

Real food for good health

Local nutritionist **LEONIE WRIGHT** blames processed food for many of the nation's health woes and offers her tips for a healthy 2011.

Now that the Christmas and New Year celebrations, with their abundance in food and drink, are once again behind us, it might be a good time to think about how you can improve the health and fitness of your family through eating healthy food.

Many people do not realise what the influence of eating the wrong foods can have on their health and energy levels. If we don't feel well we go to the doctor and are often given a prescription to cure the problem, but there are other actions we can take to make us feel better.

We eat too much of the wrong food, we don't exercise enough and we are becoming unhealthy. These are headlines we see regularly in the media and they should be taken seriously. Obesity has increased six-fold

since the 1970s and reports show that 90 percent of today's children will be overweight or obese by 2050. Diabetes figures are also rising as fast as our waistlines are expanding. More than 1.9 million people in the UK are diagnosed with type 2 diabetes and over a million are thought to be undiagnosed. All have health risks.

Research shows that we often overeat because we're tired or cold or feeling down, or because we've had a bad day at work or are stressed out with the kids. One study even shows that women eat 13 percent more when listening to the radio! However, a new wave of research is emerging that points the finger at the food manufacturers. According to this latest evidence, the reason we're eating more food is the food itself as we become addicted to the ingredients, namely salt, sugar and fats.

According to David Kessler, the former

head of the United States Food and Drug Administration we are too reliant nowadays on the ubiquitous, processed, ready-made, fast food we eat. It is not really food at all he says, it's a drug, in its own way as addictive as a class A drug.

The three main culprits Kessler identifies are sugar, fat and salt. The basis of the modern food industry is to take fat, sugar and salt and put it on every corner of every street and make it into entertainment. We develop habits around our favourite foods and become aroused when we anticipate them, according to Kessler.

We all lead busy lives and we can't or don't want to make the time available to prepare healthy food. But it is of vital importance to eat healthily. We must start eating real food, not processed food. Eating food in the form nature delivers is the way forward.

Leonie's tips

Top tips to help you and your family have a healthy 2011



- * Avoid eating processed convenience foods as much as you can due to their high sugar, fat and salt content. This means as few ready-made meals or pizzas as possible
- * Eat smaller portions regularly and don't limit yourself to three main meals a day. Each time you eat your blood sugar levels will go up. It is better to have more smaller peaks than 3 large ones

- * Make sure everyone in your family has a good breakfast. This could be porridge with some dried fruit, yogurt with fresh fruit, slice of wholemeal toast with honey or low sugar cereals
- * Eat at least five servings of fruit and vegetables a day. Fruits, nuts and seeds are very good in-between meal snacks
- * Drink as little packaged fruit juices and alcohol as possible as they contain high amounts of added sugar. It is far better to drink freshly squeezed juice or water instead
- * Make your meals from scratch with the best quality of ingredients you can afford. It is good to have one family meal a day and this also encourages social interaction
- * When cooking your main meal choose lean protein meats such as chicken, turkey or lean mince containing no more than 5% fat and more fatty fish, such as salmon and trout and avoid fish fingers

- * To accompany your meals, choose unrefined carbohydrates such as wholemeal bread, rice or pasta
- * Divide your plate in three equal parts and have a third vegetables, a third protein and a third carbohydrates (pasta, rice or potatoes)
- * Finally, build exercise into your family life. Join a health or fitness centre or simply take the family out for regular walks

extra

Leonie Wright, a nutritionist and coach, runs EatWright - www.eatwright.co.uk - a healthy eating plan which makes people healthier, slimmer and fitter for the long term.

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