

From the Nutritionist

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Your daily food choices can have a significant impact on the environment. Choices that are good for the Earth are often good for your health too. Have you considered how your eating habits impact the Earth? Here are some key ways that you can eat a more “green” diet:

Choose more local food — Crops intended for a local market are generally picked at their peak for best flavor, and a shorter time between the farm and your table means food that is higher in nutrients. Choosing local also helps to reduce the environmental impacts of shipping food across the country (or the world), and supports your local economy. Farmers that use sustainable farming practices help protect the health of

the local soil and water supply as well.

Eat less processed food — Highly processed foods take a lot of energy to produce, and often travel a long distance to the consumer, increasing pollution. Processed foods tend to be higher in sodium, sugar, and saturated fat, and lower in fiber and vitamins, so by reducing your intake of these foods you can improve your health as well. Choose more whole foods when possible.

Eat less meat — Industrially farmed meat has the greatest impact of any food product on the environment. The meat and poultry industries contribute significantly to global greenhouse gas emissions and consume large amounts of natural resources such as water and fossil fuels. Even if you don’t go vegetarian, cutting meat out of a few meals per week can lessen your impact on the environment. Also, plant-based diets have been shown in numerous studies to reduce the risk of many chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and cancer.

Decrease food waste — It has been estimated that about 30 percent of food in the United States is wasted. Wasted food is a waste of money, and also a waste of all the resources used to produce the food. Reduce food waste by taking only as much food as you can eat (you can always go back for seconds), only buying as much as you can eat before it goes bad, and making use of leftovers.

Grow something — There’s nothing like the taste of freshly picked produce. Start a garden in your backyard, join a community garden or a plant something in a pot on your windowsill. Even if you can’t plant a large garden, find something you can grow to supplement the foods you buy, like a tomato or basil plant. For “green” gardening, avoid using synthetic fertilizers and pesticides.

Reduce, reuse, recycle — Reduce food packaging by buying food in bulk, use reusable water bottles, mugs and grocery bags to reduce waste, and recycle what you can.

Vote with your wallet — Support businesses and organizations that care for the planet — such as stores and restaurants that take efforts to reduce waste or energy use and those that offer local or organic foods.

Andrea Hart, registered dietitian nutritionist and New York State-certified dietitian/nutritionist, is available for free, confidential, one-on-one counseling and as a speaker or facilitator for campus groups, panels or classes.

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