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Effortless Ways to Lose Weight and Eat Healthy

I want to live a healthy life in the most effortless way possible.

I want to get my diet and nutrition right because it allows me to do the more important things in life, but I also don't want to spend all day thinking about what I eat.

I think my time and energy should be spent building things that matter, pursuing adventure and exploring the world, connecting and sharing with the people around me, and working toward goals that are important to me.

Because of that, I have spent the last few months trying different strategies that make it easier for me to eat healthy (<https://jamesclear.com/eat-healthy>) without much effort.

Most people get wrapped up in the details and strategies of a particular diet and never get around to actually following it. I like to keep things simple. I'd prefer to abandon the details, understand the main idea, and actually make adjustments.

I don't have all the answers, of course, but here's what is working for me right now and how you can use these ideas to eat healthy, lose weight, and gain muscle.

How to Buy Healthy Food Without Thinking

The main idea of most good diets is the same: eat whole foods that are unprocessed and that grew or lived outdoors. Some of them have different variations — no animal products, no grains, etc. — but most of them fit the general “real food” mold.

The problem is that — if you're anything like me — you will eat whatever is close to you, whether it came from Mother Nature or not. As a result, the best strategy is to surround yourself with healthy food.

Here's how I do it...

When I go to the grocery store, I only walk around the “outer ring” of the store. I don't walk down the aisles. The outer ring is where the healthy food usually lives: fruits, vegetables, lean meats, fish, eggs, and nuts. These are items that grew or lived outdoors. That's what I eat.

The aisles are where all of the boxed and processed stuff is placed. Don't go down those aisles and you won't buy those foods. Don't buy those foods and they won't be around for you to eat.

Try this the next time you go to the store and do your best to not to make exceptions.

Sure, there will be the occasional time that you'll need to go down an aisle to pick up spices or grab a bottle of olive oil, but this is rare. The last three times I've been at the grocery store, I have easily stayed on the "outer ring" and I bet you can do the same.

I know that I will eat everything around me, so I do my best to surround myself with good things. This is another way that I design my environment for success, which is a strategy that I wrote about in detail here: Environment Design (<https://jamesclear.com/environment-design-organ-donation>).

How to Eat Less Without Thinking

A lot of people want to lose weight, burn fat, and build a lean body. Maybe you do too.

In my experience, the simplest way to do this is to buy healthier foods and eat less overall. If you combine these two strategies with consistency and exercise, then the rest usually takes care of itself. I already covered my simple approach to buying healthier food, so here are the two best strategies I've discovered for eating less.

Important Note: as with most diet ideas, these strategies should be used in moderation. There is a tremendous amount of social, cultural, and peer pressure in our world to "be thin." The strategies I'm sharing below aren't meant to

promote that type of behavior. My goal is offer ideas that make it easier to live healthy in a sustainable way. Your ultimate goal should always be to regain your health and love yourself.

1. Use smaller plates, bowls, pans, etc.

Make less and serve less, and then you will eat less. These strategies work much better than relying on willpower or counting calories.

Multiple research studies have shown that you will always fill your plate to the brim and eat it clean. Given that, if you want to eat less, the best way to do so is to use smaller plates.

While you're at it, making the switch to dark green plates might be a good idea as well because it will increase the amount of green vegetables that you eat.

I wrote about the science behind smaller plates and green plates in this article (<https://jamesclear.com/feeling-fat>).

2. Eat fewer, but bigger, meals (i.e. switch to intermittent fasting)

Intermittent fasting (<https://jamesclear.com/the-beginners-guide-to-intermittent-fasting>) is an eating schedule where you eat two bigger meals during an 8-hour span instead of three or four smaller meals throughout the day. Then, you fast for the other 16 hours of the day.

I have been practicing intermittent fasting for over 2 years (here's what I've learned (<https://jamesclear.com/good-bad-intermittent-fasting>)). My first meal is usually around 12pm and my last meal is usually around 8pm.

In theory, you could eat the same amount of food during two meals as you could during three. (In fact, I'm trying to gain muscle right now, so I'm trying to eat way more during my 8-hour feeding window.)

In practice, however, most people end up eating less when they switch from three meals to two meals. There is a certain amount of food that you consider to be a "meal" and you tend to eat that same amount whether you have two meals per day or three meals per day. The end result is that you eat less without thinking about it.

What You Eat Is More Important Than When You Eat

Intermittent fasting tends to help you burn fat and retain muscle. It also makes your life easier because you have one less meal to cook and clean. Those are my reasons for practicing intermittent fasting.

However, it's important to realize that **what you eat will always be more important than when you eat.**

Intermittent fasting works best when combined with a healthy diet. You can't pound Doritos from 12pm to 8pm and think that those extra pounds will magically fall away. Intermittent fasting is simply another weapon to use in the blubbery battle against fat — just like smaller plates and the "outer ring" strategy are weapons at your disposal.

If you want more information, I've written about intermittent fasting in great detail in these articles:

1. The Beginner's Guide to Intermittent Fasting (<https://jamesclear.com/the-beginners-guide-to-intermittent-fasting>)
2. 12 Lessons Learned from 1 Year of Intermittent Fasting (<https://jamesclear.com/intermittent-fasting-lessons-learned>)
3. Reader Mailbag: Answers to the Most Common Intermittent Fasting Questions (<https://jamesclear.com/reader-mailbag-intermittent-fasting>)
4. 25,000 Mornings: 8 Ways to Improve Your Morning Routine (<https://jamesclear.com/25000-mornings>)

How to Eat Whatever You Want Without Feeling Guilty

I think life is meant to be lived joyfully. I have no desire to judge myself for eating pizza or to feel guilty for drinking a beer.

But, I also know that I feel much better when I eat healthy. Plus, I love the idea of maximizing my potential and turning my body into an athletic machine.

Here's how I balance the two...

I start by making sure that it's easy for me to make the right choice, most of the time. The “outer ring” shopping strategy helps to make that possible and as a result, I eat whole foods 80% of the time.

Because I know that I'm already making good choices most of the time, I don't worry about eating a soft pretzel at the ballpark or going out to get pizza with friends.

I also have a simple rule that I try to follow: **whenever I eat an unhealthy meal, I follow it with a healthy one.**

Top performers get back on track (<https://jamesclear.com/get-back-on-track>) faster than most people, and that's what I try to do with my diet. I don't worry about having fun and I try to enjoy life, but I also use this simple rule to guide me back toward a healthy diet as quickly as possible.

Avoid the Hype and Make Simple Changes

I like simple rules.

- I don't follow a diet plan. Instead, I shop on the outer ring of the store and buy foods that come from outdoors.
- I don't count calories. Instead, I let my intermittent fasting schedule regulate my eating.
- I don't judge myself when I eat something unhealthy. Instead, I try to follow it with a healthy meal.

As a result of these simple strategies I've been able to eat healthier without much effort or thought.

And most importantly, I've actually made improvements instead of getting bogged down in the details of a particular diet. When it comes to diets and nutrition, I think you are better off moving in the right direction rather than searching for the

perfect direction.

Less effort, better food, and more time for what matters.



Thanks for reading. You helped save a life.

Whenever you buy one of [my books](https://jamesclear.com/books) (<https://jamesclear.com/books>), join the [Habits Academy](https://habitsacademy.com) (<https://habitsacademy.com>), or otherwise contribute to my work, 5 percent of the profits are donated to the Against Malaria Foundation (AMF).

With each donation, AMF distributes nets to protect children, pregnant mothers, and families from mosquitos carrying malaria. It is one of the most cost-effective ways to extend life and fulfills my bigger mission to spread healthy habits and help others realize their full potential.

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