

Nutrition: Knowing where and how to start by 1st Lt. Phil “PJ” Menagh
Ramstein Health and Wellness Center nutrition program manager
Published June 18, 2010

If you have ever owned a truck, you have likely had dozens of friends ask you to tow their junk around town.

And similarly, a physical therapist is constantly getting questions about aches and pains — in and out of the clinic.

When people find out that I am a dietitian, they often ask, “OK then, how should I eat?” My response is always, “Well, what do you want to accomplish by eating?” Before asking “how,” let’s make sure we have a “where” and a “why.” Where do you want to go with your health, nutrition or fitness goals? But more importantly, why do you want to get there?

Motivations and desires can be very unique from one person to another. Some may wish to lose 15 pounds to look and feel better.

Others are interested in gaining muscular strength to become more resilient. You may be training for an upcoming sports competition, or maybe your long term goal is to maintain or improve your current health for the next 30, 50 or 70 years. Each of these goals will have a few subtle lifestyle adjustments. Ultimately, when you have a solid vision of where you want to go and why you want to get there, the “how” tends to fall in to place.

Before you adopt a new health practice, think about how it may contribute or detract from your progress. Will a rapid weight loss diet affect your competitive sports performance? Will drinking a sugary sports drink during your workouts sabotage your waist line? How will choosing pop tarts over fruit every morning influence your long term health? When you have well-defined objectives in mind, decisions along the way seem less perplexing.

Regardless of your goal, the best place to start a meal is covering half of your plate with non-starchy vegetables or fruits, choose a sensible protein source the size of the palm of your hand and place it on one-fourth of your plate, limit starches to the last one-fourth of the plate and choose whole sources with fiber. Finally, sprinkle in some healthy fats such as olive oil or avocados.

Eat only when you are hungry, take your time when eating meals and stick to vegetables if you go back for seconds. Limit treats to special occasions — one to two per week or less. Also, make time to exercise 30 to 90 minutes most days, and adjust your schedule to allow for some rest, relaxation and sound sleep.

Diligently follow these rules 90 percent of the time and you will be well on your way to obtaining and maintaining a healthy body composition.

Furthermore, improvements can be seen in chronic health factors such as blood pressure, cholesterol and blood sugar control. Your performance will improve in school, work or

competition, and most importantly, you will be stacking the cards in your favor for living a longer, healthier life.

Are there other approaches that may also work for you? Absolutely. Then again, if you were completely content with your fitness and health, you would have stopped reading long ago. Try it. Do the work and eat good food. Write your goals down and put them in clear sight. Keep them in mind while you follow this advice for 6 weeks and see what happens. Then, adjust and adapt from there.

So, when should you start? How about now?

Go clean out your cupboards and discard foods with added sugars. Also, begin looking more closely at ingredient labels. The longer the list (and the more words you can't pronounce), the further it should be from your daily menu. Shop the perimeter of the grocery store. Stock up on fresh fruits and vegetables, lean meats, and eggs. Grab a bottle of olive oil and some lemon juice (toss together with Ms Dash for a great salad dressing). Go down the freezer aisle and pick up some steamer bags of veggies, berries and maybe some salmon.

While you are at it, grab a few cans of tuna, some jerky, unsweetened dried fruits and a bag of almonds. Then, leave the store. Skip the candy, soda, chips and cookie aisles, and use the time you saved to get to the gym, go outside and play, or prepare foods for the work week ahead.

Uncomfortable in the kitchen? Use YouTube responsibly and search for "healthy cooking" or "cooking vegetables" for some great ideas.

Sugar: Educate yourself, read your labels and avoid regular consumption of products with added sugar, in *any* form.

Just Plain Sugar

- Sugar (brown sugar, cane sugar, raw sugar, beet sugar, confectioner's sugar, etc.)
- Syrup (high fructose corn syrup, malt syrup, refiner's syrup, rice syrup, etc.)

Science-y Names for Sugar

- Dextrose
- Disaccharide
- Fructose
- Glucose
- Galactose
- Lactose
- Maltodextrin
- Maltose
- Monosaccharide
- Polysaccharide

- Ribose
- Saccharose
- Sucrose

“Natural” Sugars

- Agave Nectar
- Date sugar
- (Evaporated) Cane juice
- Fruit juice*
- Honey
- Maple Syrup
- Molasses
- Rice Malt (extract)
- (Sweet) Sorghum
- Treacle

**Admittedly, it can be hard to know where to stop in your quest to remove added sugar from your diet. Fruit juice is basically just sugar, which is why it is included. Should you eliminate fruit juice – that is up to you.*

Artificial (Non-Nutritive) Sweeteners

- Aspartame
- Acesulfame-K/Potassium
- Equal
- Nutra-Sweet
- Saccharin
- Splenda
- Stevia
- Sucralose
- SweetLeaf
- Sweet ‘n Low
- Truvia

Sugar Alcohols

- Arabitol
- Dulcitol
- Erythritol
- Glycol
- Glycerol
- Hydrogenated Starch Hydrosylate (HSH)
- Iditol
- Isomalt
- Lactitol

- Maltitol
- Mannitol
- Polyglycitol
- Ribitol
- Sorbitol
- Threitol
- Xylitol