Life Lines
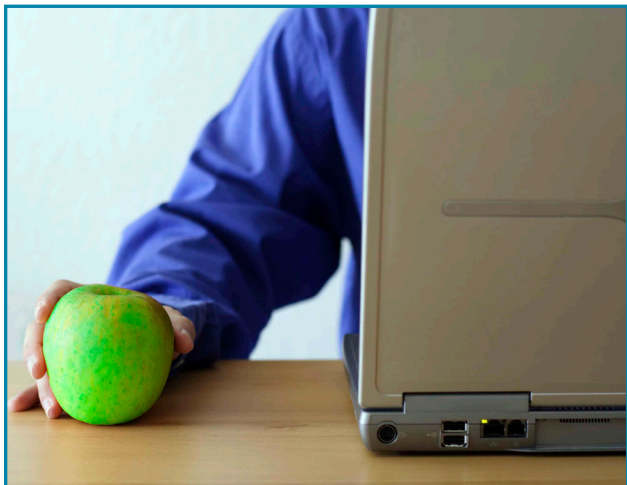
Improving Your Quality of Life — One Step at a Time

Eating Healthy on the Run

A common challenge in sticking to a healthy diet is learning how to eat healthy on the run. Often we're so busy that our good intentions fall to the wayside. Why do many of us find sticking to a healthy diet so difficult? Probably because we're just too busy.

A balanced diet full of fresh vegetables, fruit and grains is an essential part of a healthy lifestyle. This is not a novel idea. However, in today's hectic world, most of us are rushing from dawn to dusk and we sometimes choose convenience over health. Maybe we rush to get the kids ready for school, to get to work or to a meeting, to get home, to make dinner and then to get ready for bed. Even weekends are filled with non-stop activity as we scramble to catch up with unfinished office work, finish all those household chores we didn't have time for during the week, spend time with family and friends, or ferry the kids around. So, even though we know what eating healthy is, and why it's important, it's no wonder we have very little time to eat healthy. There just isn't enough time. Many of us forego preparing a healthy, balanced meal for the convenience of the local drive-thru.

The irony is that when our life is hectic, nutrition is even more important. When our bodies are fuelled with good food we have more energy and can better manage our weight and cope with stress. Eating healthy is vital, whether we're on the run or not. Here are some strategies and tips to help you stay focused on healthy eating habits for you and/or your family.

- ☑ **Eat breakfast.** More than a third of us skip breakfast, and that can be disastrous for our waistlines, and ability to concentrate. Eating breakfast kick-starts our metabolism and prevents us from overeating later. It also prevents us from becoming so hungry that we grab whatever we can find (usually sugary or salty foods such as donuts, potato chips or muffins).

- ☑ **Grab some fruit or eggs.** Make sure you always have bananas, apples or pears on hand and get in the habit of boiling a dozen eggs every weekend. Peel them, put into baggies—either one or two, it's up to you—and put them in the fridge. For those mornings where you don't have time to eat, grab a baggie and a piece of fruit and you have a nutritious breakfast.

- ☑ **Stock up on healthy snacks.** Create a small "stash" of non-perishable snacks that can be kept in a car glove compartment, school locker or desk drawer. This is readily available food you can snack on or use to round out a meal on the go. Examples of healthy snacks include: dried fruits (raisins, apricots, banana chips), canned fruit or applesauce, whole-grain crackers, mini-boxes of whole-grain cereal, rice cakes with a small container of peanut butter, granola or protein bars, nuts or trail mix, small tins of tuna, cans of soup or vegetarian chili.

☑ **Don't skip lunch.** By eating regularly, you'll help keep your blood-sugar levels stable, help reduce "bad" cholesterol levels and lower your calorie intake. When you don't eat, the resulting dip in blood sugar around 2 PM can make you feel tired, cranky and have you running to the vending machine. If you can't get away from your desk and didn't pack a lunch, dip into your snack stash for some protein, fruit, and carbohydrates.

One of the most important parts of eating healthy on the run is remembering to drink water, instead of soft drinks or coffee. Because of a lack of water, many of us go through life dehydrated. This dehydration causes fatigue, irritability, and headaches. It's common to mistake thirst for hunger, so staying well hydrated will also help you make healthier food choices.

Another important part of healthy eating—no matter what your schedule—is planning. It seems odd that we carefully plan other aspects of our lives but not our diet. Try planning your meals for the week before going to the grocery store. Also try things like washing and cutting your fruits and vegetables in advance, placing handfuls in baggies and putting them in the fridge for quick snacks or dinner side dishes. If you know you're arriving late from work or school, keep something around that is quick and easy to prepare, and make more than you're going to eat at any one sitting. You can then take the leftovers to work or school the next day.

However, if for whatever reason, you are not able to bring your own food for lunch and must buy a meal, keep the following in mind.

☑ **Consider a supermarket for your fast-food break.** You can pick up pre-cut and washed fresh fruit or vegetables, yogurt or low-fat cheese. Many supermarkets also offer sushi, wraps, salads, or other healthy prepared items.

☑ **Chicken or fish aren't always healthy choices.** Many fast-food chains offer fried breaded chicken or fish sandwiches on white bread that actually contain more fat and calories than a burger. Grilled chicken is a better option.

☑ **Order a sub or sandwich** on whole wheat bread or a wrap. And hold the mayo.

☑ **Order a side salad instead of fries.** You'll be less likely to fill up on unhealthy items and the salad will add some fibre and vitamins to your diet.

Eating healthy when you're on the run, commuting or traveling is a challenge. But with a little forethought and planning, you can maintain a healthy lifestyle even when you're on the go. The benefits of healthy eating vastly outweigh the time it takes to prepare a healthy meal, and once you understand this, you're well on your way to living healthier.