



Education

Healthy Diet

What are the keys to a healthy diet?

Your daily diet and physical activity are very important to your health--how you feel today and in the future. The three keys to a healthy diet are:

- Make smart choices from every food group: fruits, vegetables, grains, milk products, and meat (or other protein-rich foods).
- Find a balance between how much food you eat and how much physical activity you have.
- Get the most nutrition out of your calories.

What foods do I need?

The best way to give your body the balanced nutrition it needs is by eating a variety of nutrient-packed foods every day. Just be sure to stay within your daily calorie needs. A healthy eating plan is one that:

- Emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products.
- Includes poultry, fish, soy protein, beans, eggs, nuts, and lean meats if you choose to include meat in your diet.
- Is low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt (sodium), and added sugars.

Fruits

Eat a variety of fruits--whether fresh, frozen, canned, or dried--rather than fruit juice for most of your fruit choices. (Fruit juice is higher in calories and sugar and does not have as much fiber as whole fruits.) A good goal is to have at least 3 servings of fruit each day (for example, 1 small banana, 1 large orange, and 1/4 cup of dried apricots).

Vegetables

Choose from a variety of vegetables. Try to eat at least 2 and 1/2 cups a day. Eat:

- more green vegetables, such as broccoli, cabbage, and dark leafy greens
- more orange vegetables, such as carrots, sweet potatoes, pumpkin, and winter squash
- beans and peas, such as pinto beans, kidney beans, black beans, garbanzo beans, split peas, and lentils.

Whole Grains

Make sure that half of the grains you eat are whole grains. Eat at least 3 ounces of whole-grain cereals, breads, crackers, rice, or pasta every day. One ounce is about 1 slice of bread, 1 cup of cereal, or a half cup of cooked rice or pasta. Look for products that list whole grains or whole wheat as one the first ingredients.

Whole grains are good sources of fiber and other important nutrients. As well as helping to prevent constipation, fiber can slow sugar absorption and help lower cholesterol levels. You should try to have 14 grams of fiber for every

1000 calories in your diet. Whole-grain sources of fiber are whole wheat, bran, whole rye, oats and oatmeal, whole-grain corn, and brown or wild rice. Other good sources of fiber are flax seeds, nuts, vegetables, fruits, and beans.

Milk products

Get 3 cups of low-fat or fat-free milk--or an equivalent amount of low-fat yogurt or low-fat cheese (1 and 1/2 ounces of cheese equals 1 cup of milk)--every day. If you don't or cannot drink milk, choose lactose-free milk products or calcium-fortified foods and beverages.

Protein

Choose lean meats and poultry. Bake, broil, or grill the meats instead of frying them. Get some of your protein from other foods, such as fish, beans, peas, nuts, and seeds. Try to use meat as a side dish rather than a main course. You can decrease the amount of meat you eat by including it in a casserole or stew, using the meat as a flavoring for the main dish.

It is possible to have a healthy diet without eating meat. Vegetarians do need to make sure to eat a variety of nonmeat proteins every day and to get enough iron and zinc.

The foods to limit

Some foods contain very little nutritional value or have ingredients that can cause disease. Eating healthy doesn't mean giving up all sweets, salt, and snacks. It means eating such foods in moderation. You should limit saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, sodium, and added sugars in your diet. Reading the Nutrition Facts label on foods can help you do this.

Fats

Avoid high in saturated fats, trans fats, and cholesterol to help reduce the risk of heart disease. Examples of foods that contain saturated fat include butter, cheese, some margarines, shortening, tropical oils such as coconut and palm oil, and the fats in meat and poultry skin. Some margarines and many processed foods contain trans, or hydrogenated, fats. Cholesterol is a substance found in animal products such as meat, eggs, dairy products, and baked goods made with eggs and milk. Most of the fats you eat should be polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats. Healthy oils to use are canola, soy, olive, peanut, or corn oil. Fats should contribute no more than 20% to 35% of your daily calories.

Salt

Choose and prepare foods and beverages with little salt (sodium). An average healthy person should have at least 500 mg (milligrams) of sodium a day but no more than 2300 mg a day. Research shows that eating less than 2300 milligrams of sodium (about 1 tsp of salt) per day may reduce the risk of high blood pressure. Most of the sodium people eat comes from processed and fast foods, not from the salt shaker. Taste food before you add salt to it at the table. Try adding other spices or herbs to the foods you cook and eat instead of salt. Also look for foods high in potassium, which counteracts some of sodium's effects on blood pressure.

Sugars

Choose foods and beverages low in added sugars. Sugars supply a lot of calories with few, if any, nutrients. Read the ingredient list for packaged foods and make sure that added sugars are not one of the first few ingredients. Some names for added sugars are high fructose corn syrup, sucrose, glucose, corn syrup, corn sweetener, maple syrup, and fructose.

Alcohol

If you choose to drink alcohol, do so in moderation. Moderate drinking means up to 1 drink a day for women and up to 2 drinks for men. A drink equals 12 ounces of regular beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1 and 1/2 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits. Remember that alcoholic beverages have calories but are low in nutritional value. Generally, anything more than moderate drinking can be harmful to your health. Some people, or people in certain situations, should not drink at all.

Read the Nutrition Facts Label

Most packaged foods have a Nutrition Facts label, which includes a % Daily Value (DV) section. Use this tool to make healthy food choices quickly and easily. If a serving of a food provides 5% DV or less of a nutrient, it is considered low in that nutrient and 20% DV or more is considered high. Try these tips:

- Keep these low: saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, and sodium.
 - Get enough of these: potassium, fiber, vitamins A and C, calcium, and iron.
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Look at the serving size listed on the label and think about how many servings you are actually eating. If you double the servings you eat, you double the calories and nutrients, including the % DVs. Look at the calories on the label and compare them with the nutrients you are also getting to decide whether the food is worth eating. Remember that when one serving of a single food item has over 400 calories per serving, it is high in calories.

Pay attention to the calories in your diet

There is a right number of calories for you to eat each day. This number depends on your age, activity level, and whether you are trying to gain, maintain, or lose weight. You could get all the calories you need from a few high-calorie items, but chances are you won't get all of the vitamins and nutrients your body needs to be healthy. Choose the most nutritionally rich foods you can from each food group each day: foods packed with vitamins, minerals, fiber, and other nutrients but lower in calories. Pick foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products more often.

If you eat 100 more food calories a day than you burn, you will gain about 1 pound in a month. That's about 10 pounds in a year. The bottom line is that, if you want to maintain your weight, the number of calories you eat every day should equal the number of calories you burn. If you want to lose weight, you need to eat fewer calories and increase your physical activity.

Be physically active.

Regular physical activity is important for your overall health and fitness. It also helps you control body weight by balancing the calories you take in as food with the calories you burn each day.

- Be physically active for at least 30 minutes most days of the week.
- Increasing the intensity or the amount of time that you are physically active can have even greater health benefits and may be needed to control body weight. About 60 minutes of moderate exercise a day may be needed to prevent weight gain and 90 minutes a day to lose weight. Moderate aerobic exercise is generally defined as requiring the energy it takes to walk 2 miles in 30 minutes. Follow your health care provider's recommendations.

More information about healthy eating may be obtained from:

- The Dietary Guidelines for Americans Web site: <http://www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines>.

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