

Make Your Resolutions Last

A Month-by-Month Guide

By Maryann Tomovich Jacobsen, MS, RD

As 2006 came to a close, millions of Americans vowed to become healthier in 2007. Yet, according to research conducted in 2004 by eDiets, their success rates may be slim. Thirty percent of the twelve thousand people surveyed said their resolutions petered out by February, and only one in five were still in the game six months later. So what goes wrong?

It's how people attack their resolutions that make them more likely to fail. In the same survey, the top resolution was "to lose weight" followed by "to get fit." Individuals respond to such broad goals by trying to do everything all at once, such as exercising six days a week and eliminating their favorite foods. At first, this is motivating because it seems to bring quick results. But eventually life gets busy and the weight loss stalls. So people give up and blame themselves rather than their approach.

Don't fall into the same trap this year. If your New Year's resolutions are already a distant memory, don't give up. Instead, try breaking them down into manageable pieces and starting over. The result? By the Spring, you'll just be revving up and by next December anything's possible.



Month-by-Month Guide

Here's how it works. Each month, focus on one area and master it. Resist the urge to work ahead. Customize the advice to your lifestyle and personal preferences. Remember change is a matter of trial and error until you find something that works for you.

Month 1: Curtail Your Portions

Controlling portions is your secret weapon to weight control. According to a survey sponsored by the American Institute of Cancer Research (AICR), when it comes to weight control, most Americans (sixty-two percent) think what they eat is more important than how much they eat.

"This is the piece that people are missing," says Lisa Young, PhD, RD, author of *The Portion Teller Plan*. "It's not what you eat that matters, it's how much." Portions, Young explains, have doubled in the last twenty years and bigger portions simply have more calories. When she asks clients how many calories a bagel contains, they typically estimate 150. But a four-ounce bagel has four hundred calories and that's without the cream cheese.

This month, become conscious about how much you are eating and try different strategies to keep portions within reason.

- Eat only seventy-five percent of what's on your plate.
- Feel your fullness. Take your time and stop when you start to feel full.
- Share meals with friends or order an appetizer for dinner when you eat out.
- Buy single servings or use little bags to separate larger servings into smaller portions.
- Use smaller dishes and utensils—plates, spoons, forks, bowls, and glasses.

Month 2: Activate Your Life

In the second month of your program, try moving more—and more often—every day. A recent study published in the *Journal of Hypertension* looked at individuals with borderline high blood pressure who perform two types of exercises: one forty-minute session and four ten-minute bouts of activity. While both types of exercise lowered their blood pressures, the short-bout sessions brought about longer-lasting changes.

This month, find—and fill—pockets of time with activity so you accumulate at least thirty minutes of moderate exercise.

- Walk or bike to work.
- Go for short walks throughout the day or during lunch.
- Meet friends weekly and go for a hike, a walk, or a jog.
- Turn date night with your spouse or partner into a fun, physical activity.
- Go to the park and actively play with your children or pets.

Month 3: Balance Your Meals

Now that your portions are under control, it's time to balance the

food on your plate by considering nutrition and taste. Health-promoting foods—fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy, lean proteins, and healthy fats found mostly in plant sources—provide the best nourishment. "In-between" foods supply some nutrition but also contain some extras such as saturated fat and sugar. These include macaroni 'n' cheese, fruit juice, pizza, and hamburgers. Finally, nutrition-poor foods—cakes, cookies, french fries, chips, bacon, and hot dogs—taste good (so don't exclude them) but do a poor job of nourishing the body.

This month, fill your plates with "health-promoting" foods, a moderate amount of "in-between" foods, and only a small amount of "nutrition-poor" foods.

- Add fruit to cereal or top it with a dollop of Cool Whip for dessert.
- Include veggies in pasta dishes, casseroles, and soups.
- Replace white bread with whole wheat for sandwiches.
- Cut your portion of in-between foods by half—for example, instead of two slices of pizza, have one with a side salad.
- Scale back to only one small serving of nutrition-poor foods each day.

Month 4: Focus on Fat

Simply lowering fat intake isn't enough to improve health. You need to lower the fat where it counts and include the fat where it matters. This month, take these three steps to get your fat in a healthy place.

Step 1: Look at total daily fat intake. The recommended range is twenty to thirty-five percent of your calories from fat—that's forty-four to seventy-eight grams per day for a 2,000-calorie diet. (Visit www.mypyramid.gov for individualized calorie needs.)

Step 2: Reduce your intake of animal/processed fat sources. As a general rule, go lean, low-fat, or fat-free when it comes to animal products such as dairy and meats. Keep your fat intake of saturated fat below ten percent of your total calories (twenty grams for a 2,000-calorie diet), your cholesterol less than three hundred milligrams per day (an egg has about two hundred milligrams), and your trans fat intake as low as possible.

Step 3: Go unsaturated with your fats. The American Heart Association recommends that you enjoy at least two servings per week of fatty fish (salmon, trout, and herring are good choices). In addition, replace saturated fats in your diet with unsaturated fats found in olive oil, canola oil, nuts, seeds, flaxseed, and avocados.

Month 5: Step Up the Activity

The 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend an hour of moderate and more intensive physical activity per day to help prevent weight gain. However, anyone with a health condition, men older than forty, and women older than fifty should always consult their doctors when starting a new exercise program. If you get the green light, work on increasing your activity to an hour on most days. Make sure to choose something you like doing that fits into your life.

5 Healthy Lifestyle Pitfalls

1 Drinking ultra-high calorie drinks

The mistake: Some beverages contain the calories of a meal. For example, a sixteen-ounce vanilla frappuccino from Starbucks contains 490 calories, fifteen grams of fat, and sixty-two grams of sugar.

How to fix it: Keep calories from beverages to two hundred per day. If you drink a particular beverage on a regular basis, make it a point to get its nutrition information.

2 Eating more on weekends

The mistake: According to a 2003 study published in *Obesity*, people consume an extra 115 calories on weekend days (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday). That adds up to an extra five pounds a year.

How to fix it: Avoid being "good" during the week and "bad" on weekends. Instead, balance your intake of all foods so your need to overdo it on weekends dissipates.

3 Creating diet rules based on generalizations

The mistake: Choosing diet rules such as eating "low-fat,"

"low-carb," or "organic" oversimplify nutrition. Not all fats and carbohydrates are created equally and organic doesn't always mean healthy.

How to fix it: Take time to learn about the different layers of nutrition so you can make smart food choices.

4 Cleaning your plate

The mistake: According to the American Institute of Cancer Research survey, more than half of Americans clean their plates despite the amount that's served to them.

How to fix it: Tune in to your hunger, eat slowly, stop when you begin to feel full, and always leave something on your plate.

5 Participating in all or nothing exercise

The mistake: You are either "on" or "off" your exercise routine. Because your exercise is inconsistent, so are your results.

How to fix it: Take time to build an active lifestyle around your preferences and daily routine. Keep trying new strategies until one works.

—MTJ

- Alternate between structured activity and short bouts of walking.
- Sign up for a race, take swimming lessons, or prepare for a destination activity.
- Join a walking, running, or biking club to stay motivated.
- Alternate between flat surfaces and hills during your walk or run and periodically turn up the intensity on the cardio machine.

Month 6: Pick Your Fruits and Veggies

Make an effort to eat more fruits and vegetables. Eating an optimal amount of these power foods helps reduce the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, certain cancers, and other chronic diseases. In fact, research suggests that more than twenty percent of cancer deaths could be prevented if people simply ate more fruit and vegetables.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, only one in four Americans eats the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables. Added to that, many nutrient deficiencies are related to low intakes of fruits and vegetables, including potassium, vitamin C, folic acid, and vitamin A.

This month, you'll have two goals in mind. First, aim to get the recommended servings of fruits and vegetables. Second, get variety for optimal nutrition.

- Work your way up to two cups of fruit and 2½ cups of vegetables (see www.mypyramid.gov for individual needs).
- Include vitamin A-rich orange veggies (carrots, sweet potatoes), tomatoes and tomato products, leafy greens, and orange fruits

such as cantaloupe and pink grapefruit.

- Stick with vitamin C citrus fruits, leafy greens, broccoli, peppers, and tomatoes.
- Focus on sources of folic acid such as dried beans and peas, oranges, and leafy greens.
- Be sure to include potassium-rich bananas, dried fruits, oranges, cantaloupe, soy beans, tomato products, and potatoes.

Month 7: Be Aware of Beverages

Research shows that beverages provide approximately twenty percent of total calories—almost five hundred a day. According to Barry Popkin, PhD, professor in the nutrition department at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and head of a prestigious group of experts who developed healthy beverage guidelines, "Whatever you drink is simply an added calorie. And making small changes in the type of beverages you consume may be one of the easiest ways to ways to cut calories—and lose a few pounds."

Based on the Healthy Beverage Guidelines published in the March issue of *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, choose from the beverages below (in order of importance) while keeping your intake at or below two hundred calories per day.

- Water—Women should consume up to nine servings and men up to thirteen (zero calories).
- Unsweetened coffee and tea—Limit caffeine to four hundred milligrams and watch the added sugar and cream. Up to four servings of coffee and eight servings of tea (zero calories).

- Skim or low-fat milk—Up to two servings (one hundred calories per eight-ounce serving).
- Diet soft drinks or other beverages with sugar substitutes—Up to four servings a day (zero calories).
- One hundred percent fruit juices, whole milk, and sports drinks—Up to one serving (115 calories per eight-ounce serving).
- Soft drinks and juice drinks—Up to one serving (110 calories per eight-ounce serving).

Month 8: Get Stronger and More Flexible

According to the American College of Sports Medicine, your body loses as much as fifty percent lean body mass between the ages of twenty and ninety. That's half of the metabolically active muscle that helps you look lean and burn more calories.

"People make the mistake of trying to do too much too fast so that they become burned out," says Dan Callanta, certified personal trainer and assistant manager of The Sports Club/LA in Los Angeles. "They need to slowly ease into any exercise program." Callanta encourages individuals to consider working with a personal trainer even if it's just once or twice. "A good trainer will customize a workout for you based on your fitness level, individual needs, and goals. You never want a cookie-cutter workout."

There are a variety of ways to increase strength, including weight training, yoga, and Pilates. "Everyone needs a stretching program," Callanta says. The key benefits of flexibility, he explains, include increasing range of motion, application of more functional movements, and injury prevention. This month, write down your fitness goals and work on increasing strength and flexibility.

- Work with a personal trainer—years of experience, credentials, and a national certification are important considerations.
- Participate in resistance training at least twice a week—experiment with different classes at your gym or work with a trainer to get you started.
- Begin a stretching program two times per week—try a yoga class, video tape, or work with a trainer.

Month 9: Stay Fuller Longer

Studies suggest that the most satiating of the three macronutrients (carbs, protein, and fat) are protein-rich foods including lean meats, poultry, fish, legumes, and soy. A turkey sandwich keeps you full longer than do chips or crackers. This doesn't mean you should eat only protein; instead, make it part of your balanced meals. Fiber-rich foods are also very high on the satiety list (see next month for details).

That being said, feeling full is a subjective and individual experience, so you might find that certain foods make you feel full longer than do others. This month, pay attention to how different meals make you feel full.

- Build your meals around protein sources such as chicken, turkey, fish, lean meat, and soy.

- Try a boiled egg or soy product at breakfast.
- Grab a protein bar instead of a candy bar.
- Pack turkey or tuna sandwiches instead of crackers or chips for a road trip.

Month 10: Add Up Your Fiber

Diets rich in fiber can help people feel full, manage weight, decrease their risk of heart disease, and may reduce the risk of certain cancers. The National Academy of Sciences' recommendations are based on fiber's protective role in heart disease. Women on average get only twelve to fourteen grams of fiber per day when it is recommended they get twenty-five grams (ages nineteen to fifty). Men on average get sixteen to eighteen grams of fiber per day but it is recommended that they get thirty-eight grams (ages nineteen to fifty).

This month, add up your fiber by aiming for twenty-five grams if you're a woman and thirty-eight grams if you're a man.

- Try for at least three servings of whole grains daily by including whole grain cereals (three to nine grams per serving), whole grain bread (three grams per slice), brown rice, and whole wheat pasta (three grams per ½ cup).
- Include fresh fruits (fresh, frozen, or dried instead of juice) and vegetables daily (most have two to four grams per serving).
- Include high-fiber legumes (dried beans and peas) at least twice a week (five to ten grams per serving).

Month 11: Watch for Nutrient Deficiencies

According to the 2005 Dietary Guidelines, most Americans' diets are lacking in calcium, vitamin D, and vitamin E.

According to the Institute of Medicine, Americans get a daily dose of nine milligrams of vitamin E instead of the fifteen milligrams that are recommended. And the majority of Americans still aren't getting the one thousand milligrams of calcium recommended for adults ages nineteen to fifty and 1,200 milligrams for adults ages fifty-one to seventy.

While it's difficult to determine how much of it people get, vitamin D helps your body absorb calcium and has also been linked to cancer reduction. A large 2006 review study published in the *American Journal of Public Health* concluded that adequate intakes of vitamin D are associated with a reduction in the risk and death from colon, breast, prostate, and ovarian cancers. The National Academy of Sciences recommends two hundred international units for men one to fifty years of age and four hundred international units for adults ages fifty-one to seventy.

This month, focus on getting these three nutrients into your diet, and if needed, start to supplement.

Vitamin E: Strive for fifteen milligrams a day. Check your ready-to-eat cereals for their vitamin E content. Try one ounce of sunflower seeds (7.4 milligrams), almonds (7.3 milligrams), or peanuts (2.2 milligrams); two tablespoons of peanut butter (2.5); and ½ avocado (2.1 milligrams) to help meet your needs.

Calcium: Count on one thousand to 1,200 milligrams per day. Aim for three servings of dairy products (eight ounces of fat-free milk, 1.5 ounces of cheese, and six to eight ounces of yogurt) daily. Not a fan of dairy? Try soy beverages and greens such as ½ cup spinach (146 milligrams) and kale (ninety milligrams). Supplement your diet as needed.

Vitamin D: Two hundred international units to four hundred international units. You can get vitamin D through some foods (salmon, fortified milk, and cereal) and from the sun. Individuals at risk for deficiency include older adults and people with dark skin. Because few foods contain vitamin D naturally, and climate and sunscreen make sunshine an unreliable source, you may need supplementation (especially if you are at high risk for deficiency). The safe upper limit is set at two thousand international units, so taking a supplement up to one thousand international units should suffice.

Month 12: Evaluate Your weight

Having followed this month-by-month guide, you've probably dropped some weight (if you had weight to lose). Now is the perfect time to evaluate your weight and develop a game plan for the future. Why? More than six in ten Americans are overweight and most can expect to gain an average of two pounds a year.

First, determine your body mass index by going to the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute Web site at <http://nhlbisupport.com/bmi>. If it's over twenty-five, try these suggestions for healthy weight loss.

- Set realistic goals.** One to two pounds per week is considered a safe amount of weight loss.
- Try meal replacements.** Studies show that meal replacements such as Slim Fast are an effective way to help you gradually lose weight and keep it off.
- See a registered dietitian (RD) for expert advice.** Even if you go just once, an RD can help you pinpoint key problem areas. (To find a dietitian, visit www.eatright.org).
- Get support from commercial programs such as Weight Watchers.**
- Write down what you eat.** Studies show that people who are successful at keeping weight off keep a journal on a regular basis. ♣

MARYANN TOMOVICH JACOBSEN, MS, RD, is a Los Angeles-based freelance writer. Her articles have appeared in *Today's Dietitian* and *Stressfree Living* magazine. She's also a clinical and an outpatient dietitian at Olympia Medical Center in Los Angeles.

VitaSpelt brought them together... VitaSpelt may not improve your love life, but it will improve your health and give your diet program more options. VitaSpelt works several ways:

Sally eats whole foods

Harry is diabetic

- Helps achieve better blood glucose control*
- High source of dietary fiber found to be effective in preventing heart disease and some forms of cancer
- Vita Spelt whole grain pastas have 5 grams of fiber per serving
- Vita Spelt pastas are made from Spelt one of the first domesticated grains
- Superior taste, making it a welcome addition to any diet



Purity Foods, Inc.
2871 West Jolly Rd., Okemos, MI 48864
1-800-997-7358
www.purityfoods.com

*Vita Spelt whole grain pastas were awarded the Diabetes Resource Center's Seal of Approval.