



Making Healthy Upgrades

Healthy eating can be defined in many ways and has different meanings for different people. At the end of the day it is about making small, simple upgrades in our current diet to improve our overall health. That doesn't mean you have to swear off packaged foods or deprive yourself of your favorite treats. It means starting where you are, remembering that perfection doesn't exist and instead focusing on positive intentions so you can care for yourself in a meaningful way.

So where do you start?

Begin by making these 5 positive nutrition intentions:

1. I will do my best to eat foods that nourish my body.
2. I will do my best to eat more whole, unprocessed foods.
3. I will do my best to eat more vegetables and plant-based foods.
4. I will do my best to eat foods that make my body feel good.
5. A healthy diet is one in which all foods fit and I allow myself to enjoy all of my eating experiences.

Then choose abundance.

Instead of focusing on the foods you would like to eat less of, shift your intentions to the foods you are striving to add to your plate. Is it fruits and vegetables? Or perhaps it's beans and whole grains? By focusing on the additions, we can crowd less nourishing, packaged foods without fixating on taking them away.

Plan ahead.

It's true, a little planning goes a long way when it comes to creating a nourishing plate plus it'll save you money along the way. You don't need hours to successfully meal plan. Set aside 30-45 minutes to pre-package snacks or pre-cut ingredients for the week. Make batches of grains and beans that are versatile and can be used for several different meals. And don't forget to take regular inventory of your pantry so you don't buy what you already have!

Do I Need to Buy Organic?

If you avoid the strawberries, leafy greens and apples because they aren't organic, then what ends up in your cart instead? Possibly something processed, which is by no means superior to a conventional whole food. Eat the whole foods first and foremost. If you choose to buy organic, it's a personal decision that should feel good because remember, our fears around food are far more debilitating than the food itself. *Exhale and remember you are doing the best you can.*

When to make the switch...

Though it is scientifically controversial whether pesticides, antibiotics and hormones found in food have long-term health effects, it's understandable why we would want to try to avoid them. If you decide to make the switch, feel good about starting small and keeping it simple. Start with foods that are on sale or those you eat often. Here are a few money saving tips:

Meat and Poultry: Buy family packs. Opt for lesser expensive cuts of organic chicken like the thighs or organic grass-fed flank steak and ground beef. In general, leaner meats like turkey and chicken are a healthier option than their higher-fat counterparts though all foods can fit when balanced with a nourishing, plant-centric diet.

Dairy: Look for hormone free, conventional dairy products if you cannot afford to make the switch to organic. In general, think of dairy as a condiment and simply eat less.

Fish: Talk to your fishmonger. There are farm-raised fish that are raised without chemicals or antibiotics using more sustainable practices. If you want to buy wild-caught fish, it will be less expensive when it's in season. For example, salmon season is during the summer. Frozen, wild-caught fish is often less expensive than the fresh and it's really easy to defrost.

Nuts and Seeds: Buy raw nuts as roasted nuts have a tendency to become rancid faster. You can make your own nut butters with a food processor and a handful of your favorite organic nuts. It's much less expensive. Just puree and eat!

Fruits and Vegetables: If you want to buy organic, start with the below fruits and vegetables as you eat the skin. Overall, it's best to never turn down a fruit or vegetable because it's conventional – what would you eat instead?

- Apples
- Pears
- Peaches and nectarines
- Berries
- Cherries
- Peppers
- Celery
- Tomatoes
- Potatoes
- Spinach, lettuce and other greens like kale
- Grapes

*TIP: Feel good about buying conventional fruits and vegetables like bananas, citrus and melons as we remove the outer layer and eat only the inside. This reduces the risk of pesticide exposure. In-season produce, as well as frozen organic fruits and vegetables, are often less expensive.

Genetically Modified Foods (GMO's): Although controversial as to the health risks of consuming GMO's, it is good to be aware that we consume them often when eating conventional foods, especially processed foods. Most conventional soy and corn are GMO's. Canola is high on the list also.

*TIP: Avoid processed foods that use soy and corn derivatives as additives and preservatives.

Buy Local: Locally sourced foods are rich in nutrients as the travel time from farm to plate is considerably shorter for the foods grown within a 100-mile radius of your home. Produce begins to lose nutrients once it is picked, so the faster we consume them the more nutritional benefits we get.

*TIP: Farmers market produce is often less expensive and tastier than its superstore counterparts. Talk to your farmer. The produce they sell may not be "certified organic," but many local farms follow organic growing practices they just cannot afford to become certified.

Making the switch does not have to be overwhelming, all consuming or a financial burden. Even small changes like ditching the frozen dinner for a home cooked version is a step in the right direction. Set small goals like cooking twice a week and making the switch from a processed food to fresh at each shopping trip, and you are well on your way to a healthier you!

