

11 Ways to Eat Healthier This Spring



Simple strategies that won't leave you feeling deprived

By Trisha Calvo

At the start of spring, you begin to think about shedding a few extra pounds along with your sweaters. Meanwhile, a new crop of fruits and veggies begins to show up at farmers markets, making it easier to stick with those eat-healthy resolutions you may have made back in January (and maybe have abandoned by now). To help you improve your diet in as effortless a way as possible, we asked CR's resident nutrition experts, Amy Keating, R.D., and Ellen Klosz, M.S., to share their best, easiest tips for eating better right now.

Seek Out Spring Veggies

When it comes to vegetables, the more you eat, the better. But eating a variety of them is the way to get the biggest health boost because they all supply different nutrients. Spring is a good time of year to break out of a veggie rut and try some that may not be in your normal rotation.

- **Artichokes** are very filling. That's because you eat them slowly, which helps you to be more mindful about what you're eating, and they're rich in satiating fiber (7 grams, or about 25 percent of your daily need). And they have just 60 calories per medium artichoke. Keep them healthy by replacing the typical butter dipping sauce with one made with Greek yogurt and garlic or mint and chives or a Dijon vinaigrette made with olive oil.
- **Asparagus** supplies many nutrients, in particular fiber, folate, and the antioxidants vitamin E, lutein, and beta carotene.
- **Fresh spring peas** taste nothing like the frozen kind and are rich in iron and the antioxidants beta carotene and lutein.
- **Radishes** are a member of the cruciferous family of vegetables that includes broccoli and kale, which contain glucosinolates, compounds that may help protect against certain cancers.

Veg Out in the Morning

A savory breakfast gives you an opportunity to weave in a serving of vegetables, which will help you meet your daily healthy quota of 2 to 3 cups.

Try a veggie omelet or whole-wheat toast topped with tomato and cucumber, tomato and mashed white beans, mashed avocado drizzled with olive oil, or chopped mango. Add spinach or peppers to your egg sandwich or breakfast burrito, or beets or dark leafy greens to a smoothie. Consider having

a sweet potato topped with yogurt and a sprinkling of cinnamon and chopped nuts, quinoa with roasted butternut squash, or whole grains and beans. Veggie-based leftovers from dinner the night before also make for a quick morning meal.

Bump Up the Berries

Eating blackberries, blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, and other berries can be a boon to health. They're packed with anthocyanins—the antioxidants that give berries their vivid red and blue colors—and other flavonoids that studies suggest may help improve brain function, reduce the risk of type 2 diabetes and heart disease, and maintain a healthy weight. Berries are also rich in fiber—especially raspberries and blackberries, which have about 8 grams of fiber (nearly a third of your daily need) per cup. Late spring is the start of local berry season in many parts of the country, but until then you can opt for frozen berries. As long as they are packed without added sugars, they are as nutritious as fresh.

Make One Healthy Change a Day

Even a small tweak, such as having an extra serving of fruit or vegetables or choosing nuts instead of chips for a snack can significantly boost your health.

Researchers at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health found that people who made small improvements in their diets and maintained them over a 12-year period had a lower risk of early death. It didn't take a lot: For example, replacing a daily serving of processed or red meat for a serving of nuts or beans was linked to an 8 to 17 percent lower risk of early death. Some other ideas: Trade soda for water, go meatless one day a week, swap white rice or pasta for a whole grain such as farro, keep a bowl of fruit on your counter so that it's the first thing you reach for when you want a snack, and use olive oil instead of butter.

Snack From the Fridge

Fruit, vegetables, yogurt, hummus, cheese, and even leftovers are healthy options that all live in your refrigerator. Compare that with the chips, crackers, and candy that typically reside in kitchen cupboards.

Make choosing a healthy snack easier by stocking your refrigerator with good-for-you options and preparing them ahead of time, such as slicing vegetables or fruit, hard-boiling a few eggs, or stashing leftovers in single-serving clear containers (so you can see what's in them). Then arrange your refrigerator so that the healthier foods are front and center, making it more likely that they'll be the first thing you reach for when you're hungry.

Start an Herb Garden

Fresh herbs are easy to grow—even on a windowsill. If you think of them as more than a garnish, they can bump up the nutritional quality of your diet. They will add flavor to foods, so you can use less salt. And like dark leafy greens, herbs such as basil, oregano, and parsley contain antioxidants that help protect against cell damage. Toss a handful of your favorite herb into a salad, soup, or a veggie and whole-grain side dish, or make a pesto from various herbs to dress pasta, vegetables, or whole grains.

Break Out of Your Routine at Restaurants

When you eat out, try to order healthy foods you like but don't eat that often at home. For example, many people don't like to cook fish at home, so ordering a fish dish in a restaurant can help you boost your intake of heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids. At the salad bar, load up on vegetables you might not normally cook to add variety to your diet, or ask for extra vegetables instead of pasta, fries, or potatoes with your main course.

Wait 5 Minutes

If you're tempted to grab a cookie as you walk by a bakery or a handful of jelly beans from a co-worker's desk, tell yourself you can have it in 5 minutes. Then distract yourself by doing something else. Much of the time, the craving will go away on its own.

Hydrate When You're Hungry

Another strategy to prevent overeating is to drink a glass of water before you eat. For some people, the difference between hunger and thirst can be subtle. And making sure you're getting enough liquid overall—especially now, as the weather is starting to warm up—is important, too.

Document Your Diet

Women following a diet and exercise program who recorded what they ate in an online food diary were more likely to achieve a 5 or 10 percent weight loss, according to a study published in March 2019 in the journal *Obesity*. The researchers found that by the end of the six-month study, successful losers were spending just 15 minutes a day entering their data.

However, the frequency of log-ins matters; the researchers concluded that tracking the food you eat at least twice a day is more predictive of success than recording it once a day.

Another approach that might help is taking a picture of everything you put in your mouth for a day or two to create a visual food diary. Then scroll through the images to assess what you eat and when, and see where you might be able to make changes that will help you eat healthier.

Savor the Flavor

It's not only ice cream and cheeseburgers that can make you swoon with pleasure. Healthy foods can taste pretty amazing, too—think perfectly ripe strawberries; fresh-picked asparagus; a crisp, sweet, juicy apple; or fresh corn on the cob. Taking the time to notice the flavors and enjoy healthy foods will help you feel more satisfied.