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Steps To Creating A Healthy Kitchen

A healthy start to 2011 should start in the center of many homes, the kitchen. If your kitchen contains the tools and ingredients to create healthy meals and snacks, keeping those resolutions to eat healthy will be easy. This can be a process that starts slowly and over time you can develop an environment that fosters healthy eating and makes meal planning simple. Use these tips as you start:

- Shop at least once a week so you keep a stock of fresh fruits, vegetables, and lean proteins. It is tempting to shop less often and keep bulk items of packaged foods around to save time, but this leads to eating more processed foods and less fresh foods. Instead, keep a stock of beans, whole grains, and frozen vegetables to throw together meals quickly. Grocery shopping should not be a chore, but a way to keep your kitchen healthy.

- Limit the amount of sugary beverages around, even juices and sport beverages which also contain a lot of sugar. Stock water and sugar free beverages.

- As you use up less healthy foods you have around, replace them with healthier options. Buy whole grain pastas, brown rice, fresh fruits and vegetables. Replace chips with nuts, lowfat cheeses and yogurt, and fresh fruits and whole grain crackers as snacks.

- Start to read labels before buying. Ingredients are listed in order of their amount so make sure the first ingredients are healthy ones and that the product does not contain a lot of added sugars.

- Buy less packaged and processed items. While these items save time, slowly decide which items you can make yourself to cut out fat, salt, calories, and preservatives (ie: make your own rice pilaf with brown rice, nuts and dried fruit rather than a boxed mix).

Make A Resolution To Your Health

Each January, as we ring in the New Year, many of us make resolutions to improve our health. We may pledge to start exercising, eat healthy, or lose weight. And, while these resolutions are meant to improve our quality of life, we are often left feeling deprived and overwhelmed and are unable to keep these resolutions after a few weeks. This year, focus on small changes that can be incorporated over time. It will be easier to find changes that can work for you long term and keeps you focused as you will integrate a new change every week or two. Here are 5 ideas for manageable changes to focus on. Try to add a new one every week or two to keep you motivated and on track for the New Year:

- Make sure you get enough rest. Studies have shown that when people are tired, they may give in to unhealthy food choices and crave more fat, salt, and sugar. You may also be less motivated to take time to shop for and prepare healthy meals and make time for exercise. Sleeping more will keep your day more focused and productive.

- Try to eat out less and cook more. Restaurant foods contain a lot of hidden, salt, fat, sugar, and calories. Make eating out a real treat when you have time to relax and really savor the meal. When you cook, you can control the ingredients. If you find time to be an issue, prepare meals you can freeze on days off or do initial prep work ahead of time.

- Rather than completely eliminating foods you enjoy and setting yourself up for cravings that could lead to overeating, try simply reducing your portions by 10-20%. You will still enjoy the foods while cutting calories as you learn slowly to be satisfied with less.

- Keep a food journal at least 1 day per week. Writing down your intake will allow you to be aware of what you are eating and of areas of your diet you would like to focus on. Weekly journaling keeps you accountable – to yourself – and gives you an ongoing snapshot of your eating behavior.

- Decide you will not eat after a certain time of the evening. While total calories per day are what counts, people tend to lose track of snacks eaten while relaxing at night. Incorporate an evening snack into your meal plan if you enjoy one but be mindful of the portions and establish a time frame for eating it.

- Drink more water. We often mistake thirst for hunger and do not make sure we stay hydrated. Start your day with a glass of water and be conscious of sipping water throughout the day. If you need to flavor it, add a squeeze of lemon or lime. Focus on having 6 glasses of water a day and supplement with sugar free teas and other beverages.