



Ask The Trainer | Question # 3

How Do I Change My Eating Habits To Help See Results More Quickly?

While most of us know that exercising can lead to better quality of life and even weight loss, we often put nutrition on the back burner. In doing so, we may be limiting our ability to reach those goals faster - as 80% of our effort should be focused on nutrition to achieve the best results. But how can we use changes in our nutrition to help reach those goals?

Five steps to change our nutrition:

1. Set up a game plan
2. Determine what/how much we are currently eating
3. Change one variable at a time
4. Evaluate progress every 2 weeks to make informed decisions
5. Make changes if necessary

Changing our Nutrition

1. Set up a game plan

The first step is to set up a plan for what you are trying to achieve in a realistic time frame. To lose weight you must be in a caloric deficit - this means that you are eating fewer calories than you burn throughout the day.

We suggest that the longest you should be in a caloric deficit without returning to a maintenance level of calories (the amount of calories you can eat to maintain your weight) is 12-16 weeks at most.

We also recommend that you aim for 0.5-1.5lbs of weight loss per week (2lbs/week at most), because if you're losing weight faster than this, then you are going to lose more muscle mass than intended which will, in turn, drastically slow down your metabolic rate. Losing weight slower than 0.5lbs/week may cause you to lose motivation and be less efficient than you could be.

Now that you know the upper limits for what is possible in your 12-16 weeks of weight loss, you can set realistic goals – but to make changes and achieve these goals, you need to determine how much you are currently eating.

2. Determine what/how much we are currently eating

To determine what you are eating and how much you are eating every day, we recommend keeping a food journal for 4-7 days. This will help you become more aware of your nutritional habits.

With the journal, you will write down everything you eat or drink, what time you ate, and how you felt afterwards (satisfied, bloated, content, energized...). Having this data helps you to notice patterns in your eating habits; for example, you may notice that you consume limited amounts of protein, or that vegetables are few and far between, perhaps you eat take-out for 60% of our meals, or you eat very little throughout the day and are ravenous at night. Noticing these types of behaviour is important. It starts to give you a clearer picture of where you can start to make changes in your eating habits and improve your food choices.

3. Change one variable at a time

Now that you know what you typically eat throughout the week, you can identify areas of improvement. For example, it could be adding in 2 or 3 more servings of vegetables throughout the week; eating a source of protein at every meal/snack; eating smaller meals every 3-4 hours; or making food choices more “nutrient-dense whole foods” rather than packaged food.

The important thing is that you are consulting your food journal to see what habits can be changed, and then picking one habit to focus on for the next 1-2 weeks. The last thing you want to do is try to change everything at once, because you will likely become overwhelmed by the process and cause unnecessary stress.

We always suggest to our clients to adapt the mentality of “adding” rather than “subtracting” when it comes to nutrition. If you think about adding in more fruits and vegetables; adding more protein to meals; adding more whole foods to our diet; then you are going to achieve your desired results without the restriction-mindset that comes from subtracting or eliminating things from your diet.

With good nutrition practices, nothing is off limits; instead, it becomes everything in moderation.

4. Evaluate progress every two weeks to make informed decisions

Once you decide which types of behaviour you are going to change, it is important to adhere to this change as best as you can. You should choose a behaviour that you feel confident that you can implement with practice, and maintain for up to 12-16 weeks while you work towards your weight loss goal.

After 2 weeks, you should evaluate your progress to see if the behaviour you chose resulted in a 0.5-1.5lbs/week rate of loss, and/or you see changes in your body – monitored by changes in specific measurements, progress pictures, or how clothing fits.

If you are seeing progress towards your weight loss goal, you can continue with this behaviour without having to change anything else, as you are well on your way to reaching your weight loss goals without having to implement anything further at this time (woohoo!)

5. Make changes if necessary

If after identifying and changing a behaviour and after 2 weeks you are not seeing progress thus far, then you are going to want to identify another behaviour/food choice to change – along with the one you have already made. Continue to select behaviours you would like to improve upon based on your food journal and implement these changes for the next 2 weeks, re-evaluating your progress at the end of week 2.

What Changes Can We Make To Encourage A Caloric Deficit?

Changes To Food Choices

- Increasing protein intake
- Increasing fruits and vegetables intake
- Adding more whole foods
- Adding more fiber
- Making better snack options more readily available

Changes to Behaviour

- Cooking more meals at home
- Eating slower to avoid overeating
- Drinking more water
- Eating every 3-4 hours
- Adding multiple 10 minutes walks throughout the day

Final Thoughts

Although it may be tempting to change everything at once to lose weight, it is important to be patient and focus on one change at a time to make the progress as stress-free and sustainable as possible. There is no need to overcomplicate the process; instead, you are trusting the process and working on being consistent with your new behaviour and food choices.

■ By Amanda Parker, CGC Exercise Specialist



Self-described fitness superpower: Super strength, because lifting heavy things is pretty neat!