Resolve to improve health rather than to lose weight

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When the clock strikes midnight on New Year's Eve, everyone looks forward to the changes they are going to make in the year to come. However, if these changes are related to diet and weight loss, a

registered dietitian with Baylor College of Medicine says to focus on making changes in your routine that will improve your health and the weight loss will follow.

"Increasing your steps by 500 a day is not going to jumpstart your weight loss – it's not enough of a calorie burn," said Roberta Anding, registered dietitian and assistant professor at Baylor. "The reason to increase those 500 steps really has nothing to do with weight loss – it's setting up the machinery in our body to work better. The science is clear that eating more fruits and vegetables improves your health. The science also shows that people who increase their exercise are less likely to be depressed and they make more endorphins, have better insulin sensitivity and sleep better. That should be your focus – to improve your overall health."

Eat more fruits and vegetables

Anding said that if there is one goal that she could set for everyone in the new year, it would be to eat more fruits and vegetables. Fruits and vegetables are rich in fiber and antioxidants and the colors are where the nutrition is found.

The recommended amount of servings of fruits and vegetables is five a day and the average Texan eats about 1.6 servings a day. Anding suggests swapping out a fruit or vegetable for a snack during the day.

"If I bring a bag of apples to work on Monday and decide to eat an apple rather than a bag of chips every day for my snack, I'm reducing the number of calories I'm consuming and accomplishing an overall health goal," Anding said.

Anding also said that there is nothing wrong with eating frozen fruits and vegetables, as long as they are not coated with things like butter, salt, sugar or other solution. Plain, frozen fruits and vegetables are flash

frozen and the nutrients are preserved. They also save time because you don't have to wash and cut them.

"If I have several bananas that are about to go bad, I will chop them up and freeze them to use later in a smoothie or in my oatmeal. They provide natural sweetness as well as potassium, vitamin B6 and other nutrients," Anding said.

Eat protein with every meal

Protein helps curb your appetite and maintain the body's muscle mass. Anding recommends eating more protein at breakfast, but also with each meal.

"Your body needs to build and repair tissue all day, so eating protein just at the end of the day does not help," she said. "You could end up losing some lean body mass."

Also, when you eat protein with every meal, you don't feel as hungry throughout the day and when you're hungry, it's hard to follow any resolution.

Good protein sources include eggs, Greek yogurt, high protein milk and whey protein powder. For those who are vegan, Anding suggested plant based protein sources such as beans, nuts, peas, tofu and pea protein powder. Those who follow a vegan diet should also see a dietitian to be sure they are getting enough B12, which people usually get from animal protein.

Cut out sugar sweetened beverages

Rather than sugar sweetened beverages such as soda, sweet tea or

sweetened coffee drinks, switch to sparkling water with lemon or find another option that works best for you.

Exercise

Anding said to look at new forms of exercise, including lifting weights to increase your lean muscle mass and stretching, yoga and tai chi to help with flexibility and stability.

"Resistance weight training and protein are like peanut butter and jelly – they are okay apart but they are a whole lot better together," she said.

Track your diet and exercise

Write it down, record it on your phone or invest in a device that helps you track your healthy habits.

"Invest in something that helps monitor what you're doing. We know that people who record their food intake generally do better on a weight loss diet than those who just cut back," Anding said.

This will help you look back and evaluate if the goals you set worked. If they did not, set more reasonable goals based on the patterns that you tracked.

She also suggests writing down one positive thing that you did to improve your health each day. When you look back at your week, you can see how much you have changed.

Avoid extremes

Anding warns that there is no science behind extreme detoxes or juice

cleanses. Diet programs that exclude most foods or say that you cannot eat until a certain time in the day are not evidence based.

"They are not sustainable. You might lose weight, but you never learned to modify behaviors," Anding said.

Don't expect immediate results

If you cut out two sugar sweetened beverages a day and switched out a snack to a healthier option, you can easily cut out 500 calories a day, which translates into about a half pound or one pound per week.

If you add resistance weight training and you have never lifted weights before, Anding said to remember that you are making muscle, which has weight. You might not see a difference on your scale, but you may see that your clothes are fitting better because you are changing your body composition.

You may notice a change on your scale within a week, but it could be up to a month until you see changes in your clothing size.

Provided by Baylor College of Medicine

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