

Healthy Diet

What are the keys to a healthy diet?

Your daily diet and physical activity are very important to your health. They are important for how you feel today and how you will feel in the future. The 3 keys to a healthy diet are:

- Make smart choices from every food group: fruits, vegetables, grains, milk products, meat (or other protein-rich foods), and fats. The Choose My Plate Method is a good way to manage your food portions.
- 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 is ChooseMyPlate?

ChooseMyPlate is a new image designed by the US government to help you make healthy food choices in the right portions. It divides the plate into portions for 4 food groups: fruit, vegetable, grains, and protein. A circle next to the plate represents a portion of dairy foods. You can use this plate to choose foods for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Simply fill half of a 9-inch plate with fruits and vegetables. The other half of the plate should be split between starches (such as whole grains and starchy vegetables like potatoes) and lean proteins (such as lean meat). Beans and peas are a good meat substitute. A cup of low-fat or skim milk or yogurt on the side can fit in. Using this plate as a guideline for getting the right amount of each food group every day is the first step toward eating more healthfully. It is also important to learn about good nutrition and getting a variety of nutrient-packed foods every day.

What are healthy food choices?

A healthy diet:

- Includes a lot of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products.
- Includes poultry, fish, soy protein, 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 and vegetables Eat a variety of fresh, frozen, canned, or dried or dried fruits rather than fruit juice for most of your fruit choices. Fruit juice is not as healthy as whole fruits. It is higher in calories and sugar and has little to no fiber. Choose from a variety of vegetables. Some of the healthiest vegetables are:

- green vegetables, such as broccoli, cabbage, and dark leafy greens
- yellow, orange, and red vegetables, such as peppers, tomatoes, carrots, sweet potatoes, pumpkin, and squash.

Whole grains Whole grains are a healthy starch choice. Make sure that half of the grains you eat are whole grains. Whole-grain cereals, breads, crackers, rice, or pasta are good choices. Look for products that list whole grains or whole wheat as one of the first ingredients. **Foods with fiber** Fiber helps to prevent constipation. It also slows sugar absorption and help lower cholesterol levels. In general, it is

recommended that adult women get 25 grams of fiber and adult men get 38 grams of fiber each day. 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-rich foods Choose lean meats, poultry, and fish for your protein portions. Bake, broil, or grill these foods instead of frying them. Eat 8 to 12 ounces of fish a week and get some of your protein from other foods, such as 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. Beans and peas, such as kidney, garbanzo, navy, and pinto beans; lentils; and split peas, are an excellent source of nonmeat protein and iron. They add variety, flavor, and fiber to your diet. Healthy Fats Very low fat diets are no longer recommended. Fats should make up 20 to 35% of daily calories. Most of the fats you eat should be healthy, polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats, such as canola, olive, peanut, and flaxseed oil. When you buy foods such as margarine, mayonnaise, and salad dressings to add to foods, look for products made with these healthy oils and no trans fats. Three to 6 daily servings of added fat are recommended. One serving equals 1 teaspoon of oil or 1 tablespoon of a reduced-fat product. You don't have to use added fats to include healthy fat in your diet. Eating avocado and small portions of nuts (1/4 cup) and seeds (2 tablespoons) and having fatty fish a few times a week is a good way to get these fats without adding too many extra calories.

What foods should I limit?

Some foods contain very little nutritional value. Some have ingredients that can cause disease. Eating healthy doesn't mean giving up all sweets, salt, and snacks. It means viewing such foods as a treat, eating them in small portions and less often. 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. Unhealthy fats Avoid foods 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, and other whole-milk products; the fats in meat and poultry skin; and tropical oils such as coconut and palm oil. Some margarines, shortening, and many packaged convenience, snack, and fast foods contain trans, or hydrogenated, fats. Saturated fats should make up no more than 10% of your daily calories. Limiting saturated fat to 7% of your total calories can further reduce your risk for heart disease. Try to eat as little trans fat as possible. Cholesterol is a substance found in animal products such as meat, eggs, dairy products, and baked goods made with eggs and milk. You should have no more than 300 milligrams (mg) of cholesterol a day. Salt Choose and prepare foods and beverages with little salt (sodium). Don't eat more than 2300 mg (equal to 1 teaspoon of salt) a day. If you are 51 or older, you are African American, or you have hypertension, diabetes, or chronic kidney disease, you should eat no more than 1500 mg of sodium a day. Research shows that eating less than 1,500 milligrams of sodium a day may lower the risk of high blood pressure. Most sodium in the diet comes from processed and fast foods, not from the salt shaker. Taste food before you add salt to it. Try adding other spices or herbs to the foods you cook and eat instead of salt. Sugars Eating too much added sugar is linked to gaining too much weight and other health risks. Choose foods and beverages low in added sugars. Sugars have a lot of calories with few, if any, other nutrients. Read the ingredient list for packaged foods and make sure that added sugars are not one of the first few ingredients. The American Heart Association advises that women should get no more than 100 of their daily calories (25 grams of carbohydrate) from added sugar and men get no more than 150 calories (37.5 grams of carbohydrate) from added sugar. It might be helpful to remember that one 12-ounce can of regular soda contains about 155 calories, all from added sugar. 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, limit it to 1 drink a day for women and drinks a day 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, drinking more alcohol than this can be harmful to your health.

What are calories?

Calories are a way to measure the energy value of food. Your body burns calories to use for basic body functions. 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.

How does the Nutrition Facts Label help?

Most packaged foods have a Nutrition Facts label. Use information on this label to help you make healthy food choices quickly and easily. For example, the % Daily Value (DV) section can help you know some of the nutrients you will get in a serving of the food. If a serving of a food has 5% DV or less of a nutrient, it is considered low in that nutrient. 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.

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. If a single serving of a food has over 400 calories, it is high in calories.

Why is physical activity also important?

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

- Be physically active. A good exercise goal is at least 2 hours and 30 minutes (150 minutes) of moderate exercise a week. Moderate exercise means you're working hard enough to raise your heart rate and break a sweat. Examples of moderate exercise are walking fast, doing water aerobics, or playing doubles tennis. Increasing the intensity of your exercise or getting at least 5 hours (300 minutes) of moderate exercise a week will have even greater health benefits. It can help you lose weight and keep a healthy weight.
- Also do some form of strength training 2 or more days a week.
- Follow your healthcare provider's exercise recommendations for an exercise program that is right for you.

Where can I get more information?

You can get more information about healthy eating from:

- ChooseMyPlate: <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/>
- The Dietary Guidelines for Americans Web site: <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/DGAs2010-PolicyDocument.htm>

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