

Most Americans - close to 70% of us - are overweight.

Many of you are considering whether or not to make weight loss one of **your New Year's resolutions**. The problem, of course, is that you have done this before. Full of enthusiasm, you have resolved to make major changes in your eating habits and lifestyle - changes that would melt away that unwanted flab.

But, alas, those major changes proved to be unsustainable and within a few weeks you were back to your old routine and were packing on those extra pounds once more.

So maybe this year you should consider the "**Stealth Diet**".

Ok, there is no "Stealth Diet" - at least not one that I know about. But, an article in the **December issue of Environmental Nutrition** called "**Top 9 Stealth Health Diet Strategies**" caught my eye, and I thought its message would be worth sharing with you.

The article starts with an ancient Chinese proverb that makes great sense when you are considering a task as monumental as resculpting your body. The proverb says: "The man who moves a mountain begins by carrying away small stones".

So what are the "small stones" that will launch you on the path towards a healthier weight in 2012?

#1) Practice portion control: It's no secret that portion sizes are getting bigger. Even simple items like bagels and muffins are twice the size (and twice the calories) as they were 30 or 40 years ago. And restaurants compete for their customers by seeing who can provide the largest meals.

The tips are simple: Prepare smaller portions at home, split your meals or ask for doggie bags when you eat out, and never snack from an open bag or box.

#2) Slip more fresh fruits and vegetables into your diet: It's no secret that fruit and vegetable consumption reduces the risk of heart disease, some cancers and other degenerative diseases. But, more importantly, those **fresh fruits and vegetables have fewer calories** than the foods they will be displacing.

#3) Be mindful as you eat: Although it may sound counter-intuitive you will actually eat less if you take the time to savor the foods that eat. Enjoy your food. Enjoy the conversation. Meals shouldn't be a race.

Multitasking (watching television or surfing the net while eating) may save time, but it also packs on the extra calories because you aren't paying any attention to how much you are eating.

#4) Use caution with snacks: EN says that you don't really need to snack in order to lose weight successfully. I'm not so sure.

Some people (myself included) are genetically "hard-wired" to enjoy excellent blood sugar control. People like us don't really need to snack.

But I have found that many other people are "hard-wired" to experience low blood sugar between meals no matter what they eat - and if you are overweight you may suffer from blood sugar swings no matter what your genetic make-up is.

When your blood sugar tanks, you will feel hungry, tired, cranky and deprived - none of which are helpful for the long-term success of your diet. For people like you sensible snacking is absolutely essential if you want to lose weight successfully.

I do agree with EN that snacks should be healthful, They recommend no more than 100-200 calories (I'd shoot for closer to 100 calories if you want to lose weight) and should provide healthy sources of both protein and carbohydrate.

#5) Leave 10% of each meal on your plate: That's not good news for the "clean plate club", but that one simple change will save you about 84,000 calories - which is equivalent to 10 pounds of weight loss- per year.

#6) Use an oil pump mister for cooking and salads. When we pour oils from the bottle we usually end up with much more oil - and many more calories - than we actually need.

#7) Swap some of your meat for mushrooms: I strongly disagree with EN on this recommendation.

I understand where EN is coming from. Mushrooms have far fewer calories and much less fat & cholesterol than the meat that they replace. EN is also correct in pointing out that mushrooms are the only plant-based source of vitamin D.

However, mushrooms only provide about 10% as much protein as meats, and keeping your protein intake high is essential for successful long term weight loss. I would recommend substituting vegetable protein sources such as beans and soy for the meat in your diet. That will lower you fat and calorie intake without compromising on your protein intake.

#8) Eat only when sitting: In today's world we often "graze" while moving around and doing other things - and we lose track of how much we are eating. This really comes back to recommendation #3. The simple act of sitting down and focusing on the food that we are eating will reduce our food intake - and our weight.

#9) Use ripe avocado in place of butter: You'll save about 75 calories per serving and you will be getting a much healthier profile of fat and micronutrients.

I also recommend almond butter in place of butter for toast. You aren't saving any calories there, but you are getting a healthier profile of fats and significantly more protein.

There you have it - Environmental Nutrition's recommendations (with my modification) for 9 "stealth" changes that you can make in your diet for the coming year.

These are small, simple changes. They are do-able. Any one of these changes could lead to 5 or 10 pounds weight loss per year. If you made all of these changes you could lose up to 90 pounds over the next year - and you'll never have noticed that you were on a "diet".

To Your Health!
Dr. Stephen G Chaney