

# Small changes in diet can have a big impact on health

19 March 2018, by Joe Higgins



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How's that New Year's resolution coming along? Getting ready for summer and want to look your best? Just want to feel better physically? Whatever your motivation, Mercedes Sotos-Prieto, an assistant professor of nutrition in Ohio University's College of Health Sciences and Professions said just a little change in diet has a big impact.

March is National Nutrition Month and for many, resolutions made months ago to eat healthier may have waned at this point which could be chalked up to [unrealistic expectations](#) such as cutting out entire sources of food. In July, 2017, research by Sotos-Prieto was published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* detailing that consuming more whole grains, vegetables, fish, fruits and nuts and reducing sugary beverages and processed meats can lower the risk of premature death by up to 17 percent.

Sotos-Prieto said it is especially important to educate the youth on [healthy eating habits](#) as many do not consider the effects eating poorly can have on [long term health](#). She said early education can help to prevent diseases before they occur

and added that awareness in adults is crucial in setting good examples for children.

"There's no magic diet or recipe," she said. "You need to find a diet you can adhere to for a long time that includes healthy components such as fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, healthy fats such as olive oil and swapping refined grains for whole grains that are better for you."

Just by changing one serving of red or processed meat for one daily serving of nuts or legumes can have a big impact on your health, she added.

According to Sotos-Prieto, recent studies have shown that reduced-fat and fat-free foods aren't always a good alternative.

"High fat consumption can actually be good if the quality of the fat is good," she said. "Nut butter (made from actual nuts), can be a good source of food in addition to avocados and other [vegetable oils](#) and we have strong data that shows extra [virgin olive oil](#) is proven to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease."

Sotos-Prieto suggests a plate be filled halfway with fruits and vegetables while the other half consists of healthy protein and whole grains. Drink water and add [olive oil](#) to your routine. She addressed the culture of going out to eat and said it's still possible to find healthy substitutes at restaurants.

"Take a burrito in a bowl. Ask for a tortilla made with whole grain, add brown rice, beans and include all the vegetables you want with chicken and guacamole. Instead of fries, get a side of vegetables or create your own pizza at home using whole [grains](#) and vegetables," said Sotos-Prieto.

Small changes sustained over time will benefit your health inside and out, doing away with the pressure to make diet-related resolutions next New Year's.

Provided by Ohio University

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