lies with Rule 3: eat more vegetables. How many vegetables? There isn't a hard and fast rule to that, but my answer to most patients is, "more than you

think." USDA dietary guidelines have been 5 ½ cup servings, but anti-cancer and brain health research suggests double that or more. So I usually advise my patients to use the plate method and try to get about ½ their plate vegetable at most meals, including breakfast. I refer to the Harvard Healthy Eating Plate (www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/healthy-eating-plate) as a good guideline. Harvard's plate is research backed and less influenced by powerful lobbying groups. Vegetables are a great source of vitamins, minerals and fiber, so they create satiety both by filling you up and by satisfying your body's needs for nutrients. Vegetables are a win-win and one of the only food groups that every weight-loss diet agrees on.

So those rules are simple to say and a bit of work to make habits, but that is the not-so-secret secret that keeps diet companies making money year after year. If you don't make dietary changes into habits, if you don't create permanent sustainable changes, if you return to the same eating and activity patterns that contributed to you gaining weight in the first place, you will end up right back where you started. It is the definition of insanity to keep doing the same thing and expecting a different result. The terrible flip-side of that coin is that losing weight and regaining it over and over again, also called yo-yo dieting, is actually worse for your long term health and efforts to regain control of your weight than having just a few extra pounds. So if you want to prioritize your health, don't buy into the hype of a quick fix and invest in healthy habits. Be sure to check back next month as my colleague, Dr. Wendy Rogers, will be writing more about small steps and sustainable changes to create health.



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