Irish Life

Wellbeing

5 Healthy Eating habits to focus on this week



Healthy eating does not have to mean a strict diet or complicated rules. Small, realistic changes can add up to a big difference in your health, energy and mood, and how it impacts your life.

Irish Life Wellbeing Physical Health & Nutrition Consultant Rab Das outlines 5 Healthy Habits, with practical steps so you can build them gradually.

1 Slowly increase your fibre sources with more fruit and vegetables

Why? Fibre is undefeated for human health. Most sources are loaded with rich sources of nutrition, vitamins, etc. Fibre tends to be a rich source of fuel for our gut microbes – the ones that promote positive health (and are so popular in the online space). Finally, and not to be forgotten, fibre makes you feel fuller supporting hunger signalling and making you more 'regular'.

TIP: Aim to add 1–2 extra portions of fruit or vegetables over the course of the day. You can add them into existing meals (really good for vegetable options) or just add a portion of fruit as, or with, a snack.

Remember, fruit can be fresh or frozen, whatever is the most achievable and enjoyable for you. Both are suitable and healthful ways to get more fibre.

2 Keep a protein source with each main meal

Protein gets plenty of press, so we are all aware of how important it is. While it's important to emphasise, we should just be looking to get adequate amounts in across the day. A good way to think about this is to spread it evenly across our main meals.

TIP: Aim for yoghurt, lean red meat, poultry, eggs and fish if you're looking at animal sources; if you're mixing it up with plant-based sources of protein, think about peas, beans, legumes, plant-based meat alternatives like tofu, tempeh, and soy-based products as suitable options. Or have a bit from both worlds.

Remember, protein helps with feelings of fullness, and supports our muscle tissue, and the recovery process. All good things.

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3 Stick to an even spread of meals throughout the day where possible

Sometimes we forget that we need enough energy over the course of the day to feel good, perform well, and achieve what we want to in a day.

To get enough energy in a day, try to create as routine a pattern as possible in terms of the number of meals you eat and the time frame between them. While there's no considered best practice, an even spread of 3 or 4 meals in a day is a good place to shoot for.

TIP: Within each meal, it's advised having servings of vegetables and/or fruit, adequate amounts of protein from sources of your choosing, and then something familiar from wholefood sources (like rice, potatoes, other grains and wholegrains etc).

Remember, if you're someone who is more active, you can always add to your meals, or add in an additional snack as needed.

4 Repeat this pattern for the whole week, even trying to replicate it when having a meal out

Healthy Habits are all about consistency over the long-term not just concentrated efforts that are often hard to maintain.

TIP: Think about the number of meals you might have in a week and set a target where you will aim to be as consistent as possible with the habits you're trying to include.

Remember, there might be days where you are super consistent and there might be days where there is less consistency. That's part of life. What you might find that at the end of the week, you've made your Healthy Habit a pattern because of the overall approach you've taken, not just at individual moments.

5 Don't get too drawn into online recommendations

In our search to be as healthy as possible, we can find ourselves giving more weight to those in the online space who we might feel have our best interests in mind. Sometimes this isn't the case and these recommendations can push us further from our health intentions.

TIP: Take some time to remember that not every piece of nutrition advice has our own best interest in mind or understands our individual circumstances.

Remember, at worst it's arguably more noise than we need, and at best, it further pushes the gap between what we know we need to do and what we action to make our lives healthier.

Download our Healthy Habits tip sheet here!

You might notice that there's been no overly prescriptive suggestions of big claims about which fruits or vegetables you should add. That's because we want you to have control over the actions you take, so they are more meaningful to you and create a higher likelihood that you'll follow through with them in the future.

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