

## A New Perspective on Healthy Eating

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Change is the only constant in life. This holds even for one of our most basic and fundamental behaviors - eating. While our need to consume calories and nutrients has not varied (much) over time, our approach to food, how we prepare food, which foods we eat and how we think about all of these varies a lot across cultures and time. Our attitudes towards fat from the 80's to now, and the so-called French Paradox are good examples of these differences. How should we navigate the sea of dietary trends, new foods and conflicting information?



The most important thing to remember is that no single way of eating is right for everyone. What and how much we eat and how we prepare food is a choose-your-own-adventure plan. There are many ways we can adjust and improve for better health and enjoyment. Yes, enjoyment - because food is or can be a pleasure as much as it is fuel and nutrition.

Along that line, it is also important not to make food an all-or-nothing proposition. Identifying some foods as "bad" or enforcing intense dietary restrictions may become problematic. This may trigger a restricting and binging cycle or other forms of disordered eating. Intense judgments about food can also damage social relationships. We always make choices about what we eat, but what might it feel like to start with the perspective that all foods are allowed, that no foods are off limits? What might it feel like to eat what you are craving and enjoy it without guilt?

This is controversial, but the argument that if we followed our cravings, we would eat nothing but cupcakes is overstated. Most adults wouldn't. And part of navigating a healthy diet is to balance honoring our cravings with our other needs and external health values. If you have a reliable hunger signal, that's a

great signal to listen to. But hunger may not be reliable. And there may be reasons to eat despite not being very hungry. Some days you may wake up feeling like breakfast, and other days you don't, and that's okay. Food is also social and emotional - those needs are important too. If you have a tradition with friends or a special family recipe, that's just as valid a reason to enjoy food.

To achieve balance with your other needs and health, tune into how you feel - both mentally and physically - after eating. Consider how your choices affect your metabolic health (as measured by labs, for example) and any specific goals you are working towards (increased athletic performance, stable blood sugar or stopping weight gain, for example). Every meal is an opportunity to nourish yourself by honoring your cravings and making healthful choices.

*I hope this perspective is useful for you as we move into the holiday season.*



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