

THE LOSER'S DIET

Winning weight-loss tips from 'Biggest' expert



Forberg's tips helped last season's "Biggest Loser" winner, Helen Phillips (above), shed 140 pounds. Photo by Chris Haston/NBC

The key to a slimmer waistline is simple: No more white foods. Those are words Cheryl Forberg lives by. And she should know. The chef and nutrition expert has been sharing diet tips with contestants on the weight-loss show "The Biggest Loser" since its premiere eight seasons ago.

In time for last week's season premiere, she has published the new weight-loss guide, "The Biggest Loser: Simple Swaps," to help people make the right food choices. Namely, swapping out "the white stuff" — refined flours, sugars, rice and bread — for whole-wheat breads and whole grain pastas.

"So many people are inspired by the show, but they're a little bit overwhelmed by all the really big changes," Forberg says. "They wonder, 'Can I do this at home?' And the answer is, 'Yes! You can start with baby steps.'"

Step 1: Make better choices.

In a city where the daily pace is a mile a minute, there's still time to make a couple of easy swaps in your everyday menu, according to Forberg.

Some of her favorites include using Greek-style yogurt instead of American-style (less carbs and sugar, but just as creamy), using avocado slices on a sandwich instead of mayonnaise (you get the

right texture, but good fats instead of bad), and hard cheeses, like pecorino, instead of soft ones, like cheddar (save on fat without sacrificing flavor).

And there are even swaps for some of New York's most classic — and classically unhealthy — dishes.

Next time you try making a pizza, go for a whole-wheat dough and low-fat mozzarella cheese, then load fresh vegetables on top. Or use a portobello mushroom as the base instead of crust, suggests Forberg.

In the morning, opt for just half of a whole-grain bagel instead of the usual ones made with bleached flour. Or, better yet, go for a whole grain English muffin.

And as for that pastrami sandwich? You're in luck: all you have to do for this one is swap your bread with lettuce and wrap the sandwich in romaine, Forberg says. Going easy on the meat can't hurt and mustard is already a naturally calorie-free food.

Even if you're just running into a neighborhood bodega to pick up a few quick items, Forberg adds, you should stop to read the ingredients on every package. Remember, you can't always judge a food by its label.

"Sometimes, I think people went a little overboard with the fat-free craze," Forberg says. "When you remove fat, you have to replace it with something else. And if [the food maker] replaces it with salt or sugar, it might not be lower in calories than the original."

She also warns that fat-free options can sometimes contain unhealthy artificial components.

"If you can't pronounce something in the label, put it back on the shelf," says Forberg.

The same attitude of taking your time with food also goes for late-night snacking splurges. Try to distract yourself for 10 to 15 minutes and see if the craving goes away, Forberg says. Most of the time it will. And it may sound obvious, but Forberg's tried and true solution is to simply not keep those high-fat, sweet treats in your home to begin with.

Says Forberg, "You can't succumb to temptation if you only have healthy choices in your home."

Amy Eisinger

Don't judge a food by its package

In addition to the nutrition labels and ingredient lists on the back of packaged foods, often you'll find bold promises on the front of these products — especially if the product is a "light" version of the original. These phrases are sometimes a little misleading. The list below decodes common health claims you'll find on many packaged goods.

CALORIE FREE. This designation means that the product must contain less than 5 calories per serving.

LOW CALORIE. This term means the food contains no more than 40% of the calories of the regular version.

REDUCED CALORIE. A reduced-calorie food contains at least 25% fewer calories than the regular version. Depending on how many calories the original version had, this doesn't necessarily guarantee that the food is low in calories.

FAT FREE. A fat-free food can contain only 0.5 gram of fat (or less) per serving.

LOW FAT. This phrase guarantees that there are 3 grams of fat (or less) per serving.

LIGHT. This term means a product has 50% less fat than its regular counterpart. Depending on how much fat the original product contains, this doesn't necessarily mean that the product is low in fat.

REDUCED FAT. This term simply indicates that a product has 25% less fat than the regular version. Again, it doesn't necessarily mean that the food is low in fat.

HIGH FIBER. This is a good term to watch for. It indicates that one serving has at least 5 grams of dietary fiber.

GOOD SOURCE OF FIBER. This phrase guarantees that the food product has 2.5 to 4.9 grams of fiber per serving.

MORE OR ADDED FIBER. These claims mean that the product has at least 2.5 grams of fiber per serving — which doesn't necessarily mean it is "high fiber."

LOW SODIUM. These foods contain half the sodium of the original.

SUGAR FREE. This term guarantees that there is less than 0.5 gram of sugar per serving.

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