

Nutrition News

Department of Human Nutrition

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Small Improvements in Food, Physical Activity Choices Yield Big Benefits

Taking just one “small step” to improve your lifestyle choices can drastically enhance your health. Here’s an example. To prevent weight gain of one pound a year, eat ten calories less per day on average. Here’s another example. Walk one - half mile five days a week for three months to burn the calories found in one pound of body weight.

Two small food choice changes that improve health are to eat breakfast more regularly and to replace white bread with a whole grain type. Next, you might snack more often on fruits and vegetables instead of selecting foods high in added salt or sugar.

You might choose to read the Nutrition Facts labels on foods; replace

most soft drinks with fat free milk; add cooked legumes to salads; or replace 80-percent lean ground beef with 95-percent lean.

Similar to making gradual improvements in food selections, being more physically active enhances well-being. You might begin to walk during part of your lunch hour, or park a little farther away from your office and stores. Over time, you could increase the minutes per week spent in planned physical activity sessions, such as stretching, using light hand-held weights or bicycling.

Recent research confirms that losing ten pounds of excess body weight and getting 150 minutes a week of moderate exercise, such as walking, greatly reduce

the risk of getting type 2 diabetes, or at least postpone the risk.

The first step in this change process: Be aware that you don’t have to make lots of changes in food selections and physical activity all at once. That can lead to feeling overwhelmed. Instead, start by improving just one or two of your lifestyle choices. Nudge your food and physical activity habits toward better health. You can expect measurable benefits to your health and quality of life.

References: 1) LaClair B. Kansans not following nutrition guidelines: Findings from the Kansas Health and Nutrition Survey. Kansas Health Institute Issue Brief 10-02, 2010;March: 1-4, online at www.khi.org 2) Hornick BA, Krester AJ, Nicklas TA. Menu modeling with MyPyramid food patterns: Incremental dietary changes lead to dramatic improvements in diet quality of menus. J Am Diet Assoc. 2008;108:2077-2083 3) Diabetes Prevention Program Research Group. 10-year follow-up of diabetes incidence and weight loss in the Diabetes Prevention Program Outcomes Study. Lancet 2009;374:1677-1686

For more information about healthy eating, contact your local extension office.
The Food Assistance Program can help people of all ages with low income buy nutritious foods for a better diet. To find out more, call toll-free 1-888-369-4777.

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