

Healthy Eating

Getting Back to Basics



Challenge Yourself to Eat Better

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Healthy Eating: It's Your Choice

If you think healthy eating means giving up foods you like and forcing down foods you don't, what you read in this booklet will surprise you. Healthy eating is really about keeping meals interesting with a variety of foods. It means eating more basic foods like fruits and vegetables, and *easing up* on less healthy snacks. And it means making small changes that work for you.



"I Can't Because..."

You've likely thought about eating better. Chances are you came up with a bunch of reasons not to. Have you ever made the excuses below? What else is stopping you from eating healthier?

- I don't want to eat food I hate and give up food I like.
- I don't have time to eat healthy.
- I don't...

Bypass the Barriers

For our ancestors, food was hard to find and eating was a matter of survival. Now, food is everywhere. And eating is often about pleasure. We don't always eat because we're hungry, and often don't stop when we're full. Barriers like these can make healthy eating a real challenge in today's world. But you *can* do it. Healthy eating isn't an all-or-nothing change. Small changes do add up.

This booklet is not intended as a substitute for professional healthcare. See your doctor before undertaking any significant lifestyle change.
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Your Point of View

Healthy eating is a personal choice. What works for someone else might not work for you. The trick is to come up with strategies that fit into your lifestyle. This booklet will help. To get started, identify what's holding you back. Think about your answers to these questions:

- Why do you want to eat healthier?
- Do you ever eat when you're not hungry? When? Why?
- What's your idea of the perfect meal? Could you make it healthier without changing it too much?
- How did your parents feel about food? If you have kids, what have you tried to teach them about food?
- Each week, how much time do you spend planning and cooking meals? How does this compare to time spent eating out or picking up fast food?

How This Booklet Will Help

This booklet isn't just about healthy food. It's also about making healthy choices. As you read through it:

The page on the left will teach you why your body needs certain types of food, and how much of each to eat. You'll also learn about good food choices and what makes them less healthy.

The page on the right will help you figure out what's stopping you from eating healthier. The page gives practical tips to overcome barriers. And it gets you started with one small change.



Using MyPyramid

The serving suggestions in this booklet are based on the U.S. government's guidelines for a 2,000-calorie diet. Your needs may differ. Visit www.MyPyramid.gov to get specific guidelines for your gender, age, and activity level. See page 15 to learn more about servings.



Grains

Grains (also known as starches) make up foods such as bread, pasta, rice, cereal, and tortillas. Grains provide iron, B vitamins, and other nutrients the body needs to function. And they give your body fiber, which helps your digestion. Fiber also helps you manage your weight, because it's low in calories but fills you up. Each day, you should eat about **6 ounces** of grains (see page 15).

Nutrient-Rich Choices

Whole grains are chock full of fiber. And they're not processed much, so they keep most of their nutrients. At least half the grains you eat should be whole grains. Good choices include:

- Any bread or breakfast cereal that lists a whole grain (such as whole wheat or whole rolled oats) as the *first* ingredient. Ingredients are listed from most to least, so if a whole grain is first, you know the food has a lot of it.
- Foods made with whole grains, such as oatmeal, barley soup, wild rice pilaf, and buckwheat (soba) noodles.

What Makes Grains Less Healthy?

- As grains are processed (refined), they lose fiber and nutrients. White grains are often refined. This means white bread, white rice, and flour tortillas are not as healthy as whole-grain versions, such as whole-wheat bread, brown rice, or whole-grain tortillas.
- Claims made on food packages can be misleading. Even if a package says the food is a whole-grain product, check the ingredients. Unless a whole grain is listed first, the food isn't as healthy as the package makes it sound. Here's a hint: Wheat bread isn't a whole grain. Whole-wheat bread is. Make sure to read the fine print!
- Added fat and sugar also make grains less healthy. This means cookies, pastries, donuts, snack cakes, sugar cereals... you get the idea.



"I know which foods are junk foods. But how can I tell what the good stuff is?"



Look at ingredient lists as you shop. Basic foods have fewer ingredients with names that are easier to understand.

To Get Started...

Get Back to Basics

A basic food is as close as it can be to the natural state of its ingredients. Basic foods have calories, but these foods also hold a lot of nutrients. To get back to basics:

- Stay away from foods with added fat, sugar, colors, or salt (sodium). These foods tend to be high in calories and low in nutrients.
- Compare labels to find foods high in vitamins, fiber, and other nutrients.
- Choose basic foods over processed foods. Do you buy boxed pasta or rice with powdered flavor packets? Instead, try regular pasta or rice seasoned with fresh herbs. (Even better, use whole grains!)

Look at the Big Picture

Make an effort to eat healthier overall. It's best to eat a variety of all types of foods—but not necessarily at each meal. Try for balance throughout the day. And don't forget that small changes add up.

One Small Change

Have a better idea?

Find a whole-grain bread or cereal that you like.



Vegetables

Vegetables are a major source of fiber. They're also packed with vitamins needed for health and growth. One of these is vitamin A, which helps keep skin healthy. Then there's vitamin C, which boosts the immune system so you're less likely to get sick. You should eat at least **2½ cups** of vegetables a day (**see page 15**). You might need to step up your vegetable intake to meet this.

Nutrient-Rich Choices

Fresh, frozen, or canned—all vegetables are high in nutrients. The color of the skin tells you what's inside. So if you eat plenty of colors, you get a variety of nutrients. Some good choices include:

- Dark green vegetables, such as spinach, collard greens, kale, and broccoli.
- Bright red and orange vegetables, such as carrots, sweet potatoes, red bell peppers, and tomatoes.
- Starchy vegetables, such as potatoes and squash.

What Makes Vegetables Less Healthy?

- Boiling vegetables causes some vitamins to escape into the water. To hold on to vitamins, briefly steam, sauté, stir-fry, or microwave instead. Overcooking destroys vitamins, so try to keep vegetables a little crispy.
- Using a lot of margarine, butter, or salad dressing adds fat and calories, but not many nutrients. A small amount of these toppings is okay. But the more you add, the more fat you add, too.
- Frozen vegetables that come with cheese sauce or other processed flavoring are high in fat and salt. It's healthier to season plain frozen vegetables yourself. Try fresh herbs, garlic, toasted almonds, or sesame seeds.
- Canned vegetables often have lots of salt. Shop for low-sodium varieties.



"How can I keep from eating junk food? It's everywhere—candy at the gas station, donuts at work, cookies and chips at parties."



Choosing between healthy food and junk food? You *can* have it both ways. At a party, fill up on healthier snacks, then enjoy a small treat.

Think About Calories

Calories In, Calories Out

Think of calories as a seesaw. The calories you eat tip it one way. The calories you burn (with activity) tip it the other way. Eating as many calories as you burn helps keep the seesaw in balance.

Give Yourself an Allowance

Think before you eat. If a food is high in calories and low in nutrients, do you really want it? If you do, go ahead. But know that it's coming out of your "calorie allowance" for the day. Could you satisfy the craving with a healthier food instead? Simply choosing water over soda or sugary juice makes a difference!

Let Your Stomach Growl

Think you're hungry? Wait 10 minutes. If your stomach stops growling, you weren't really hungry! This helps you avoid calories you don't need.

One Small Change

Have a better idea? _____

Sneak vegetables into a favorite meal. Shred carrots into hamburger, or add zucchini to spaghetti and meatballs.



Fruit

Like vegetables, fruit contains fiber and plenty of vitamins. But the great thing about fruit is its flavor. If you have a sweet tooth or just want a little treat, fruit is the healthiest way to indulge. And you're probably not eating as much of it as you should. An apple a day doesn't cut it anymore. Try to eat at least **2 cups** of fruit daily ([see page 15](#)).

Nutrient-Rich Choices

Most fruit is seasonal. So, your options change with the time of year. Take advantage of the seasons to keep healthy eating fresh. Most of your fruit should come from whole fruit. Nutrient-rich choices include:

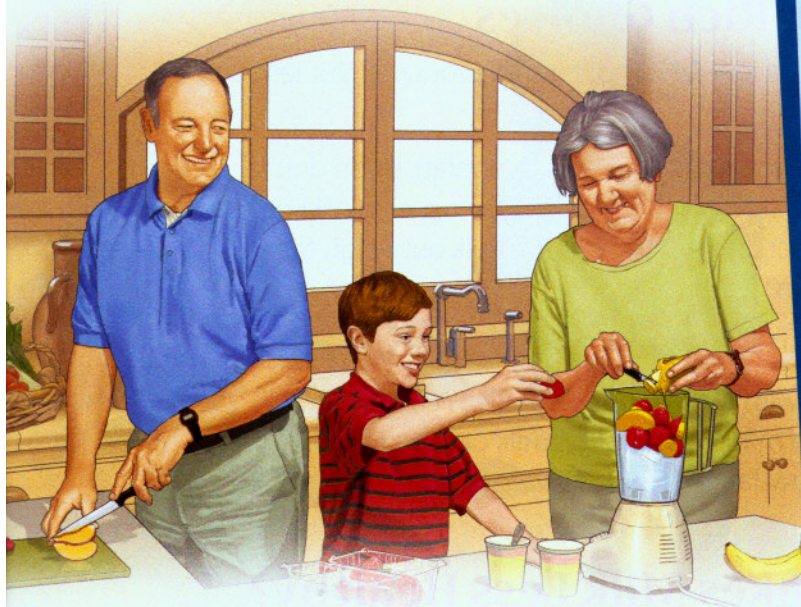
- Any fruit that's fresh, frozen, or canned in its own juice (no added sugar).
- 100% fruit juice, such as orange juice. (Be aware that even 100% juice is high in calories, and juice has less fiber than whole fruit. One small glass a day is enough.)

What Makes Fruit Less Healthy?

- Added fat, sugar, or processed flour makes fruit less healthy. This means desserts like pastries, pies, and sorbet. Try a fruit salad or a smoothie instead.
- Fruit canned in heavy syrup contains added sugar. Check the label to find out if the fruit is canned in syrup. If it is, rinse the fruit before eating it, and don't drink the syrup.
- Juice with sugar added (not 100% fruit juice) contains a lot of calories and very little nutrition. You may already know that soda has a ton of sugar in it, but believe it or not, so do most juice drinks! Instead, try sparkling water with a dash of juice.
- Dried fruit has less vitamin C and more calories than fresh fruit. It's okay from time to time. Just remember, it's not as good for you as fresh fruit.



"Forcing myself to eat healthy takes all the fun out of it. How can I be healthy *and* happy?"



Healthy eating doesn't have to be boring or bland. A fresh fruit smoothie can be tasty and satisfying—and it's much healthier than other sweets!

Make It Easy on Yourself

Pick and Choose

Don't force yourself to eat foods you don't like. Just eat what you like from each food group. You may want to list your favorite (healthy) recipes. When you're out of ideas for what to eat, check the list for a meal you haven't had in a while.

Don't Be Cruel

Don't deny yourself treats. You'll just want them more. Instead, set limits for yourself. Here's an example: Buy only one "fun" food at a time. Make this last a week before you buy another.

Toss the Rules

MyPyramid and the tips in this booklet are suggestions, not rules. Use them to figure out ways you can eat healthier *and* still have the foods you like.

One Small Change

Have a better idea? _____

Next time you're at the grocery store, pick out two fruits you've never tried. _____



Milk

The milk group includes foods that are made from milk and are also high in calcium (a nutrient that builds strong bones). You should have the equivalent of **3 cups** of milk each day (**see page 15**). But some people can't drink milk. If you're lactose-intolerant, special milk products can help. If you're allergic to milk, be sure to get your calcium from leafy greens (such as mustard or collard greens) and from calcium-fortified foods (such as orange juice and soy products).

Nutrient-Rich Choices

It's best to choose low-fat or nonfat milk products. Nutrient-rich choices include:

- Good old-fashioned milk (low-fat or nonfat). If you don't like the flavor, stir in a little chocolate syrup, or vanilla or almond extract. The nutrients in the milk outweigh the added calories.
- Low-fat or nonfat cheese, cottage cheese, and yogurt.
- Foods made with these products, such as cream of broccoli soup made with nonfat milk or quesadillas made with low-fat cheese.

What Makes Milk Less Healthy?

- Many milk products are high in fat. Always look for low-fat or nonfat varieties. You can ease into this. If you drink whole milk now, make the move to 2% milk first, then to 1%.
- Most cheeses are high in fat. If you select a cheese with a strong taste, you may eat less than you would of a milder cheese. Also look for low-fat cheese or cheese made with part skim milk.
- Added sugar, such as in ice cream and frozen yogurt, makes milk products less healthy. Compare food labels to find brands lower in fat and calories.



"My parents taught me to clean my plate. Now I can't leave food behind!"



Even with healthy food, bigger isn't better. Serve portions that make sense—for you and your kids.

Get Used to Eating Less

Pay Attention to Portions

The truth is, most of us eat too much. Try to cut portions down. Serve dinner on smaller plates. At a restaurant, split your entree with someone else at the table. Or take half home in a doggie bag.

Keep an Eye on Your Stomach

Stay alert while you eat. Are you still hungry? Or are you eating just because you've been trained to clean your plate? If you're hungry, have seconds of vegetables or fruit. But if you're full, don't force yourself to finish! (The same guidelines go for your kids.)

"Me Too!"

Kids do what they see you do. If you have kids, it's important to model good eating habits. Get them used to eating healthy-sized portions now. They'll be better prepared for the future.

One Small Change

Drink low-fat or nonfat milk with at least one meal each day.

Have a better idea? _____



Meat & Beans

This group includes foods that are high in protein. Protein helps the body build new cells and keeps tissues healthy. Most Americans get enough protein without even trying. It can be harder for vegetarians, but plenty of non-meat foods are rich in protein, too. Try to eat **5½ ounces** of food from this group each day (**see page 15**). It's best to get protein from a variety of sources.

Nutrient-Rich Choices

There's a lot more to this food group than just meat and beans. It also includes nuts, seeds, and eggs. There are all sorts of nutrient-rich choices:

- Chicken and turkey with the skin removed
- Fish and shellfish
- Lean beef, pork, or lamb (without visible fat)
- Soy products, such as tofu, soybeans (edamame), tempeh, or soy milk
- Black beans, kidney beans, pinto beans, chickpeas, and lentils
- Peanuts, almonds, walnuts, sesame seeds, and sunflower seeds, as well as foods made from these (such as peanut butter or tahini)
- Eggs and foods made with eggs (such as quiche or frittata)

What Makes Meat & Beans Less Healthy?

- Fatty meat is not healthy. Before you cook meat, trim off all the fat you can see. Chicken and turkey skin is also high in fat, and should be removed before cooking.
- Breading and frying make food less healthy. This includes dishes like fried chicken, fried fish, and refried beans.
- Sausage and lunch meats tend to be high in fat and salt. Buy low-fat, low-sodium versions.



"I don't have time to make healthy meals from scratch. Fast food and frozen dinners are quicker. What else can I do?"



Cut the work in half by combining store-prepared food (such as meat skewers or a roasted chicken) with a homemade salad or rice dish. It's almost as easy as fast food, but much healthier!

One Small Change

Have a better idea? _____

Make a meal that includes a non-meat source of protein (such as tofu, lentils, or any other food listed on page 12).

Time-Saving Tips

Multi-Task

Prepare foods that don't take a lot of effort, so you can do other things while they cook. Put chicken breasts in the oven and do the laundry while they bake. Or cook stew in a slow cooker while you're at work.

Cut Corners

Make food preparation easy on yourself. Use less time-consuming cooking methods. For example, microwave potatoes instead of baking. Or broil meat instead of frying. Line the broiler with foil to make cleanup easier. You can even use paper plates if you don't have time to wash dishes.

Go with the Flow

Plan ahead based on your schedule. When you have time, make extra food and put it in the fridge or freezer. When you're in a hurry, you can just put it in the oven.



Oils

Oils are fats that are liquid at room temperature. This food group includes oils you cook with, plus foods that are mostly oil, such as mayonnaise and salad dressing. Oils give the body vitamin E and essential fatty acids, which keep cells and tissues healthy and help the body heal. But oils and other fats are high in calories. Eating too much fat leads to weight gain and increased risk of heart disease. MyPyramid recommends having only **6 teaspoons** of oils a day. You probably already get this much in the food you eat.

Fat Facts

Some fats are liquid. Others are solid. And all of them can be bad for you if you eat too much. Food labels tell you which fats a food contains. Some are more healthy than others:

- **Unsaturated fats** are found in some oils (such as olive, peanut, and canola), nuts, seeds, and fish. These are the healthiest fats. They can be good for your heart in moderate amounts.
- **Saturated fats** are found in animal foods such as butter, lard, beef, and high-fat dairy. These are less healthy, and should be limited.
- **Trans fats** are found in french fries and other fast food, snack foods (like chips and cookies), and some margarines and shortenings. These are the worst fats for you. Avoid them when you can.

Be Smart About Fats

In with the Good

Choose unsaturated fat over saturated when you can. Here's one idea: Cook with olive or canola oil instead of lard or butter. What else could you do?

Out with the Bad

Check food labels for trans fats. And stay away from foods that have them. Trans fats are mostly found in processed foods. So, getting back to basics is a great way to avoid them!

How Much Should I Eat?

This booklet has provided daily recommendations for each food group, based on MyPyramid's guidelines for a 2,000-calorie diet. (Your needs may differ. Check with your healthcare provider.) Do you wonder what these guidelines mean when you sit down to eat? This page can help you meet the daily amount.



Milk: 3 cups

The equivalent of 1 cup is:

- 1 cup low-fat or fat-free milk or yogurt
- 1½ ounces of low-fat or fat-free natural cheese (such as Swiss or provolone)
- 2 ounces of low-fat or fat-free processed cheese (such as American)

Oils: 6 teaspoons

Oil is hidden in other foods, so you likely already get at least this much in the food you eat.

Meat & Beans: 5½ ounces

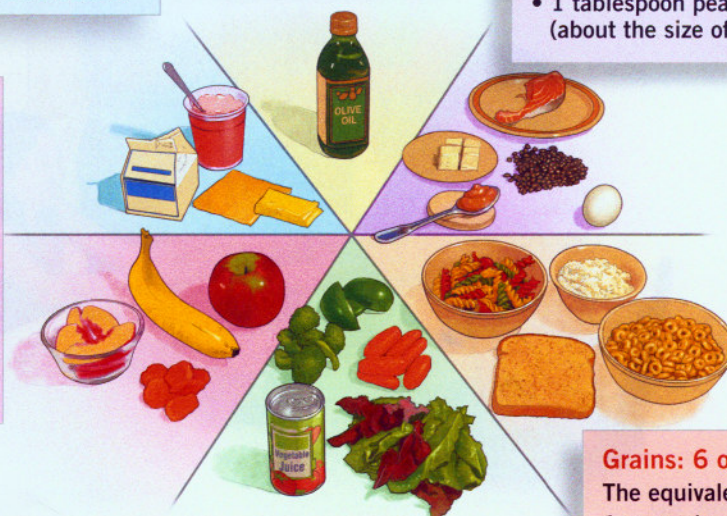
The equivalent of 1 ounce is:

- 1 ounce of cooked lean meats, poultry, or fish
- 1 egg
- ¼ cup cooked dry beans
- ¼ cup tofu
- 1 tablespoon peanut butter (about the size of your thumb)

Fruit: 2 cups

The equivalent of ½ cup is:

- ½ cup of fresh, frozen, or canned fruit
- 1 medium piece of fresh fruit
- ¼ cup of dried fruit



Vegetables: 2½ cups

The equivalent of ½ cup is:

- ½ cup of cut-up raw or cooked vegetables
- 1 cup of raw leafy vegetables
- ½ cup of vegetable juice

Grains: 6 ounces

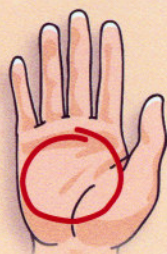
The equivalent of 1 ounce is:

- 1 slice of bread
- 1 cup of cereal
- ½ cup of cooked pasta or rice

How Big Is That?

2 to 3 ounces

is the size of a small palm or a deck of cards.



1 cup is the size of a fist or a tennis ball.



½ cup is the size of a cupped hand or a golf ball.

Who Eats at Your Table?

Don't let your commitment to healthy eating end when you put down this booklet. You *can* eat healthier, without giving up your favorite foods or flavors. And you don't have to do it alone. Share this booklet with the people who share your meals and your life. Together, you can make healthy eating a reality.



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