

1-1-2015

# Get two for one—the same strategies help you go green and improve wellness

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## Recommended Citation

Waters, Jean S., "Get two for one—the same strategies help you go green and improve wellness" (2015). *White Papers*. 14.  
<http://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/nbdcwhitepapers/14>

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## Get two for one—the same strategies help you go green and improve wellness

**S**tart today, resolve to make smart choices using resources—it can lead to a lower impact on the environment and increased health. We have learned that food choices involve consideration of multiple attributes such as nutritional values, freshness, safety of storage and packaging, limits on specific ingredients which may cause sensitivity or be unhealthy, and accounting for point of origin. In the same way, product choices should consider multiple attributes.

### Consider the life cycle of products you purchase

What are the impacts of material extraction and manufacturing, transportation, use, and disposal? Often we make purchases in a hurry and only consider the initial price paid, without considering the costs associated with a products use or disposal. Buying products with recycled content reduces impact of material extraction and helps build the market for recycling. Reusing products and buying durable products reduces impacts all along the life cycle, so that is an even better choice.

Sometimes, it's better to pay a little more for something initially and use less of it or reuse it. Planning purchases is important so you buy what you need but not more than you need. Little decisions made every day can add up to big changes in your eco- and healthy- lifestyle.

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Some choices, such as retrofitting with LED lamps or paying for regular maintenance of equipment, may seem like money you don't want to spend at first. However, when looking at the cost over a longer term, these choices make excellent financial sense. When re-lamping, get a redesign at the same time. Your workspace may have been modified since the original design and you may need fewer fixtures when switching to LED lamps. There are other benefits to making these changes as well. Along with energy savings, new lighting provides an updated look and can contribute to higher productivity. Regular maintenance checks result in cost savings for HVAC, compressed air, and steam systems. Maintenance of systems helps ensure that little problems don't become big, expensive problems. It takes a little discipline and labor cost but pays big dividends.

### Buy better quality and more flavorful food

In the same way, buying better quality and more flavorful foods can satisfy without consuming as much quantity. If the food you eat is better quality, it may be more expensive, but planning to eat less of it allows you to stay within your budget. Just

as mechanical systems in our buildings and factories need maintenance, wellness initiatives include “maintenance” style exercise, where little bits of exercise are built into your day. People try to put exercise into their daily routine by parking far from the door, taking the stairs, and getting up from their desk to talk to a colleague rather than use the phone or email. People are also encouraged to have a regular exercise routine of walking, jogging, cycling, aerobics, or life-time sport. Studies have shown exercise improves a person’s physical and mental health, paying big benefits for small, routine efforts.

## Planning is essential to healthier eating and to reducing waste

Purchase healthy foods so junk food is not available to eat. Eat regular meals to avoid over-eating due to getting too hungry. An additional benefit to planning and purchasing for smaller meals is the reduction of food waste. Excess food constitutes about eight percent of what we throw away in this country. Planning takes some time but saves money and resources. Planning food purchases allows you to capture sales and avoid waste and the time spent planning once per week makes daily food preparation easier.

Another strategy is to drink more water and eat more water-based soups to fill up on low-calorie foods and eat fewer high-calorie foods. By replacing our food intake with lower calorie equivalents, we can reduce our overall calorie intake.

Planning printing and paper use can help us reap the environmental benefits of using high-recycled-content paper and stay within the budget. Instead of printing so many materials, evaluate what really needs to be printed and substitute electronic communications for non-essential printing. Electronic communications are like soup. They help keep the message going without the calories (or in this case, without the environmental

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impact). In addition, paperless transactions save money on paper used, printing, and postage while providing convenience for customers and lowering handling costs. Likewise, limit portion size. When printing is necessary, can the size of the paper be smaller? How about the number of copies? Only print what is needed. Go through mailing lists prior to purchasing printed materials so you don’t have extras. This not only saves printing costs but postage and storage space for left-over materials. With proper planning, buying higher-quality 100% recycled-content paper will be within the budget. Reduce.org offers additional tips on reducing paper in an office. <http://www.reduce.org/paper/index.html>

## Avoiding toxins is good for lifestyle and environment

Other choices for healthy lifestyles include avoiding toxics, such as BPA in food containers and hazardous chemicals in cleaning supplies. Many schools are leading the way in using green (non-toxic, biodegradable) cleaners to better manage their inventory and provide a safer environment for students and employees. Chemicals are purchased in concentrated form and diluted to specific levels according to the surface being cleaned. Concentrated chemicals not only lessen environmental impact by reducing transportation weight, but they also reduce the size of inventory that must be stored. This healthy, environmentally conscious choice can also be cost effective. The University of North Carolina at Greensboro found that using concentrated chemicals reduced chemical cost from \$3.07 per gallon to about 25 cents per gallon. The University also reduced chemical usage by 75%<sup>1</sup>.

Engaging in a healthy lifestyle and going green requires a conscious effort, planning and systematic changes, but both can be done using similar techniques and yield beneficial results. Just as multiple attributes should be considered when making choices, multiple benefits are achieved. The benefits are not always immediately obvious but realized over time.

<sup>1</sup> International Executive Housekeepers Association, <http://ncproject-green.com/Presentations/GreenCleaningUNCG.pdf> accessed online 09/15/14.



## About the author

Jean Waters, MS chemical engineering, SFP, is a senior community service associate with the Nebraska Business Development Center. She works with businesses and organizations to increase energy efficiency and eliminate waste at the source. She helps companies with sustainability and Green Teams. Waters served as program manager for the Pollution Prevention Resource Exchange (P2Rx) specializing in environmental management systems, pollution prevention assessments, and environmental compliance for small to medium-sized industries.

Waters has a Masters of Science degree in chemical engineering and was an air toxics engineer and director of the Pollution Prevention Institute (PPI) at Kansas State University. At PPI she consulted individually with businesses and gave seminars on environmental management systems, air permits, including Title V permitting, and pollution prevention planning. Prior to joining PPI, Waters was a process engineer for Raytheon Aircraft and plant chemist for Koch Fiberglass, both in Wichita, Kansas.



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