

Nudge nəj/

verb 1. prod (someone) gently, typically with one's elbow, in order to draw their attention to something.

noun 1. a light touch or push.

In 2008, Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein's published a ground-breaking book *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness*. In it, they explained:

"A nudge, as we will use the term, is any aspect of the choice architecture that alters people's behavior in a predictable way without forbidding any options or significantly changing their economic incentives. To count as a mere nudge, the intervention must be easy and cheap to avoid. Nudges are not mandates. Putting fruit at eye level counts as a nudge. Banning junk food does not."

Most of us know what we should and should not be eating -- more fruits and vegetables, less fat, sugar and salt. But why do we continue to have epidemic levels of obesity, heart disease, and Type II diabetes? Why aren't we blessing our bodies with better nutrition? Nudge-theory may help solve this growing problem.

This is part I in a four-part series looking at nudging our behavior to better food choices.

We know we should decrease the fat in our diet. But do we know WHY? You have probably read that fat in your diet does not necessarily lead to fat on your body. So if you're skinny, you can eat fatty foods, right? Not so fast. Saturated fat raises blood cholesterol and increases the risk of heart disease. It also creates a feeling of fullness, which may prevent of a person from eating more vegetables, fruits, grains, beans, etc.

Not all fats are created equal. There's saturated fat, trans fat, polyunsaturated fat...so many that it gets confusing and many people just give up. Here's a rule of thumb that makes it easier to follow:

Fats that are solid at room temperature raise cholesterol levels. (animal fats like butter and margarine, the fat that rises on soups and gravies made from meat products, and shortening.)

Fats that are liquid at room temperature help lower cholesterol levels. (olive oil, peanut oil, sunflower oil). If you see a trend here, you are not mistaken -- these are all plant based. The plants they come from -- olives, peanuts, sunflower seeds -- are all good sources of protein with healthier fats. Avocados are a good choice, too.

The idea of nudging means we can make small easy choices rather than large difficult choices. Going from a meat-and-potatoes diet to a vegan diet would be very difficult. This is also a "negative" choice -- we see all the thing we "cannot" have. Following some of the suggestions below are easy; hopefully they are "positive" choices, or at least "neutral". Rather than feeling a loss of a favorite food, you won't perceive any noticeable difference in your meal.

SUGGESTIONS

- Use hummus, pesto or guacamole instead of mayonnaise as a sandwich spread.
- Squeeze lemon onto cooked vegetables, instead of butter or cream sauce.
- Reduce portion sizes of meat. Servings should be the size of a deck of cards.
- When making mashed potatoes, use olive oil instead of butter or cream.
- When choosing soups, opt for selections that are not cream based (tomato soup is a better choice than tomato cream soup.)
- When eating out, ask for vinaigrette on the side, and use only what you need.
- Reduce consumption of baked goods, and opt for dark chocolate or fresh fruit.
- Be careful about foods labeled "low fat" or "reduced fat". To maintain the flavor, these foods are often high in sugar. <https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/truth-about-low-fat-foods>