

# The York University Staff Association Health & Wellness News & Views

2019 is upon us! In fact, we're already a month in. Which can only mean one thing: It's New Year's resolution time. Raise your hand if you've ever set a crazy-ambitious New Year's resolution. To eat healthier for instance? Only to lose sight of your resolution around February or so, when you realize you might have bitten off a little more than you could chew. Yup, definitely raising my hand right now. The Holidays tend to make us see optimism everywhere, which is a good thing except when it comes to our dinner plate. Cinnamon rolls contain cinnamon right? Which pretty much renders them health food. Apple pie? I read somewhere that "an apple a day keeps the doctor away". Eggnog? Yes please: After all, eggs are the worlds most perfect food. Before you know it, you've dismissed away a month of unhealthy choices and the "most wonderful time of the year" turns into the most popular time of the year to go on a diet. In 2019 there are so many diets battling for your attention, it can be difficult to know which plans deliver real results. And the reality is that most diets, the good, the bad, and the ugly, will help you lose weight short term. But the importance is in keeping the weight off. Doing so, relies on obtaining a doable plan that you can stick with long term. This often means diets that restrict entire food groups and/or only allow you to eat within strict structured times throughout the day (sorry Keto, adios Atkins, & pointing at you intermittent fasting) are out, unless medically advised. There are a range of "healthy" diets out there, with several variations which should be an invitation for you to start 2019 by going shopping among these diets and find one that may work well for you and your family.

Can't bear the thought of quitting meat entirely? You don't have to... The Flexitarian Diet is a semi-vegetarian style of eating that encourages less meat and more plant-based foods. There are no specific rules or suggestions, making it an appealing option for people who are looking to cut back on animal products. Eating a mostly plant-based diet is not only good for weight loss but it's also beneficial in lowering the risk of chronic conditions including heart disease, type 2 diabetes and cancer. It's based on the following principles:

- Eat mostly fruits, vegetables, legumes and whole grains.
- Focus on protein from plants instead of animals.
- Be flexible and incorporate meat and animal products from time to time.
- Eat the least processed, most natural form of foods.
- Limit added sugar and sweets.

Due to its flexible nature and focus on what to include rather than restrict, the Flexitarian diet is a popular choice for people looking to eat healthier.

Although still used to shed pounds, with a focus on living healthier, Weight Watchers is about far more than its name might indicate. Its revamped WW Freestyle program, relaunched in 2017, builds on its Smart Points system, which assigns every food and beverage a point value, based on its nutrition. Weight Watchers enrolled over 600,000 new subscribers in 2017 alone. Although no foods are off limits, dieters must stay below their set daily points to reach their desired weight. For example, a 230-calorie, glazed-yeast donut is 10 Smart Points, while 230 calories of yogurt topped with blueberries and granola is only 2 Smart Points. Dieters who join Weight Watchers are known as "members." Members can choose from several programs with varying levels of support. Members also receive access to an online database with thousands of foods and recipes, in addition to a tracking app for logging Smart Points. Many studies have shown that Weight Watchers can help with weight loss. In addition, WW encourages physical activity by assigning a fitness goal using Fit Points. Each activity can be logged into the Weight Watchers app until the user reaches their weekly Fit Point goal. In my opinion WW works because it is not a fast approach, but rather a slow and steady plan, and as the Weight Watchers system has evolved over the years, it has always been about creating a balanced diet, eating in moderation, and eating the foods you want. The three program options also add to the convenience factor and allow participants to choose the plan and the format that best fits their lifestyle.

Amid all the superfoods and fad diets, one style of eating consistently comes out on top as the best: the Mediterranean diet. In 2018, it is ranked as the best diet to try by U.S. News & World Report. The Mediterranean diet involves consuming lots of plants, whole grains, healthy fats and lean proteins, well cutting back on processed foods, red meat and refined sugars. The Mediterranean diet incorporates the basics of healthy eating — plus a splash of flavorful avocado and/or olive oil and perhaps a glass of red wine. This way of eating traditionally includes fruits, vegetables, pasta and rice. For example, residents of Greece eat very little red meat and average nine servings a day of antioxidant-rich fruits and vegetables. Saturated fats and refined sugars are limited to special occasions only. Enjoying the many benefits of the Mediterranean diet is one of the smartest things you can do for your health. Cognitive decline, heart disease, cancer, depression, diabetes, and osteoporosis can all be battled

with this popular diet. Even better news: though "diet" is in the name, this plan is more of a holistic approach to eating that relies on real food. You won't be counting calories or macronutrients like you would with a typical "diet." The Mediterranean diet emphasizes:

- Eating primarily plant-based foods, such as fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes and nuts
- Replacing butter with healthy fats such as olive oil and canola oil
- Using herbs and spices instead of salt to flavor foods
- Limiting red meat to no more than a few times a month
- Eating fish and poultry at least twice a week
- Drinking red wine in moderation (optional)

You can find a whole world of information about the Mediterranean diet on the internet, and many great books have been written about it. Try googling "Mediterranean recipes" and you will find a ton of great tips for delicious meals. Another great thing about eating this way is that you're sure to find many of your favorite foods are still available to you and even better, you're bound to find many new ones you'll love. At the end of the day, the Mediterranean diet is incredibly healthy and satisfying. You won't be disappointed.

The DASH diet, which stands for Dietary Approach to Stopping Hypertension, is a lifelong approach to healthy eating that's designed to help treat or prevent high blood pressure (hypertension). Hypertension is definitely something you want to avoid. We know that high blood pressure is directly related to heart disease. The higher your blood pressure, the more likely you are to suffer from scary issues like heart attacks, strokes, kidney disease, and even heart failure. The DASH diet encourages you to reduce the sodium in your diet and eat a variety of foods rich in nutrients that help lower blood pressure, such as potassium, calcium and magnesium. Foods naturally contain small amounts of sodium, but most of the sodium in our diet is added during food processing. Canned and packaged foods are often high in sodium because it is added to preserve food. While the DASH diet wasn't created for people to lose weight, supporters believe that if you stick to their focus on fruits, veggies, nuts, whole grains, and low fat or nonfat dairy, you're not only going to lose weight, but you'll also start to wean yourself off of medications used to control high blood pressure and even diabetes. The plan limits higher in saturated fat foods, added sugars, and sodium, limits red meat and steers clear of processed food sources like condiments, sauces, breads, cereals, fast food, sweetened beverages, jam, syrups etc. Here are some general tips:

- Make sure there is plenty of color on the plate
- Include fruits, vegetables, and nonfat or low-fat dairy foods
- Have at least two side dishes of vegetables
- Prepare fruit-based desserts, rather than pastries

Although the DASH diet was designed to help lower blood pressure, this eating plan has also been shown to assist in lowering cholesterol and weight loss among other health benefits.

The MIND diet (Mediterranean-DASH Intervention for Neurodegenerative Delay) is a hybrid that combines aspects of the DASH and Mediterranean diets, with the overall goal of improving brain health. According to a study from the Rush University Medical Center, the diet has proven to cut an individual's risk of developing Alzheimer's by an average of more than 50 per cent. To make the most of the MIND diet, aim to increase your consumption of these brain-healthy foods by incorporating them into your meals and snacks as much as possible.

- Leafy greens and other vegetables
- Nuts
- Berries
- Beans
- Whole Grains
- Fish/Poultry, no more than 4 servings of red meat per week
- Olive Oil
- Wine

Beyond the brain-boosting benefits that this diet can provide, there are several other reasons people are choosing the MIND approach to healthy eating.. You'll enjoy complete nutrition and a wide range of improvements to your health and well-being without feeling restricted or overwhelmed by a difficult to maintain eating plan.

Remember, healthy eating isn't an all-or-nothing proposition. What's most important is that, on average, you eat healthier foods with plenty of variety both to keep your diet nutritious and to avoid boredom or extremes. If you require a paint by numbers, easy to follow, hand hold approach? Weight Watchers may be the plan for you. If your idea of an enjoyable meal is a pile of roasted vegetables, low fat feta cheese and grilled chicken on brown rice, the DASH diet may be a more suitable option. On the other hand, if you'd rather fill a plate with hummus, tabouli salad, tomatoes, cucumbers, and olives and enjoy it with a glass of wine, you might find the Mediterranean diet easier to stick with. Your health and your goals should also figure in. If you're trying to get enough calcium without resorting to supplements, you may find DASH a little easier to follow. However, if you are lactose intolerant, the Mediterranean diet may be the better. If cholesterol or high blood pressure are a

concern? Than the flexitarian or MIND approach to eating may be the most suitable. The bottom line, changing your diet means a life-long commitment to healthier lifestyle choices. People who make small changes in their diet over a longer period of time, rather than a dramatic change all at once, are more likely to stay committed to a healthier diet. The perfect diet is out there, but not in the way that you think. There is no one perfect diet that works for every single person on this entire planet. Each person has a different set of nutritional requirements to keep them healthy. Many diets will sustain you or keep you alive. That doesn't mean that they are good for you long term. Your perfect diet should not just keep you alive, it should help you thrive. It should give you the best possible intake of nutrients to allow your body to be as healthy and strong as it can be. Cheers to 2019! I think it's going to be our year!

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