

Now that the holidays are over and a new year is here, it's a perfect time to focus on healthy eating. Whether young or old, healthy eating can make a real difference in the way people feel today as well as their health in years to come.

"One of the key issues is that while most people typically gain a pound or two over the holidays, often times it isn't lost afterward, contributing to overweight and obesity later in life," according to Dr. Joann Schaefer, director of the Division of Public Health in the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. "Weight gain typically occurs over many years, and added up, it's easy to become at risk for serious health problems such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and some cancers."

Being overweight raises the risk for type 2 diabetes. Losing weight is one of the best things people can do to defend against diabetes and prevent other health problems. If some motivation is needed to shed those holiday pounds, take the online test at www.defendagainstdiabetes.ne.gov to find out the risk. If overweight, losing 7 percent of body weight by making healthy changes in eating and being physically active is the best way to prevent or delay type 2 diabetes.

Here are a few tips to get started:

Eat more fruits and veggies. Make half the plate fruits and vegetables. Selecting a colorful variety of fruits and veggies is a key to healthy eating since they are naturally low in fat and high in vitamins and minerals.

Drink water instead of sugary drinks. Drinking too many sugary beverages (soda, energy drinks, sports drinks, sugar-sweetened juice drinks, etc.) can add too many calories, leading to weight gain and increasing the risk of diabetes.

Avoid oversized portions. Check the labels on what is being eaten to see how many calories are in each serving. Cut back on those high-calorie items or decrease portions. Eat off a smaller plate or split the meal in half at a restaurant and take the rest home.

Small changes over time can make a big difference in successful weight loss. Start by making healthy food choices today!