

Nutrition Basics

Healthy Eating Made Easy

The State of The American Diet

Research shows that more than 75% of Americans consume too few vegetables, fruits, and dairy, and more than 60% of Americans consume too much added sugar, saturated fat, and sodium. Americans also tend to consume less than the recommended amount of whole grains and seafood, and too many refined grains.¹ With increasingly busy schedules, it's easy to grab convenience foods that are often high in unhealthy ingredients, and low in beneficial ones.

So, what's the solution?

To learn the basic principles of good nutrition and make healthy eating easy!

Follow a Healthy Eating Pattern

Use the following guidelines to maintain a healthy body weight, ensure adequate nutrient intake, and decrease your risk of chronic disease.



Make Half Your Plate Fruits and Vegetables

- Fruits and vegetables provide fiber, and essential vitamins and minerals.
- Aim for a variety of colors each day.
- Have fruits and vegetables for snacks, add them to mixed dishes, and opt for fruit as dessert.



Replace Refined Grains with Whole Grains

- Whole grains include oats, whole wheat, quinoa, brown rice, millet, popcorn, and more.
- Look for “whole” on the ingredient list.
- Watch the portion size: make grains about one-quarter of your plate at meals.



Choose a Variety of Lean Proteins

- Lean proteins include white meat, like skinless chicken and turkey, eggs, and low-fat (skim or 1%) dairy products.
- Include fish twice per week.
- Incorporate plant-based proteins, such as beans, legumes, nuts, and seeds.
- When choosing lean red meat, look for lean ground (92% or higher) or with “loin” or “round” in the name.



Fats are Not Bad—Just Choose the Healthy Ones!

- Nuts, seeds, avocados, fish, and oils (liquid at room temperature) provide healthy fats.
- Include sources of omega-3 fats such as salmon, cod, walnuts, and flaxseeds.
- Watch portion size; fat provides more calories per gram than carbohydrates or protein.



Limit Saturated and Trans Fat, Sodium, and Added Sugars

- Too much saturated fat, trans fat, and sodium can have a negative impact on heart health, and added sugars contribute calories without beneficial nutrients.
- Meat, dairy, solid animal fats, coconut oil, and palm oil are all high in saturated fats.
- Trans fats are found in processed foods and baked goods.
- Check ingredients for hydrogenated oil—it may mean the product has added trans fat.
- Limit sweetened drinks and desserts, and choose plain yogurt to decrease added sugars.
- Watch sodium content of canned and processed foods and sauces.

¹ Information adapted from: 2015 – 2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, U.S. DHHS and USDA

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Focus on Nutrient Dense Foods

Nutrient-dense foods provide compounds that are important for good health without compounds that contribute to poor health and excess calories. They contain fiber, vitamins, minerals, and healthy fats, and have very little, if any, added solid fats, sugars, sodium, and refined starches.

In addition, preparation method has an impact on nutrient-density. In their natural states, vegetables, fruits, seafood, beans, eggs, seafood, nuts, seeds, low-fat dairy, and lean meat and poultry are nutrient-dense foods.

Here's how to fit nutrient dense foods into your daily plan:

Choose This...	Instead of This...
Unsalted, Dry-Roasted Nuts or Seeds	Salted, Oil-Roasted Nuts or Seeds
Low-Sodium Canned Beans	Baked Beans
Oven-Baked Fish with Herbs and Lemon	Fish Fry
1% Plain Milk	Chocolate Milk
Steamed Corn on the Cob	Creamed Corn
Fresh Fruit or Fruit Canned in Juice	Canned Fruit in Syrup
Whole Grain Pasta with Vegetables Sautéed in Olive Oil	Pasta with Alfredo Sauce
Air-Popped Popcorn	Butter-Flavored Popcorn

Tips For Success

- 1. Plan Ahead:** Make a meal plan for the week, keeping the components of a healthy eating pattern in mind. Make a grocery list based on your meal plan and stick to it.
- 2. Keep a Well-Stocked Kitchen:** Keep bags of frozen fruits and vegetables on hand that can be prepared in a pinch. Stock your pantry with brown rice, low-sodium canned beans, healthy oils, herbs, and spices. Keep cleaned and cut vegetables (carrots, bell peppers, etc.) in your refrigerator for snacking.
- 3. Cook with Health in Mind:** Steam, sauté, or bake vegetables with a small amount of olive or canola oil. Bake meat in the oven instead of pan frying with added fat. To save time, cook grains and proteins in batches and incorporate them into several meals. Crock pot meals and casseroles can be divided and frozen for a homemade microwaveable dinner—great for saving time and making meals on a budget!
- 4. Control Portion Size:** Make protein and whole grains each one-quarter of your plate at meals. Fill the other half of the plate with fruits and vegetables. Nuts and seeds are a healthy protein and fat source, but they contribute a lot of calories, so limit portion size to ¼ cup.
- 5. Stay Hydrated:** Sometimes you may think you are hungry when you are actually thirsty. Carry a water bottle and stay hydrated with plain water throughout the day.
- 6. Enjoy Treats in Moderation:** There is no need to deprive yourself of the foods you love. Choose mostly nutrient-dense foods and enjoy a small portion of your favorite treats!

Work Well,
Live WellSM

