

How to eat a healthy, balanced diet



Eating healthy is all about feeling your very best. Having plenty of energy, staying well, and being as healthy as possible speak for themselves, and can all be accomplished with a balanced diet that's both delicious and satisfying by learning a few key nutrition basics and using them in a way that works for you – instead of against you.

It all starts with eating smart. In addition to boosting your energy, increasing your memory, and balancing your mood, your food choices can help reduce your risk of diabetes, cancer, high blood pressure, heart disease, and other illnesses, and keep depression at bay. And by increasing the variety of healthy food choices and planning ahead, you can learn to create and maintain a healthy diet you'll enjoy.

Setting yourself up for success

Think about planning a healthy diet as a series of small, manageable steps instead of one big drastic change. Just approach these new changes little by little, and combined with commitment, you'll have a healthy diet sooner than you might think.

Start slow

Trying to make your diet healthy overnight isn't realistic or smart with a new eating plan. Take baby steps, like adding a salad (full of vegetables with different colors) to your diet once a day, or switch from butter to olive oil when you cook. Focus on foods you love and easy recipes that use a small amount of fresh ingredients, and gradually your diet will become healthier and more enjoyable. As you get used to small changes and they become a habit, keep adding more healthy choices to your diet.

Other resources:

Tools for planning a healthy diet from the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture:
www.choosemyplate.gov

Helpful portion sizes from the U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services:
<http://hp2010.nhlbihin.net/portion>

Expert cooking advice, nutrition information, and shopping tips:
www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org

Get more helpful health information when you log in to Healthy Lifestyle Rewards at:
www.blueshieldca.com/hlr

Every change counts

Don't worry about being perfect or completely eliminating foods you enjoy to have a healthy diet. The long-term goal is to feel good, have more energy, be healthy, and reduce health risks. Don't let any slips derail you – each and every healthy food choice you make matters. Here are some healthy changes you can start with.

- **Eat less** – Take the time to fully enjoy your food as you eat. It's easy to pack in too many calories if you're eating quickly or focused on something else. Notice your body's hunger and fullness levels before, during, and after eating so you recognize when you've had enough. To help avoid oversized portions, use a smaller plate, bowl, and glass, and measure out foods before you eat. If you dine out, choose smaller-size options, share a dish, or take home part of your meal.
- **Eat these foods more often** – Add more vegetables, fruits, and whole grains in your meals and snacks to get all the nutrients your body needs to be healthy. An easy way to choose more whole grains is by switching out whole-grain products for refined products. For example, eat whole-wheat bread instead of white bread, or brown rice instead of white rice.
- **Fruits and vegetables = half your plate** – Eat red, orange, and dark-green vegetables like tomatoes, sweet potatoes, and broccoli, along with other vegetables for your meals. Greens are loaded with vitamins A, C, E, and K, calcium, magnesium, iron, potassium, and zinc, and help strengthen the blood and respiratory systems. Be adventurous and branch out with kale, mustard greens, and Chinese cabbage. Adding a wide variety of fruit to your meals or as dessert provides fiber, vitamins, and antioxidants.
- **Eat these less often** – Cut back or eliminate foods high in solid fats, added sugars, and salt, like cookies, sweetened drinks, ice cream, cake, candy, pizza, and fatty meats such as ribs, sausage, bacon, and hot dogs. These foods may be eaten occasionally as treats, not as everyday food choices.
- **Watch out for salt** – Choose lower-sodium options of foods like soup, bread, and frozen meals by checking the Nutrition Facts label on the package.
- **Drink water** – Instead of sugary drinks, rehydrate your body with water or unsweetened beverages – it's healthier, and you'll trim unwanted calories. Soda, energy drinks, and sports drinks are a major source of unhealthy added sugar and high-fructose corn syrup, not to mention an enormous amount of empty calories that really add up.