The Right Things to Eat Meal Plan

Before Jim Parrish, teacher at Spook Hill Elementary, started what he calls the “right things to eat” food plan, he would eat at least three hamburgers with fries or potato chips each week. “I would sometimes eat a sausage biscuit for breakfast, skip lunch, and pig out on snacks as soon as I went home in the afternoon,” Jim said. He would eat more than one helping of whatever he fixed that night or go out to eat. He would also indulge in processed snack foods and sweets. “Little Debbie became one of my best friends,” Jim remembers. He recalled feeling lousy and fed-up with being overweight; these feelings were his driving force to change his eating habits and lifestyle.

On August 23rd 2016, Jim began tracking his food intake. With the help of Debbie Zimmerman, Employee Wellness Program Manager, Jim set a calorie limit of 1,500. Following standards set by the USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans, Jim’s recommended fat intake was set to 50 fat grams a day. The Wellness Program provided Jim with food journal templates as well as The Calorie King: Calorie, Fat, and Carbohydrate Counter book. Jim used the Calorie King book to look up the calories and fat grams in all the food he ate and used the journals to track his consumption daily. “Boy was I amazed at the calories and fat grams I used to eat. I found out in a hurry that eating one hamburger with the condiments put me over my allotted 50 grams of fat allowed daily.” In fact, one small hamburger may have 480 calories and 26 fat grams. Add a small fry at 310 calories and 15 fat grams, and this meal alone would cause a person to exceed their recommended allowance. “I went to a restaurant and the fried onion had 1,965 calories and 160 fat grams. The small cheddar biscuits at a popular fish restaurant has 260 calories and 10 grams of fat. How quickly those calories add up!”

Jim says he now eats low-fat bread. “Two slices have 80 calories and 0.5 grams of fat. I spray it with butter instead of using the soft kind. The spray butter has almost no calories and fat per serving.” He now includes oatmeal for breakfast and instead of skipping lunch he eats a Healthy Choice steamer dinner. He also forgoes snacking in the afternoon and has stopped bringing high-fat and high-calorie processed foods into the house. “My philosophy is simple; if it’s not in the house, I can’t eat it,” Jim said. He still orders a steak once in a while, but now he gets a smaller, 6-ounce portion. He has incorporated low-calorie salad dressings and grilled fish into his diet and, although he still drinks Diet Coke, he is drinking more water daily.

“The bottom line is writing down everything you eat, don’t skip meals, and read the labels.” Jim correctly advises that labels can be deceiving because the values listed are for one serving when most of the time there is more than one serving in the package. Paying attention to labels and serving size will ensure accurate calorie and fat calculations. “You will not believe how fast the weight comes off,” Jim says. “Since August 23rd, I have lost 45 pounds and 4 inches on my waist.” Jim’s daily exercise has only been walking at school. “I do plan to start walking at least a mile daily.”
Getting started: tips for long-term exercise success

All kinds of activities such as walking, swimming, cycling, jogging, skating, and dancing, among many others, can help your heart and overall health. This amount of physical activity (moderate-intensity) should make you feel like you are using energy without it being overwhelmingly difficult. Physical activity can be a structured program or part of your daily routine and it will still add up to a healthier heart and healthier you. The first step is walking—it’s free and easy to do.

Dress for Success!

- Wear comfortable shoes. Make sure they are properly fitted.
- Clothing should be appropriate for the activity and the weather.

Make the Time!

- Start slowly—build up gradually to at least 30 minutes of activity on most or all days of the week (or whatever your doctor recommends).
- Stick to the same time of day so that it becomes a regular part of your routine. For example, you could walk Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday from noon to 12:30pm.
- Incorporate tiny habits. Add your new behavior after an existing one (after lunch, right when you wake up, after your afternoon break, or even after you do a certain act like using the restroom). This is an easy way to make it into a new habit that you will start to do automatically. Make sure it is small, realistic, and easy to do. For example, a tiny habit may be "every time my favorite show goes to commercial, I will do a push-up." That is an easy way to start doing push-ups if that is your goal and you want to start small. Be sure to add to your goal to prevent stagnation.
- Find a convenient time and place. Make sure it is also realistic (if you dislike the gym, saying you will go every morning is not very likely).

Make it Fun!

- Choose activities that are fun, not just exhausting.
- **Add variety!** Have a plan of multiple activities that you enjoy. This will ensure you never get bored with the same routine while exercising. For example, you can include walking one day, biking the next, and swimming after that.
- Get your family and friends involved! You will be more likely to stick with it if you have others supporting you.
- Use audio books and music to keep yourself entertained.

Choose a Goal That Matters!

- Don’t get caught-up in setting mindless goals.
- It is important to allow yourself time to really think about what you want in life and what is standing in the way. This will allow you to create a meaningful goal that will inspire you to change. One way to find your meaningful goal is to ask yourself why you want this—three times in a row.

Track and Celebrate Your Success!

- Try not to become overwhelmed thinking that you must change everything all at once.
- Small choices and changes can create the path for the bigger changes you wish to see. Consider what the smallest thing you could do today that would bring you closer to your goal. (Remember tiny habits?)
- Be sure to note your activities in a calendar or activity log. Include the distance or length of time of your activity. Also write down how you feel after each activity. This can help motivate you to continue or motivate you to find a different activity that you would enjoy more.
- Reward yourself with non-food items! Get yourself a small gift, new pair of running shoes or go on a nice shopping trip. Success can be one of the most motivating factors.

Get Moving, Get Active!

Take the first step! It starts with walking—it’s easy and it works.

- Walking is the simplest **FREE** way to start and sustain an active life.
- Walking is safe and easy.
- Walking just 30 minutes a day provides benefits to heart health.
- Walking is one of the most effective forms of exercise to achieve heart health.
Keep a healthy weight this New Year

The holidays were a time of joy and celebration. It was time to relax, reduce stress and enjoy free time with family and friends. Yet, no holiday tradition is complete without food. For many, the holiday season was the perfect time to gather and show gratitude around the dinner table. However, we know popular dishes can pack extra calories and slowly contribute to weight gain. Here are some helpful tips to help you manage your weight, control your appetite and reduce your stress as you start the New Year:

Exercise in the morning
Exercising in the morning helps you feel more awake and refreshed. It also ensures better eating behavior throughout the day.

Eat small frequent meals
Saving your calories until the evening dinner may be doing you more harm than good. Skipping meals can cause you to overeat at dinner time preventing your body from using the energy from those calories and storing it as fat. A better approach is to consume small frequent meals throughout your day. This will not only avoid the post dinner guilt but it will also keep your calories in check.

Take your time
Put your fork down in between bites in order to slow down how quickly you finish your meal. Practice mindful eating by enjoying the flavor of every food you eat. Take it one bite at a time.

Don't stress
If getting back into the swing of things is causing you stress, take a step back and meditate. Stress releases cortisol, which increases your appetite and affect food preferences. Emotional or physical stress increases intake of foods that are high in fat, sugar or both. Pay better attention to your impulses and learn how to recognize the feeling of hunger versus emotional eating. Remind yourself of your goals and practice portion control to stay on track.

Abdominal Breathing Technique for Relaxation

How it's done: With one hand on the chest and the other on the belly, take a deep breath in through the nose, ensuring the diaphragm (not the chest) inflates with enough air to create a stretch in the lungs. The goal: Six to 10 deep, slow breaths per minute for 10 minutes each day to experience immediate reductions to heart rate and blood pressure. Keep practicing for six to eight weeks, and those benefits might stick around even longer.

When it works best: Before an exam or any stressful event. Keep in mind, “Those who operate in a stressed state all the time might be a little shocked how hard it is to control the breath,” says Yoga Instructor, Rebecca Pacheco. To help train the breath, consider biofeedback tools such as Dr. Alison McConnell's Breathe Strong app, which can help users pace their breathing wherever they are. Read more from Greatist.com

Level of difficulty: Beginner
Butternut squash, caramelized onion, and spinach lasagna

This vegetarian pasta dish is sure to please every palate at your dinner table.

**Ingredients:**

- 6 cups (1/2-inch) cubed peeled butternut squash
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh sage
- 12 garlic cloves, unpeeled (about 1 head)
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt, divided
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- Cooking spray
- 1 large onion, vertically sliced
- 2 tablespoons water
- 2 (9-ounce) packages fresh spinach
- 5 cups 1% low-fat milk, divided
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 thyme sprig
- 5 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 cups (6 ounces) shredded fontina cheese, divided
- 3/8 teaspoons ground red pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon grated whole nutmeg
- 9 no-boil lasagna noodles

**Directions:**

Preheat oven to 425 degrees.

Combine squash, 1 tablespoon oil, sage, garlic, 1/2 teaspoon salt, and black pepper in a large bowl; toss to coat. Arrange squash mixture on a baking sheet coated with cooking spray. Bake at 425 degrees for 30 minutes or until squash is tender. Cool slightly; peel garlic. Place squash and garlic in a bowl; partially mash with a fork.

Heat remaining 1 tablespoon oil in a large Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add onion, and sauté for 4 minutes. Reduce heat to medium-low; continue cooking for 20 minutes or until golden brown, stirring frequently. Place onion in a bowl.

Add 2 tablespoons water and spinach to Dutch oven; increase heat to high. Cover and cook 2 minutes or until spinach wilts. Drain in a colander; cool. Squeeze excess liquid from spinach. Add spinach to onions.

Heat 4 1/2 cups milk, bay leaf, and thyme in a medium saucepan over medium-high heat. Bring to a boil; remove from heat. Let stand for 10 minutes. Discard bay leaf and thyme. Return pan to medium heat. Combine remaining 1/2 cup milk and flour in a small bowl. Add to pan, stirring with a whisk until blended. Bring to a boil; reduce heat, and simmer for 5 minutes or until thickened, stirring constantly. Remove from heat; stir in remaining 1/2 teaspoon salt, 1 1/4 cups cheese, red pepper, and nutmeg.

Spread 1/2 cup milk mixture in the bottom of a 13 X 9-inch glass or ceramic dish coated with cooking spray. Arrange 3 noodles over milk mixture; top with half of squash mixture, half of spinach mixture, and 3/4 cup milk mixture. Repeat layers, ending with noodles. Spread remaining milk mixture over noodles. Bake at 425 degrees for 30 minutes, and remove from oven. Sprinkle with remaining 1/4 cup cheese.

Preheat broiler.

Broil 2 minutes or until cheese is melted and lightly browned. Let stand 10 minutes before serving.

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Yield: Serves 8 (serving size: 1 piece)