

The Healthy Diet

For a healthy diet you need to eat a wide variety of foods in moderate-sized portions that give your body the nutrients and energy it needs. You also need to limit foods in your diet that can be harmful to your body.

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. The foods and food ingredients you need to limit include fat, cholesterol, sodium, alcohol, and sugar.

Eating foods high in cholesterol and saturated fat can cause atherosclerosis (narrowing of blood vessels from buildup of fatty deposits). This is critical for everyone but especially important if you have a family history of high cholesterol levels or diabetes. Atherosclerosis can lead to heart disease and strokes. Cholesterol is a substance found in animal products such as meat, eggs, dairy products, and baked goods made with eggs and milk. Vegetables do not contain cholesterol.

Of the various types of fats, saturated fats are the least healthy. They tend to increase the level of cholesterol in your blood. In fact, the amount of saturated fat in food is at least as important as the amount of cholesterol. Foods labeled "No Cholesterol" sometimes contain high saturated fat. Saturated fats are generally solid at room temperature. 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.

To reduce the saturated fat in your diet, limit the amount of butter and margarine you eat. Drink nonfat or low-fat milk instead of whole milk. Choose lean cuts of meat and take the skin off poultry before you cook or eat it. If you use cooking oil, avoid peanut oil. Better oils to use are sunflower, canola, soy, or olive oil. Try not to eat foods containing tropical oils such as palm or coconut oil.

Sodium, one of the ingredients in table salt, can contribute to high blood pressure if it is eaten in excess. Sodium is found in many foods, not just in table salt. Fast foods usually contain high amounts of sodium. An average healthy person should have at least 500 mg (milligrams) of sodium a day but no more than 2400 mg a day. Read the labels on food packaging to check how much sodium is in the food. As a general guide, "low sodium" means each serving contains less than 140 mg of sodium. "Moderate sodium" is 140 to 400 mg per serving. "High sodium" is more than 400 mg of sodium per serving. Also, 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.

The following chart shows the amounts of sodium in various foods:

Food	Approximate mg of Sodium
Big Mac or Whopper	1000
Bread (2 slices)	200 to 600
Cheese, cheddar (1.5 oz)	300
Fruit (1)	2 to 5
Milk (1 cup)	120
1 teaspoon of salt	2100

Excess alcohol consumption can lead to weight gain, liver disease, brain damage, and other disorders. Women should probably have no more than one drink a day. Men should not have more than two drinks a day. A drink equals about 5 ounces of wine, one can of beer, or one ounce of distilled spirits.

Sugar and foods that contain a lot of sugar supply a large number of calories but very little nutrition. Sugar also may cause tooth decay.

The Foods You Need

A healthy diet depends on eating a variety of foods. If you eat a variety of foods you are more likely to get all the necessary nutrients. Your diet should contain the following nutrients:

- Proteins

Proteins form the basic structure of body tissue and organs. The body uses proteins for growth and repair of cells. Proteins are found in eggs, milk, cheese, tofu, nuts, meat, fish, poultry, dried beans, split peas, and lentils. About 15% of your daily calories should come from protein.

- Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates are the body's main source of energy. Carbohydrates are found in potatoes, bread, cereals, grains, pasta, milk, yogurt, vegetables, and fruit. They should make up at least half of your daily calories.

- Fats

Fats provide energy and are used for growth and repair of tissues. They are found in olives, nuts, cheese, meat, fish, poultry, butter, vegetable oils, avocados, and mayonnaise. Saturated fats are less healthy than polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats. Saturated fats are found mostly in butter, margarine, meat, cheese, poultry with skin, tropical oils, and whole-milk dairy products. Monounsaturated fats are found in olive oil, canola oil, and avocados. Polyunsaturated fats are found in fish and some vegetable oils.

Fats should contribute no more than 30% of your daily calories. Only 10% of the fat you eat should be saturated fat. There are nine calories in a gram of fat. So, to calculate the maximum grams of fat you should eat each day, use these formulas:

1. Multiply the maximum number of calories you should eat in a day by 0.30 (30%) to calculate the maximum number of calories you should get from fat.

Number of calories a day x 0.30 = Number of calories from fat in a day

2. Divide the daily number of calories from fat (the answer from the calculation above) by 9 to find the maximum number of grams of fat you should eat each day.

Number of calories from fat / 9 = Number of fat grams a day

For example, if you need 1800 calories per day, no more than 30% of those calories should come from fat: $1800 \times 0.30 = 540$ calories from fat. Divide 540 by 9 to find out the maximum number of grams of fat you should consume each day: $540/9 = 60$ grams of fat.

- Fiber

Fiber is found in plants and is not digested by the body. It provides what is considered "bulk," which is used by the large intestine to help remove waste through bowel movements. Lack of fiber in your diet can worsen intestinal problems, such as constipation. Fruit, vegetables, bran, whole grains, and cereals are good sources of fiber. It is recommended that you get 20 to 35 grams of fiber a day. A diet high in fiber may help reduce your cholesterol levels.

- Vitamins and Minerals

Vitamins are important nutrients that help to regulate metabolism and help the brain, nerves, muscles, skin, and bones function properly. The major vitamins are A, B, C, D, E, K, B-12, and seven B complex vitamins. Minerals are necessary in very small amounts for the body to function properly. For example, calcium is necessary for healthy teeth and bones, and zinc and magnesium are needed to control cell metabolism. Iron is important for healthy blood and many chemical reactions in your body. Vitamins and minerals are found in many foods, especially milk, cheese, green leafy vegetables, fish, meat, and poultry. They are also added to milk and cereal.

- Water

Water is necessary to replace the fluid your body loses every day when you breathe, go to the bathroom, and sweat. You should drink six to eight glasses of water or other liquids (including soups and other beverages) every day.

You can use the following chart as a guideline for choosing the types and amounts of foods you eat in a day. Remember that carbohydrates (grains, fruits, vegetables) should make up at least half of your daily calories and variety is important.

Food Group	Number of servings	Examples of serving size
Meat, poultry, fish, dried beans, eggs	2 to 3	2 to 3 oz of lean meat, 1 egg, 1/2 cup cooked beans
Grains	6 to 11	1 slice of bread, 1/2 cup pasta or rice, 1 oz of cereal
Fruits	2 to 4	1 fruit, 3/4 cup fruit juice
Vegetables	3 to 5	1/2 cup nonleafy vegetable, 1 cup leafy vegetable
Milk, cheese, yogurt	2 to 3	1 cup milk or yogurt, 1 to 2 oz cheese

Meat versus Vegetarian Diet

Meat, including poultry and fish, is a very nutrient-rich food. Meat is one of the best sources of iron and protein. Most people get much more protein than they need, however. You should limit the amount of meat you eat, but you don't have to eliminate meat altogether. Choose lean cuts of meat and try to use the meat as a side dish rather than a main course. You can include meat in a casserole or stew, using the meat as a flavoring for the main dish without overeating the meat portion.

It is possible to have a healthy diet without eating meat. Vegetarians do have to be careful to make sure they get enough iron and protein, however.

Guidelines for Eating Healthfully

For best nutrition, choose foods containing high-fiber, complex carbohydrates and monounsaturated or polyunsaturated fats instead of refined, low-fiber carbohydrates and saturated fats.

Learn more about nutrition and healthy living. Read the ingredients on all packaged and canned foods you buy. Some contain more fat, sodium, sugar, and preservatives than you expect.

In addition:

- Bake or broil food instead of frying it.
- Don't eat more than four egg yolks a week. Egg whites are healthy, but egg yolks are not.

- Have a green leafy salad at least once a day. (Leaf lettuces and spinach are much more nutritious than iceberg lettuce.) Use oily dressings sparingly on the salads or try nonfat dressings.
 - Eat fresh foods instead of canned foods.
 - Eat more whole-grain products.
 - Eat raw vegetables or cook them only slightly. Steam vegetables rather than fry them.
 - Limit the amount of red meat you eat; eat more fish.
 - Remove the skin from poultry before cooking or eating it.
 - Limit fat, cholesterol, sugar, alcohol, salt, and caffeine in your diet.
 - Avoid prepared foods as much as possible.
 - Limit dining at fast-food restaurants. If you do dine there, leave off the bacon, cheese, sour cream, mayonnaise, and fatty salad dressings. Order broiled instead of fried items.
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