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The Path to a Healthier Lifestyle: Wellness Tips for Women

by

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Women and men are created equal, but when it comes to diet and exercise, the standards and requirements vary. You've likely heard of the importance of a balanced diet and physical activity, but how much does it actually matter?

Take a Look at the Food You Eat

You eat because you are hungry, but food does more than just stop the rumbling in your stomach. The [food](#) you eat gives your body the information it needs to function properly, and the wrong instructions have negative effects such as obesity, malnourishment, and an increased risk for diabetes and heart disease. Nutrients are the key to what makes a food good or bad for you, as nutrients tell your body how to function. For example, magnesium initiates muscle release, lowers blood pressure, controls blood sugar, promotes wound healing, and enhances immune function. Without the proper amount of magnesium, you could have problems with your blood pressure such as hypertension, or muscle spasms such as heart arrhythmia.

For women, a [healthy diet](#) should include whole grains, low-fat or fat-free dairy, protein, fruits, and vegetables. Look for iron-rich foods, which will boost your energy levels, such as chicken,

turkey, fish, beans, or lentils. For healthy bones and teeth, incorporate calcium-rich foods like yogurt, cheese, or calcium-fortified foods. Eating calcium now could benefit you in the future too, as it prevents osteoporosis, a disease that weakens the bones. Healthy eating doesn't mean you have to completely cut out indulgences, but try to limit regular soft drinks, candy, or fried foods. Remember, women typically have more fat and less muscle than men, so you need fewer calories a day to maintain a healthy body weight and physical activity level. If you are moderately active, try to stay in the 1,800 to 2,200 calories per day range. If you are highly active, you may require more calories. If you are unsure, consult your doctor to ensure that you are meeting the needs of your body and not under- or over-fueling.

Exercise Can Do More than Trim Your Waist

Exercise has several other health benefits besides whittling your waist. Regular [physical activity](#) maintains healthy bones, muscles, and joints, controls weight, builds lean muscle, controls the swelling and pain of arthritis, and reduces blood pressure. If you haven't ever engaged in regular physical activity, start out slow with short intervals, such as 5 to 10 minutes, and gradually build up. Remember that you don't have to work out on full blast. You can get the same amount of activity from moderate exercise such as walking for 30 minutes as you can get from intense exercise such as running or jogging for 15 minutes. Start where you feel the most comfortable and work your way up.

Unfortunately, more than 60 percent of women in the U.S. don't meet the recommended amount of physical activity, and over 25 percent of women aren't active at all. Inactivity is more common among women, with common [barriers](#) being lack of funds or time. Getting into a regular exercise routine doesn't require paying for a gym membership. If money is a factor, workout at home using a workout DVD or include the family pet by going for a walk. In fact, involving your pet in your workouts is a great way for the both of you to get active. It could even turn into a way to earn a little extra cash. For example, [walking](#) a neighbor's dog a few times a week while you're walking your own pooch is an easy side gig. Time is another common barrier to exercise, and fitting it in amongst your other obligations such as work, family, and household chores can be difficult. If you find that you don't have enough time, schedule exercise into your calendar like you would an appointment. It could be as simple as scheduling time to play a game of tennis with a group of friends for one hour a week, or ride your bike for 30 minutes. You have the power to decide.

It is important for women to watch their diet and incorporate physical activity to live a healthy lifestyle. Take a look at the way you are living, and make minor changes to experience large benefits.

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Ms. Merrill is a retired nurse, who aims to provide tips on finding the right medical care, health insurance, etc.