

A MARTHA STEWART PUBLICATION

+ 7 SIMPLE STEPS TO SMARTEN UP YOUR DIET
THE BELLY-BRAIN CONNECTION: WHY GUT HEALTH MATTERS MORE THAN YOU THINK

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YOU'LL WANT
TO EAT
ALL YEAR

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DESSERTS YOU
CAN INDULGE IN

GET CENTERED
6 EASY MOVES FOR
A STRONGER CORE

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Too Much of a Good Thing?

Here's something to chew on: Your carefully constructed eating habits may be contributing to weight gain, low energy, and health problems. Avoid these seven common blunders and you'll feel better—fast. BY RACHEL MELTZER WARREN, R.D.

"I DON'T KNOW WHY I CAN'T LOSE WEIGHT. I've cut out refined carbs, buy strictly organic, and never snack on junk food." I hear this from women at least five times a week in my nutrition practice. Many of my clients shop more scrupulously for groceries than they did their last car but still struggle with a few extra pounds, digestive upset, or sluggishness. Once we look deeper, the problem, it turns out, is often something I call Healthy Overeaters Syndrome—the tendency to overload on nutritious foods. If any of the following describe your habits, you might be a victim, too. The cure? Small tweaks to your diet that will help you stay healthy, slim, and satisfied.

1 HABIT: YOU HIT THE (WHOLE-GRAIN) BREAD BASKET HARD

Switching from white bread to whole wheat and from white rice to brown are some of the most important swaps you can make for your health—eating whole grains is linked to maintaining a healthy weight, suggests research from Louisiana State University. But don't let the earthy flavor and hearty texture confuse you. Whole-wheat breads and pastas have roughly the same number of calories as their white counterparts (about 180 to 220 calories for a cup of macaroni, for example) and are tasty enough to easily overdo. Even millet and amaranth run around 210 to 250 calories per cup.

CONTROL IT: While the fiber in healthy carbs makes them a more satisfying choice than refined grain foods, it still takes about 20 minutes for your brain to register that your stomach is full—enough time to go back for seconds of that überhealthy (but carb-heavy) quinoa. Before you overstuff, stretch your grain by diluting it with veggies: Start with ½ cup of a whole grain (like rice, millet, or bulgur) and mix in equal parts roasted cauliflower or chopped spinach. You'll save calories—a cup of rice has 216 calories, but a rice-and-veggie combo has about 136—and still get the filling fiber. "Low-cal, high-fiber foods require more chewing, which slows down your pace and helps prevent you from going back for more," says Kristine Clark, Ph.D., R.D., director of sports nutrition at Penn State University. Added bonus: You'll also up the flavor and disease-fighting antioxidants.

2 HABIT: YOU START THE DAY WITH A BIG BOWL OF HIGH-FIBER CEREAL

Whole-grain cereals may help prevent everything from heart disease to diabetes. The benefits could be due to their rich content of blood vessel-relaxing minerals, such as potassium, and blood sugar-stabilizing fiber, or simply because cereal replaces less healthy breakfast options (blueberry scone, we're talking about you). The drawback? You may be setting yourself up for a growling stomach a few hours later. "Dry cereal is mostly carbohydrates, which means it gets digested quickly," explains Clark. And that fast burn can make you feel like you're ready for lunch before you've had time to rinse out your bowl.

CONTROL IT: Add some protein to your meal: Ideally, you'll get around 20 to 25 grams in the morning. Protein slows digestion, which keeps you feeling full longer, Clark says. In one recent study from the University of Missouri, brain scans showed that people who ate a protein-rich breakfast had more of a reduced desire to eat than when they had less protein. One easy fix: Substitute nonfat Greek yogurt for milk and you'll get up to 15 more grams of protein per cup. Or pair your breakfast with a soy latte for an extra seven grams. Measure out one serving (around ¾ cup) of cereal. Add some sliced fruit, and you've got a belly-filling, perfectly sized breakfast.

3 HABIT: YOUR GO-TO SNACK IS AN ENERGY OR PROTEIN BAR

The right bars can be lifesavers when there's just no time to eat (look for those with recognizable ingredients on the label). But if you grab one mid-morning and another to refuel after an evening workout—or pick the wrong one (a few come in at 350 calories and 17 grams of fat; close to what you'd find in a small meal)—you could be calorie-loading your day. **CONTROL IT:** Try to time your workout so you eat a meal within an hour of your cooldown instead of opting for a post-exercise snack. Something that contains protein and carbs to replenish muscles and energy stores—like turkey on whole-grain bread with mustard and a side salad of arugula and tomato, or brown rice with tofu and sautéed veggies—is ideal, says Cynthia Sass, R.D., a sports nutritionist and author of *Cinch!* If that's not practical, have a small snack—one that packs about half of the calories you just burned (if you're a 140-pound woman, you expend about 130 calories every half

hour on the elliptical). "Many of my clients overestimate their needs and often eat back all the calories they just used up, which prevents weight loss or seeing results from muscle-toning moves," Sass explains. If you need a bar to tide you over between meals, look for one with no more than 200 calories (such as mini Kind and Lara-bars)—or choose a snack like an apple with one tablespoon of almond butter or a piece of organic string cheese and a pear.

4 HABIT: YOU TOSS NUTS INTO EVERYTHING

In recent years nuts have become nutritional darlings. They deliver heart-healthy unsaturated fats, and adding about two ounces of them to a daily diet helped decrease "bad" LDL-cholesterol by about 7 percent, according to a recent study in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*. What's more, people who eat nuts also have a lower risk of developing diabetes. However, nuts are extremely calorie-dense (160 to 200 calories per ounce), which means that a sprinkle of almond

Foods that fool you

Is it as healthy as it sounds? Think twice before you grab one of these hyped-up products:

GLUTEN-FREE BREAD While a boon to people with celiac disease or gluten sensitivity, products free of this protein (found in wheat, rye, and barley) don't seem to pack any extra health benefit for the rest of us. Many are also generally lower in fiber and several vitamins, and some have more calories than their wheat-flour-filled counterparts.

REDUCED-FAT PEANUT BUTTER Most of the fat in natural nut butter is the heart-healthy monounsaturated type—so there's no reason to fear it. What's more, the fat removed is often replaced with things like hydrogenated oils and sweeteners. The verdict: Stick with the regular stuff; the only ingredients that should be in nut butters are nuts and—if you like—salt; check the label.

WHEAT CRACKERS Without the word "whole" on the label, this claim just tells you a product is made with flour (which is usually made from wheat).

slivers on cereal here and a handful of walnuts on a salad there add up quickly.

CONTROL IT: Don't eat more than two ounces of nuts a day, and think about the way you'll most enjoy them. Ultimately, you'll be more satisfied if you experience the flavors and textures you prefer. Pistachios may be the most waistline-friendly choice—new research shows that your body absorbs fewer calories from them than previously believed (and shelling them can keep you from tossing down handfuls at a time). Rather than eyeballing a serving, reuse an empty Altoids tin as an almond holder; it fits just about two ounces and travels well for an emergency energy boost. In

the kitchen, stash a ¼ cup measuring scoop (roughly the equivalent to one ounce of nuts) in your bulk container so you can avoid doling out more than one serving.

5 HABIT: YOU GIVE YOURSELF THE GREEN LIGHT ON ORGANIC FOODS

Organic produce, meat, and dairy is better for the environment and for your body. But what about organic salad dressings, granola bars, and veggie chips? You may be underestimating the damage they can do to your diet. In one Cornell University study, people thought that cookies labeled “organic” had fewer calories and fat, and more fiber—and tasted better—than cookies without the

label, says Brian Wansink, Ph.D., author of *Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think*.

CONTROL IT: Don't fall under the spell of the “health halo”—the tendency to think a food is healthier than it really is because of how it's marketed, or because of positive label claims. A treat is still a treat. Instead of assuming a food is good for you, take a close look at the nutrition-facts label and size it up for yourself. While there is no magic number to aim for, the 80/20 rule of thumb works for a lot of my clients: Eat the healthiest foods you can 80 percent of the time, and kick back a little—and indulge in that vegan double-chocolate cookie—the rest of the time.

6 HABIT: YOU REACH FOR DRIED FRUIT WHEN YOUR SWEET TOOTH HITS

Get in as much fruit as you can each day, right? Not so fast. While dried fruit still packs roughly the same antioxidants, vitamins, minerals, and fiber as fresh fruit, cup for cup the dehydrated stuff is far more caloric—grapes have about 100 calories; raisins around 480! What's more, the dose of fiber you get from an oversize serving of dried fruit may lead to gastrointestinal upset.

CONTROL IT: Opt for fresh fruit when possible—its combo of fiber and water will fill you up and keep your digestion on track without the gas and discomfort that dried fruit can trigger.

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7 HABIT: YOU OVER-HYDRATE—WITH SPORTS DRINKS

If you're working out intensely for an hour or more, or sweating like crazy (hello, hot yoga), it's important to drink fluids that contain minerals like the sodium you lose as your body works to cool itself. “Not replacing missing nutrients can lead to dehydration and electrolyte imbalance,” Sass says. But if your workout doesn't require a shower afterward, all a sports drink (even the ones without neon colors)

provides is extra sugar and sodium, which can leave you feeling bloated, and hinder weight loss.

CONTROL IT: Assess your workout. If you're walking on the treadmill, doing Pilates, or out for a leisurely bike ride for less than an hour, plain old water will suffice. Miss the flavor of a sports drink? Fill a pitcher with water, cubed melon, and mint leaves; steep in the fridge overnight. When you do need a sports drink, pay attention to serving size. Some individual bottles have as many as three servings—and up to 150 to 210 calories. +