

The Importance of Eating a Healthy Diet in Recovery

Early Recovery

Early recovery from active addiction can be a difficult time. Our bodies may feel uncomfortable, we may have a lot of unfamiliar and unpredictable emotions. It is easy to transfer addictions to activities like overworking or watching television, and it is also easy to use food to make us feel better. Or we may overeat sugary foods, especially if we were abusing a drug like alcohol that has a high sugar content or narcotic pain medication which is correlated with cravings for sugar.

Why Eat Well

It's easier to maintain your recovery when you feel good, and eating a healthy diet will help you feel better physically, mentally, and emotionally. If you eat a regular, balanced, and healthy diet, you'll have **fewer health problems, your energy will improve, you'll think more clearly, and you won't have as many mood swings. Eating isn't just for people in recovery. Eating well is great for everyone!**

Improving Your Diet

- Eat regular meals. If you skip meals, your blood sugar will drop, leaving you vulnerable to eating sugary foods or relapsing. (**Hunger is a common relapse trigger.**)
- Drink water.
- Lean proteins are best. Choose **chicken and turkey over beef and pork**, vegetable proteins like **tofu, peanut butter, and nuts**. Get enough protein, though. Protein helps your body rebuild if you haven't been taking care of yourself because of addiction or other difficulty.
- Choose whole fruits like apples or pears over candy or doughnuts.
- Snacks are fine. It's best to include **whole grains, fruits or vegetables, and healthy proteins**.
- Try to eat whole grains such as **brown rice and whole wheat pasta or bread**. Refined grains don't fill us up as well because they have less nutritional value, so we eat more of them.
- Healthy fats are important, like **olive oil, nuts, seeds, and avocados**.
- Eat **lots of vegetables and fruits**. Good for you at all times, when recovering from an active addictive, you need the vitamins and minerals they contain help rebuild your system.

Other Health Tips

- **Get enough sleep** (6 to 8 hours).
- Find a **physical activity you enjoy**, such as walking, running, working out, or playing soccer. Build up gradually and exercise regularly. You may find it helpful to exercise with a friend.
- **Learn to relax**. You could try meditation, yoga, prayer, or gardening. Watching television and using the computer may seem relaxing, but they stimulate our nerves rather than calm us down.
- Find a support group or see a spiritual director or counselor.
- **Explore your spirituality**. Find a way to get closer to your Higher Power. A religious community can give you a lot of support and improve the quality of your life.

General Tips to Make Healthy Eating Affordable

- **Buy produce in season**, such as tomatoes in the summer and cabbage in the fall. Produce will be cheaper then. Look for vegetables and fruit on sale (but don't buy them if they're wilted or old).
- **Shop at farmer's markets**. You may be able to get deals on produce.
- **Don't buy processed foods**. They are expensive and have little food value.
- **Buy in bulk** whenever possible. Rolled oats or nuts in the bulk bin are cheaper than packaged.
- Learn to use **bulk herbs and spices** instead of relying on packaged flavorings.
- If you have time, you **make your own mayonnaise, ketchup, and barbecue or other sauces**. They'll be healthier, tastier, and cheaper.

The Importance of Eating a Healthy Diet in Recovery

Cooking From Scratch

- It takes hardly any more time to **cook a cake or muffins from scratch** than from a mix.
- **Soups are much better home made** and significantly less expensive. You will have to plan ahead, but you can cook up a big batch and freeze some for another day.
- **Use dry beans instead of canned.** Once you're used to cooking them, you'll find they're easy.
- Instead of expensive boxed cereals, **make porridge (such as oatmeal) from scratch.**
- You may like making **bread, pizza dough, or crackers from scratch**, especially with children.

Learn to Cook

Sometimes cooking even simple things can seem daunting, and what if you don't have time to spend in the kitchen? Cooking from scratch doesn't have to take a lot of time.

Here are some good websites where you'll find simple, inexpensive recipes that have been tested so you know they work:

<https://www.foodhero.org/>

<http://oregonstate.edu/dept/kbrec/recipes-0>

Good, basic cookbooks:

The Fannie Farmer Cookbook

The Fannie Farmer Junior Cookbook

The Joy of Cooking

Feed Yourself, Feed Your Family

Whole Foods for the Whole Family

You may find that trying to get healthier to sustain your recovery is the best thing that ever happened to you and your family. Happy eating!

Prepared by Barbara Stevens, June 2015