

The Non-Diet Approach

By Lisa Schilling RN

With a non-diet approach, all foods are legal and acceptable when eaten in moderation and in balance. There are no “good” or “bad” foods. While some foods provide more *nutritional* value, those that don’t, but taste great, are still important. They address the *mental aspect* of eating and nutrition. Many people feel guilty about eating so-called “bad” foods. When you attach a value to food, it can cause unnecessary guilt or a false sense of accomplishment. A balanced eating approach **allows** for moderate indulgences. They serve to reduce feelings of deprivation that many face when changing their eating habits.

Many people enjoy eating, out but associate this with being “bad” or eating “illegal” foods. It is possible to eat a regular meal in a restaurant. The same decision-making process occurs whether you eat at home or go out. Many people think of only two options: eating for pleasure or eating for health. As you learn and practice healthy eating techniques, these two options will become one and the same. You don’t want to feel restricted to the “healthy-living options” when eating out. That will leave you longing for the day when you can eat “normally” again. You should be able to order your favorite dish and enjoy it guilt free. How? It is done by incorporating that into your plan.

If you're having a special “diet meal” that's different from the rest of your family or friends, you'll feel as though you're being punished. This will affect your *mental health* and can cause stress. Stress will release cortisol and thus affect your chemical and hormonal balance. This shows how intertwined mind and body are. In order to be successful in changing your eating habits, you must look forward to and enjoy each eating episode. The key is learning how to *balance* the foods you love. If you're eating low-fat foods just to be healthy, but not enjoying the flavors and textures, it most likely won't be a *permanent*

change. However, if you begin **enjoying** foods and balancing meals you're more likely to stick with this style of healthy eating. Try to make your most disciplined choices on routine days. This will allow extra freedom when splurge meals or treats present themselves. Plan well and eat well.

To do this you must learn about what *portions* really are and how to *budget* your daily calories accordingly. This will require you to develop a *purposeful eating plan* based on your needs. You will also need to learn “approximating” calorie values of what you take in. Just as you budget your time, you can learn to budget your calorie intake. With practice, you can gauge quite well what you are taking in. This approach gives you structure and personal control. You have “x number” of calories per day to work with. How you divide those calories throughout the day is your choice. It provides an outline for you to fill in the details. This way of eating teaches you healthy methods to balance the food you have available to you. No food lists, recipes or meal plans. Food you have, eat and are regularly offered.

This style of eating requires you to be *mindful* of food choices. You must pay attention to *what* and *how much* you put in your mouth. Concentrate more on what you are **adding** and less on what you are avoiding. Balancing food **combinations** is most important. The beauty of this method, **it is not set in stone.** It is a guide. You may not meet your goals each day, but having a plan helps *steer* you back in the right direction. This should be more productive than your current method of “what am I feeling hungry for now?” This approach is designed to be flexible for the unpredictable events that make up REAL life, it gives freedom within boundaries. Next week we will tackle: Planning for Deviations, learning to bend so you don’t break.