Six Easy Steps to Clean Eating
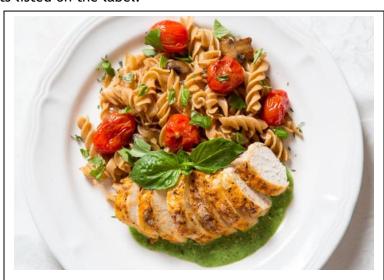
First, let's clear up what clean eating is _not_. It's not deprivation, it's not a diet, and it's not all that time consuming.

Clean eating means you choose more of the healthy options in each food group _and_ eat fewer processed foods. It's a simple way to feel better overall, both physically and mentally. Keep this easy six-point checklist in mind:

1. **Beware of processed foods**. Your body digests these foods differently and less efficiently. Shop the outer perimeter of your grocery store to stock up on unprocessed foods. Essentially, anything in a package is processed. Read labels and watch out for an ingredient list that's really long. That's often a red flag for extra sugar, refined grains and partially hydrogenated oils. If you can't pronounce it, think twice before eating it.

2. **Limit sugar.** Yes, it's addicting. What's more, it's hidden under various names ("high fructose corn syrup") and in surprising sources, like salad dressings and tomato sauces. In general Americans eat 28 teaspoons of added sugar each day, quadruple what we need. Start by cutting back on soda, candy and baked goods. Your body will (eventually) thank you.

3. **Eat those fruits and vegetables!** Fruit does contain sugar, but that natural form is generally better for you than additives or sugar substitutes, _unless you have a health condition that restricts sugar intake_. Adding fruit and vegetables to your diet helps reduce your risk for a number of chronic diseases, including high blood pressure and heart disease. At the same time, the fiber in whole produce helps support the "good bacteria" in your gut, which can boost immunities and even improve your mood.

4. **Introduce whole grains.** By that, we mean "real" whole grains, ones that are as close to their natural state as possible. Read labels and don't be fooled by "whole-grain" claims on foods which may still contain processed ingredients. Quinoa, wild rice and oats are great examples, along with whole-wheat pasta and whole-grain breads with just a few simple ingredients listed on the label.

5. **Where does meat fit in?** People often confuse clean eating with being vegan, but in fact, meat can be part of clean eating. That said, eating less meat can help reduce your blood pressure and risk of heart disease while helping with weight loss. Try to limit processed meats such as cold cuts, bacon and sausage. Consider adding other protein sources like eggs, dairy, beans and nuts to your daily menu.

6. **Don't pass the salt!** As with sugar, most Americans consume far more sodium that they need. Daily requirements, according to the Institute of Medicine, shouldn't exceed a teaspoon a day, or 2,300 mg. Cutting back on processed foods, often high in sodium, is a great start. Try cooking with herbs, spices, citrus and vinegar instead of salt. If you must salt your food, choose a very light sprinkle of sea salt or kosher salt.

Source:

1. Valente, Lisa, MS, RD. "7 Tips for Clean Eating." _EatingWell_, 2018, Web, eatingwell.com/article/78846/7-tips-for-clean-eating/