

# HEALTH NUTRITION

## YOUR GOOD HEALTH: *It's a Question of Balance*

Story by StaffWriters Plus

**F**orget about carbs, about zones, about fad diets. When it comes to health, the word now is "balance."

As in, a balanced approach to eating. A balanced diet that incorporates a variety of foods. And above all, a balance between healthy eating and exercise.

"The Balancing Act," the American Dietetic Association calls it. "Eat Well and Move It!"

"Find your balance between food and physical activity," urges the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"A balanced diet and regular physical activity are the building blocks of good health," declares the National Institutes of Health.

Get the picture? Balancing is now as vital to all of us as it is to a tight-rope walker, and the stakes are just as high: Your health and well being. All of which begs the question, just how do we define balance—and how do we achieve it?

"Nutritionally, balance refers to the mix of nutrients people consume in one meal, in one day, even during a whole week," says Joan Stollberger, a registered dietitian with offices in Smithtown and Melville. When the proper balance is struck, Stollberger says, over time "blood sugars come into control, often without medicine, blood pressure and weight come down, even cancers are reduced."

"I think of balance as a plate," says Cathy Nonas,

a spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association, and an assistant clinical professor at the Mt. Sinai School of Medicine. "Half of it is filled with vegetables, a quarter of the plate is a high fiber starch, such as brown rice or whole grain bread, and the other quarter is a low-fat meat, chicken or fish."

Now imagine Nonas's full and balanced plate on one side of a scale—on the other is, yes, a balanced exercise program, the kind recommended by the American College of Sports Medicine: That's 20-60 minutes of moderate-hard aerobic activity (such as running, brisk walking, bicycling, swimming) three-five days a week; 2-3 sessions per week of strength training, and regular stretching.

"All successful programs should include each of these elements with the amounts varying depending on your makeup and goals," says Alyssa Shaffer, fitness director at Fitness magazine and author of *The A-List Workout* (McGraw Hill).

"Some of us can get away with less flexibility training than others...if weight loss is your primary goal, you'll need to amp up the cardio. To get a lean, muscular body, strength training is the key."

If your mind is now spinning with images of broccoli

and barbells; of yogurt and yoga classes...well, fear not: Striking the healthy balance in diet and exercise is not as complex as it may seem. It starts with small changes.

Such as:

- Walking two blocks to the mailbox to post that bill, instead of driving.
- Trying to add one more fruit or vegetable to your diet each day.
- Making a few healthier choices when you eat out (request a half portion of an entrée; order that chicken or fish grilled or broiled, instead of fried; dip your salad in the dressing by the forkful instead of dousing the whole bowl with it).
- Taking the stairs instead of the elevator to the second floor.

Don't laugh: These little steps add up (and to help

## GETTING ACTIVE

**T**he ideal exercise regimen involves a combination of aerobic, strength and flexibility training. But you don't jump into a program like that if the most strenuous activity you've done the last few years involves adjusting the recliner in your living room. You've got to start gradually, by "engineering" activity into your daily life. This so-called "lifestyle" activity can provide substantial health benefits—and provides a great first step towards a more comprehensive exercise regimen. Here are some tips from the Centers for Disease Control on how to get more activity into your daily activity.

- Walk to work, school, the store, or place of worship.
- Park the car farther away from your destination.
- Get on or off the bus several blocks away.
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator or escalator.
- Play with children or pets. Everybody wins. If you find it too difficult to be active after work, try it before work.
- Take fitness breaks—walking or doing desk exercises—instead of taking cigarette or coffee breaks.
- Perform gardening or home repair activities.
- Avoid labor-saving devices—turn off the self-propel option on your lawn mower or vacuum cleaner.
- Use leg power—take small trips on foot to get your body moving.
- Exercise while watching TV (for example, use hand weights, stationary bicycle/treadmill/stairclimber or just stretch).
- Dance to music.
- Keep a pair of comfortable walking or running shoes in your car and office. You'll be ready for activity wherever you go!
- Make a Saturday morning walk a group habit.
- Walk while doing errands.

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you begin, we've included a few other suggestions below). Research has shown that some of the greatest benefits can be accrued for those who go from doing nothing to doing something—even just a walk around the block. Eventually, you should aspire to the balanced fitness program noted earlier. But no one goes directly off the couch and into a five-day-a-week exercise regimen of running, weight training and yoga classes. Achieving that balance takes time. Be patient, and stick with it. "People are not consistent," Nonas says. "They try hard, but there are too many daily things that seem to get in their way...a night out, a birthday party at the office, free lunch, cookies on the counter. These things add up."

Other obstacles can include so-called "triggers." For example, if you're getting hungry just reading about food, you might be triggering a response that's based not on actual, physiological need for food. "Triggers" can include smells and sounds, such as the aroma of a freshly baked apple pie fresh or a steak sizzling as its cooked to juicy perfection...okay, we'll stop there, you get the point. Triggers can also be emotional: Boredom, anxiety, anger.

In their book, *Healthy Eating Every Day* (Human Kinetics), Ruth Ann Carpenter and Carrie E. Finley offer these tips on disarming those triggers:

- If you don't feel physical symptoms of hun-

ger, try to figure out what is prompting you to eat. (And if it's not hunger, then either drink a glass of water, or take a walk. Either might make you feel better.)

- Eat slowly. This is good for digestion, but it's also good for introspection—and it gives your stomach the "we're full" signal to the brain.
- Pause in the middle of a meal. "If you are no longer hungry, stop eating."

Stop eating. What a brilliantly simple idea! Of course, that's easier said than done. What's more, trying not to eat, or denying yourself the foods you crave, can backfire, throwing you... dare we say it?...off balance.

Instead, Nonas recommends eating consistently and with an eye towards portion control. Stollberger suggests that you become a more discerning consumer: In other words, don't believe the hype. "In my practice, I usually have to spend some time breaking down consumer perception of what they think good nutrition is," she says. High among the misconceptions—even now, in the post-Atkins world—is that all carbs are bad. What she and most other health professionals recommend is a diet rich in whole grains, fruits and vegetables, and lean protein, served in sensible portions and mixed with generous helpings of daily activity.

Call it a recipe for balance.

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