

Wellness 101

Nine Simple Lifestyle Guidelines from Denis Faye, the Real Nutrition Nerd

Eat less saturated fat! Eat more phytonutrients! Eat less salt! Eat more saturated fat! Cardio is bad! Strength training will give you unsightly thighs! It seems like every time you turn on the TV, check your tweets, or open the newspaper, someone's telling you something new that you need to do in order to get through the year alive. If you're in the process of getting healthy, figuring out the best advice can feel like playing Whack-a-Mole on a football field-sized board.

It doesn't need to be. Here are two facts about all those nutrition plans and diet books out there that should ease your mind: Fact #1: they're mostly wrong. Fact #2: they're mostly correct. Sure, some are rip-roaring piles of cow poop, but for the most part, there's some thread of truth to the advice.

The thing is, there's no single, right way to eat or exercise. Our DNA and the way our lives have influenced that DNA give each of us a unique set of dietary and lifestyle needs. The 25¢ term for this is biochemical individuality. So finding the diet that's right for you is sometimes just a series of educated guesses. (My goal is to help you with the "educated" part.)

Despite this, there are a few universal truths when it comes to healthy living. When you boil down all the (credible) information out there, you'll find that most of it features the same, simple guidelines. Let's start with these nine.



1. Eat fruits and vegetables. Lots of them.

"Eat Food. Not Too Much. Mostly Plants," says Michael Pollan, author of *Omnivore's Dilemma* (not to mention my personal guru). The man is right. Fresh produce – either raw or healthfully cooked (see guideline #3) – tends to be packed with vitamins, minerals, phytonutrients, fiber, and water. Furthermore, it's filling and delicious. If you make fresh fruits and veggies the cornerstones of your diet, you're miles ahead of most of America.

2. Drink lots of water too.

You're about 70% water. When you don't get enough, your body simply doesn't function as well. Think of it as the motor oil of your personal engine. And we're talking pure water here - when you look to other sources to hydrate, you tend to load up on chemicals or sugar, neither of which will help you on your quest for wellness.



To figure out how much water to drink, divide your weight in pounds by 2. Drink that number in ounces. So if you weigh 150 pounds, that's 75 ounces of fresh water daily. Not a fan? Squeeze some citrus in there or muddle some mint on the bottom of your glass. Herbal tea works too.

3. Carbs, fat, and protein are your friends.

All (real) food consists of carbohydrates, protein, and fat. They're what is known as macronutrients—and they're all crucial to your survival. None of them are evil. There are, however, evil *subcategories*. For example, fruits and veggies are primarily carbs. They're good for you. Refined (white) flour and added sugars are also primarily carbs. They're bad for you. Generally speaking, the more a macronutrient is processed, the worse it is for you.

Also, different people respond differently to different levels of macronutrients. If you're not sure how this all applies to you, just stick to whole, real foods and eat a balance of all three. You'll be just fine for now.

4. Don't fry things.

There's just no point. It compromises the nutritional value of your food and adds oxidized (or damaged) fat to your meal, which is either nutritionally void or downright cancerous, depending on who you ask. Steaming, broiling, and baking are all better options.

5. Get more sleep.

Not only is sleep the time when your body recovers from the wear and tear of living, but a lack of sleep stimulates production of the hormone ghrelin, which tells you to eat, while decreasing the hormone leptin, which tells you to stop eating. Furthermore, a recent study out of Harvard shows that tired people are less likely to listen to their front-brain when it says, "Put down the Cheetos, wise guy." If you don't have time for 7-8 hours a night, see if you can find time for a nap.



6. Get more exercise.

The list of how exercise benefits your mind, body, and soul is endless. It doesn't have to be much. Just get off that chair for 30 minutes a day or so. (Ideally, that 30 minutes is tough. If it's easy, try to make it 60 minutes.) Don't listen to anyone who tells you that you need to do a specific workout to get in optimal shape. Yes, there are nuances and fine-tuning to be done later on in your fitness journey, but none it matters if you're not motivated. Pick something you enjoy and you can commit to, be it walking, yoga, basketball, or calisthenics in your living room while watching reruns of *The Rockford Files*.



7. It's okay to be naughty sometimes.

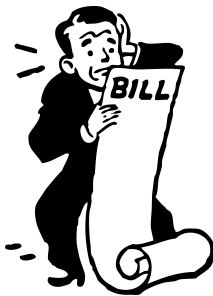
Planning on competing in the Olympics any time soon? No? Then you certainly don't need to eat like an Olympian. Relax and enjoy life a little. If about 20% of your diet isn't perfect, it'll make the rock solid 80% much easier to tolerate. (Although, in time, that 20% will probably become increasing less appealing. Believe it or not, healthy food can be yummy too.)

Same with exercise. If you workout regularly and you miss a couple days, no sweat (literally). The break might even aid recovery.

8. If you screw up, don't give up.

What happens if a little "being naughty" turns into a major binge? As they say in New York, "cheesecake happens." It's okay. Just keep going. If you don't mind a little tough love, using a mistake as an excuse to quit is just that: an excuse. So get out there and get healthy!

9. Stop stressing.



Nothing bungles good health like stress. Life is all about balance. There's summer then there's winter. There's night, then there's day. There's funny then there's sad. There's stress then there's relaxation.

No, wait a minute! That last one isn't always true. For some people, stress is a constant state of being. Stop the madness. Not only is this an unpleasant way to live, but constant stress ties your endocrine system—the series of glands that regulates your hormones—into knots, especially when it comes to the stress hormone cortisol. Just a little cortisol helps you get through temporary challenges. Prolonged cortisol reduces your ability to digest, raises your blood pressure, and redistributes your body fat to your gut. (Visceral adipose tissue, or "belly fat" is especially good at activating cortisol, so in situations of prolonged stress, your body will create more of it to meet cortisol demands.)

The solution? Stop stressing. Don't know how? Start with five minutes of "nothing" time every day just to clear your head. Stare into space. Meditate. Read a spiritual text. Pick your nose *really* clean. I don't care. Just make the time.

If you have any questions about any of these topics,
I cover them all on my website:

www.denisfaye.com

or you'd just like to rap, come over to my Facebook page:

www.facebook.com/realnutritionnerd

