

JANUARY

THE RACE TO BEAT THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE

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The race is on -- to be the first person who fails at his or her diet, or to let the gym membership lapse.

Despite the New Year's resolution tradition, the beginning of the year marks a time for promises of better health to be broken by holiday treats and cheeseburgers snuck on the way home.

It may sound negative, but it's the truth. And sometimes the truth, unlike tempting eggnog and goodies, is hard to swallow. So how do you beat the winter blahs and keep up with that promise of a healthy diet and regular exercise? Well, don't start in the first place, especially if you're contemplating a diet that's named after a beach, turns you into a watcher, or forces you to give up a whole food group.

Instead of "dieting," make a commitment to begin eating healthy. But what does "healthy" mean?

- Celebrate the wonders of color! Strive to include lots of colorful, flavorful vegetables in each meal. For breakfast, that might mean mixing a medley of peppers and spinach into your normal omelet or scrambled eggs.
- Walk to your next meal. Make a point of walking during your lunch hour. Even if you work in an office, take the stairs or walk around the warehouse for 10 minutes before or after lunch.
- Shop on the outside. Keep to the perimeter of your supermarket, where all the fresh produce, meats and dairy

are sold. The more you turn to "whole" foods in your diet, the better your chance of success will be in battling the bulge.

In the kitchen, you can make simple tweaks to your daily routine that will pay big dividends. Replacing refined sugars with small amounts of honey, agave syrup or maple syrup cuts calories and increases flavor. When sautéing vegetables and meats, use small amounts of extra virgin olive oil or grapeseed oil to cut cholesterol and saturated fat.

Winter preparations of meats and vegetables can include long, slow braises in natural broths to heighten the flavor of dishes while keeping them low-fat. Roasting a whole chicken on Sunday afternoon, and then using small amounts of it in lunch and dinner for the next few days, is a great way to make sure you always have a lean meat on hand to turn into a great meal, rather than turning to the pizza joint in the middle of the week.

There are many ways to keep your commitment to live healthier in the new year. Key to any of them is the effort you make to take small steps. Don't overcommit to a fad diet or completely remove a whole classification of food from your diet in hopes of losing weight. Just concentrate on some of the small steps mentioned above. And remember, you don't have to live up to the full terms of your New Year's resolution; you just need to last longer than your co-workers so you can gloat.