

# Chow Line

News from the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences

## Keep it simple to plan for healthful holidays

Last year, I promised myself that after the holidays, I would eat healthier and exercise more. It never happened. This year, I don't want to wait, but I also don't want to set myself up for failure or be the Grinch during holiday gatherings. Any ideas?

First, recognize that it's difficult to change our behaviors. Face it: If it were easy, you would have done it a long time ago. For a habit to stick, experts in behavior change say it's important to keep a few strategies in mind:

- **Keep it simple.** Focus on one realistic change at a time, and make it as easy and automatic as possible. Once you get into the habit — that is, once you find yourself doing the behavior without even thinking about it — you can try tackling something else. But not before.
- **Be specific.** For example, instead of setting a goal to eat more fruits and vegetables, set a goal to eat at least one fruit and three vegetables each day. That way you can track your progress.
- **Celebrate your success.** Give yourself an “attaboy” every time you practice your new habit. It might sound silly, but offering yourself a small pat on the back can make a big difference in whether your new behavior will actually become a habit.
- **Go public.** Tell your friends and family about your goal and ask for their support. Be sure to tell them why you are trying something new — at the very least, that will help you make sure you yourself understand the reasons you want to make a change. It also helps you make sure it's something you really want to do, not just something you feel obligated to do.

What sorts of new habits might be most helpful



photo: Hemera

during the holidays? Here are some ideas:

- **Drink a pint of water before every meal.** If you're trying to lose weight, this simple strategy could be effective. According to a recent study in the journal *Obesity*, adults who drank 16 ounces of regular tap water before each meal, three times a day, lost almost 10 pounds in 12 weeks, compared with an average loss of less than 2 pounds for those who drank water before meals only once a day or not at all.
- **Take a 15-minute brisk walk every day after dinner.** While this small amount of extra activity would be beneficial for almost anyone, British researchers who reviewed studies involving older adults found that the biggest boost for longevity might be for people who are sedentary to start doing just a little moderate to vigorous exercise. They found that people over 60 who averaged 75 minutes of such exercise a week, or 15 minutes five days a week, were 22 percent less likely to die over 10 years than those who remained sedentary.
- **Limit alcohol consumption to recommended levels (or less).** It's easy to get carried away during holiday gatherings, but alcohol provides a lot of empty calories and consuming too much carries other health risks, as well. The recommended limit is one drink a day for women or two for men. One drink is equal to 12 ounces of beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of liquor.

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**Editor:** This column was reviewed by Dan Remley, Ohio State University Extension field specialist in Food, Nutrition and Wellness.

*Chow Line is a service of the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences and its outreach and research arms, Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1043, or [filipic.3@osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@osu.edu).*

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