Edinburgh Community Food and New Year resolutions

Small Steps for the New Year

Now that it's February, you might find that those good intentions you had at the beginning of the New Year have slowly diminished and you're back to your old eating habits. Every year people set New Year's resolutions in a bid to shed those extra pounds and increase their health. However, by the end of January, approximately 80% will have given in to the temptation of unhealthy food or abandoned those gym routines which started off so promisingly. With so much contradictory information around, unrealistic goal setting and the sheer complexity of most diets, it is easy to feel overwhelmed and quickly become discouraged.

We are in no shortage of novelty diets which promise quick weight loss, particularly at the start of a new year. The question is do they actually work? Worryingly, most of the diets you read about in magazines are based on no scientific research and often advocate eating practices which could potentially damage your health and leave you feeling ill. Often these diets are geared towards drastically reducing calorie intake – known as 'crash' dieting, which although can lead to rapid weight loss initially, are not maintainable in the long run, meaning you're likely to gain back any weight you have lost.

Our bodies are like cars, in the sense that we put in the right fuel in order to run effectively. This means getting the right balance of protein, fats and carbohydrates as well as a range of other vital nutrients – as shown in the Eatwell plate.

You might find on these types of diets that you're excluding

certain food groups such as carbohydrates, meat, fish or dairy products which can be dangerous for your health. Cutting out certain food groups altogether will not necessarily cause any immediate effect, but over time can lead to deficiencies in nutrients that your body needs to function properly.

The only way to lose weight for good is to make permanent changes to the way you eat and exercise over a number of months or years – not a few short weeks! Setting small goals for the year ahead is much more realistic and achievable than making radical changes in your diet or exercise regime, and small, simple changes have been shown to have long lasting results. Making a few small healthy alterations needn't be expensive, time consuming or leave you feeling hungry, and you'll be surprised at how quickly you see positive results! Here are a few simple suggestions to get your year back on track:

• Make a healthy eating schedule – Planning out meals and snacks in advance will not only keep you on track health wise, it could also save you money by avoiding last minute trips to the supermarket.

• Swap fizzy drinks for water – Fizzy drinks hold no nutritional value and are full of sugar which if consumed in excess can contribute to weight gain, tooth decay and type 2 diabetes. Opt for mostly water, herbal teas or milk.

• Fill up on fruit and veg – if you struggle with portion sizes and like a lot of food on your plate, fill up with a large salad or other low calorie vegetables. Snack on berries and other fruits instead of chocolate or crisps. Not only are they rich in healthy antioxidants, they are low in fat and high in fibre.

• Switch to wholegrain carbohydrates – Wholegrain carbohydrates (oats, wholemeal bread/pasta/rice) are digested slower so will keep you fuller for longer, preventing you from

snacking in between meals and helping you maintain a healthy weight.

• Reduce the amount of salt you add to foods – Use herbs, spices and garlic and even lemon juice to add flavour to meals instead.

• Get moving – You don't need a gym membership to get your daily exercise. Try squeezing fitness opportunities in throughout the day such as climbing the stairs at work, leaving the car at home and walking, or getting off the bus a couple of stops early.

Once you start to incorporate eating nutritious food and doing physical activity into your daily routine, you will find it becomes habitual and the idea of dieting will suddenly seem a bit strange! Making small changes like these may be what we all of us need to break less healthful habits and create new ones which will lead to a sustainable healthy lifestyle.

[Edinburgh Community Food](#) is all about helping people enjoy delicious, fresh healthy food and making sure everyone in our city has access to a healthy diet.

"Our aim is 'to get people into healthy food, and healthy food into people.'

"We tackle health inequalities in low-income communities in Edinburgh through our food and health development and promotion work including cooking courses, cookery demonstrations, nutrition workshops, health information sessions and tasting sessions."

Submitted by [Gail Hutchison](#)