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**Small steps can be more effective to improve diet**

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Superior, Wis.]--Eating healthier is a goal many Americans put at the top of their list of New Year’s resolutions. But as the year goes on, are people likely to stick to their goal?

In a recent study, researchers compared grocery receipts from a group of households at three different times: for a few months before the winter holidays; during the holidays; and for a few months afterward. They had previously found that household grocery receipts were related to the amount of food consumed in those homes.

Not surprisingly, the comparison showed that the amount of unhealthy food purchased increased over the holidays. After the holidays, purchases of healthy foods grew—again no surprise knowing that many people made New Year’s resolutions related to health. But researchers also found that purchases of unhealthy food did not drop back down to preholiday levels.

These findings, combined with earlier studies showing that many people gain--and retain--a small amount of weight over the holidays, suggest that New Year’s resolutions related to healthy diets might not be all that effective.

So should we give up on the idea of resolving to turn over a new diet leaf? Beth Olson, University of Wisconsin-Extension/UW-Madison nutrition specialist says maybe New Year’s resolutions don’t always result in a healthier diet, but they do show people have awareness and interest in eating healthier—even if only for a limited time.

Olson says that goals for the new year are no different than other resolutions people make throughout the year to change their behavior—it may require more than one try. “People may consider change many times before they succeed in actually making that change,” says Olson.

Taking baby steps, such as learning how to read food labels or adding more fruits and vegetables to recipes, may not feel as overwhelming as making a big change in eating patterns, says Olson. “Over time, small changes may contribute to a longer term healthy habits.”

To learn more about nutrition and healthy eating, contact Julie Montgomery, 715-395-1427, julie.montgomery@ces.uwex.edu Douglas County UW-EXTENSION OFFICE.

**Reference for educators:** Pope L, Hanks AS, Just DR, Wanskin B (2014) New Year’s Res-Illusions: Food Shopping in the New Year Competes with Healthy Intentions. PLoS ONE 9(12)e:110561.