

## Chapter 2. Much More Than a Diet

*A Healthier You* is about our diet—what we eat. But it’s not a “diet book.” It’s different. It’s about helping us find our way to better health by making smart choices about nutrition and physical activity—two keys to a healthy lifestyle.

Sure, this raises a number of questions: “What exactly does a healthy lifestyle mean? Deny myself the very pleasures of eating? Is this the end of eating out? What about my hectic life? Seriously, how much physical activity do you really expect me to get each day?” Sometimes, it’s hard enough to get everything done in a day—let alone physical activity!

*A Healthier You* is not about what we deny ourselves, but instead:

*It’s about choices.* The food and physical activity choices we make every day affect our health. The more we know, the better choices we can make.

*It’s about balance.* We need to learn to make more room in our lives for things that make us happy, healthy, and productive.

*It’s about a healthy lifestyle.* To get the most out of our lives starts with small steps—a slow, steady approach to being healthy that we can live with each day—or most days. Hey, nobody’s perfect!

At some level, we all know that a lot about being healthy comes down to taking care of ourselves: what we eat, how much we eat, and how much physical activity we get. We don’t need to be rocket scientists to figure this out. *A Healthier You* already gives us the state of the science from the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* to help us:

- make smart choices from every food group
- find our balance between food and physical activity
- get the most nutrition out of our calories.

Good to know, right? But let’s face it, healthy habits take some effort. There’s no magic pill that instantly does the trick.

How often have we told ourselves, “I’m going to start eating better and moving more.” And, we mean it. We make the pact with ourselves at least every New Year. Too often, however, it’s easy to get derailed and fall back into unhealthy habits. We don’t mean to. But, the truth is—it takes a real commitment to change our behavior, especially for the long haul.

We basically know that we eat to live, but today, some of us seem to live to eat. Food represents a lot of things to us. To some it’s a stress reducer—“I’m stressed. I’m tired and just want to go home and eat.” There’s often nothing like the emotional comfort of a pint of ice cream. Sometimes, food is our way of celebrating or a reason for coming together for special events like block parties or family reunions. Food is part of our social fabric. It’s one way we pass traditions down from generation to generation and sometimes preserve our cultural identities. We hear stories from people talking about how food is part of their heritage. The secret ingredient in Nana’s strudel is “love” to be sure, but there’s also “lard” in that strudel! From Sunday family dinners serving spaghetti and meatballs to the best barbecue for a handful of nieces and nephews, extended family, and friends...sometimes, the entire neighborhood—we all love to kick back and relax with our favorite foods and enjoy ourselves!

There are ways, though, to make a healthier lifestyle doable and still enjoy Nana’s cooking at the reunion. It’s the day-in and day-out choices that we really need to think about. Whether this means finding the motivation to be our own personal trainer, using easy-to-make recipes to prepare our own meals in about as much time as it takes to head out to the nearest fast-food place, doing our best to eat healthfully on a budget, or making better choices when eating out—the little things do add up and make a big difference. Self-discipline may take some getting used to, so *A Healthier You* offers words not only of encouragement but also about the know-how to get started and keep with it!