

Join the World School Milk Day celebration on September 25th. Learn more today! → X

Home | Nutrition Topics | General Nutrition + Wellness | Lifestyle Wellness | Healthy Eating Planner

Healthy Eating Planner

Small steps to build healthier habits



What is healthy eating?

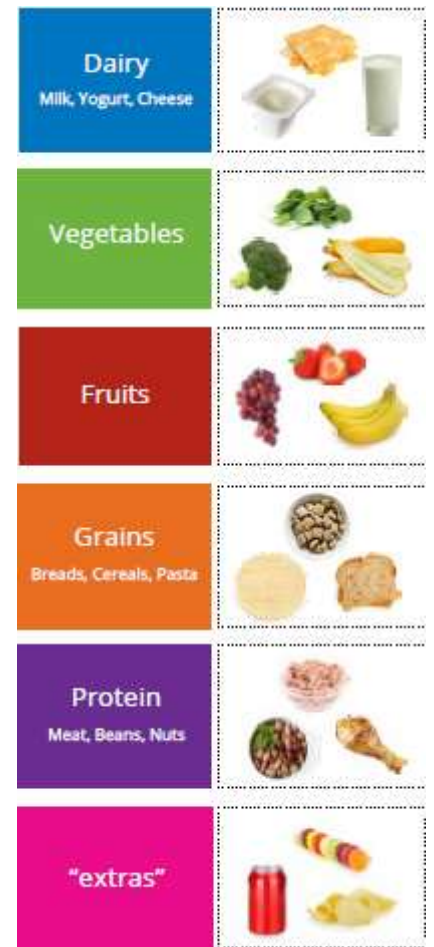
Healthy eating is a pattern of nutritious and wholesome food choices that you make over time. Nutritious foods are nutrient dense, full of vitamins and minerals. Eating foods from a variety of food groups is a good way to balance food choices. Try to include items from two food groups at every snack and from three to five food groups at every meal.

Click on each of the 5 food group links to learn more:

- [Dairy](#)
- [Vegetables](#)
- [Fruits](#)
- [Grains](#)
- [Protein](#)

Fats and oils also contain nutrients that are an important part of a healthy eating pattern. Dietary fats are found in both plant and animal foods. They supply calories for energy and help with the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins. Fats from food sources also protect organs, regulate body temperature and help produce hormones.

All the foods that you eat work together to impact health. Foods to build into daily choices for a healthy eating pattern include fruit, vegetables, milk, yogurt, cheese, whole grains, beans, nuts, seeds, fish, lean meat, poultry, eggs and healthy fats and oils.



What do food labels tell you?

Food labels are full of information to help you make decisions. Here are 3 tips for using a label:

1. **Check serving sizes.** The top part of every label provides information about how many servings are in a package or container and what is considered a standard serving size. The nutrition information on the rest of the label is based on one serving (not the entire package). Serving information makes it easier to compare similar foods or products and recognize the portion or amount eaten at one time.
2. **Be mindful of calories.** Simply put, calories are the amount of energy in one serving size. A label might list 1 cup as having 280 calories; eating 2 cups, or two servings, would supply twice as many calories as shown on the label. Being aware of calories can help guide food choices.
3. **Focus on getting more fiber, vitamin D, calcium, iron and potassium.** Eating a variety of foods provides a broad range of vitamins, minerals and other nutrients. Dietary fiber, vitamin D, calcium, iron and potassium are included on the Nutrition Facts label because they are generally underconsumed by most Americans. Eating foods that are high in dietary fiber can help lower blood sugar and cholesterol levels and maintain regular bowel movements. Getting enough vitamin D, calcium, iron and potassium can reduce the risk of developing osteoporosis, anemia and high blood pressure.

Choosing the right amount and the right balance of foods to feel full and satisfied is a skill that can be developed. Learning to read a food label and estimating portion sizes

are two ways to practice this skill. Estimating portion sizes can also reduce food waste. The Nutrition Facts label can be a great tool to inform healthy eating decisions, but it is important to look beyond the label as well. Since you eat different combinations of foods over time rather than nutrients in isolation, choosing a variety of nutritious foods is more important than focusing on a single substance such as a vitamin, calories or sugar.

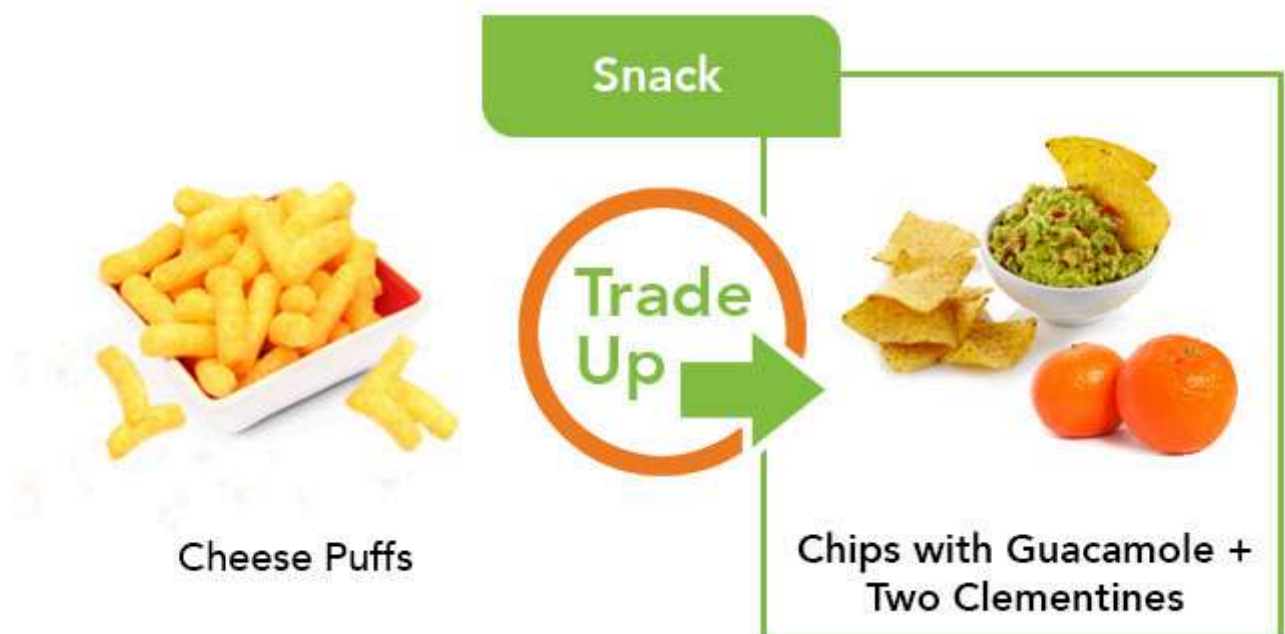
How Do Portion Sizes Impact Health?



What do healthy habits look like?

Habits take time to build. Practice making daily choices to move toward a healthier lifestyle.

Try
a
few



small steps to help achieve your health and nutrition goals. Here are some examples:

- **Choose healthy snacks.** Carrots and hummus or fruit and low-fat yogurt are examples of smart combinations to satisfy hunger between meals.
- **Consider portion size.** Increase portions of fruits, vegetables and dairy to meet daily recommendations while decreasing portions of highly processed foods that do not fall into food groups or are high in calories.
- **Move more.** Walk for 30 to 60 minutes daily to reduce risk of disease and improve health.
- **Eat breakfast.** Start the day with a boost of nutrition and energy. Aim for two to three food groups at breakfast when you can.
- **Prepare food at home.** Home-cooked meals are often lower in calories and have more variety than restaurant meals.

Healthy food choices do not have to be complicated. One-time food choices are less important than consistency and an overall eating pattern. Eating a piece of cake occasionally is different than eating a piece of cake every day.

Are beverages part of a healthy eating pattern?

Beverage choices matter. Beverages can be nourishing; however, be aware of empty-calorie beverage choices that contribute to total daily calories without a lot of nutrition.

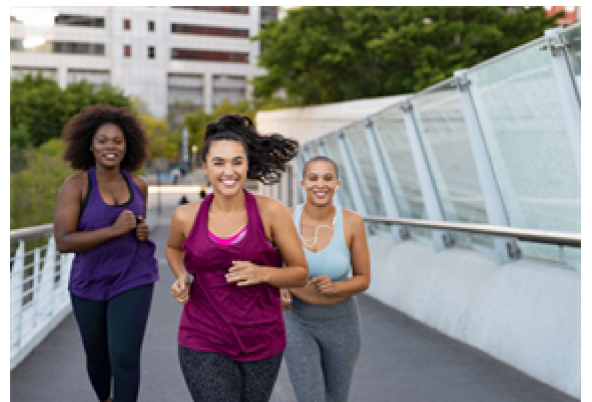
Beverage choices are especially important for young children. Research shows that what children drink from birth through age 5 can have a significant impact on their health since beverages are a big part of what they consume during this critical life stage. New recommendations by health care professionals include plain water for hydration and plain pasteurized milk for nutrition. A limit on 100% juice consumption and limits or restrictions on added sugars in beverages are recommended.



Be active ... get moving!

Physical activity is an important part of a healthy lifestyle. The benefits of regular movement include:

- More energy
- Less stress
- Better sleep
- Lower risk of chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes and heart disease



Physical activity can be in the form of exercise (jogging, walking, swimming) or everyday activities (gardening, car washing, stair climbing). Do it all at once or break it into increments of 10 to 20 minutes.

Being active 30 minutes per day, five days a week keeps the heart strong. To help with weight loss goals or maintenance, be active 60 to 90 minutes most days.

Exercise should keep the heart beating fast for a period of time. Strength training exercises like lifting weights or doing push-ups, sit-ups or yoga are also important since they build muscle, improve balance and strengthen bones.



No time for physical activity?

- Do jumping jacks or Pilates moves while watching TV or go for a walk with a friend.
- Use break time at work to stretch, walk and do simple exercises like squats and arm circles.
- Listen to a podcast while going for a walk instead of sitting on the couch.

Build healthy habits as a family

As a parent or caregiver, you can influence a healthy lifestyle for the whole family. Here are some ways to support positive eating experiences that support a child's health now and in the future:



- Model eating and enjoying a wide variety of foods.
- Include children in food purchasing and preparation.
- Enjoy family meals together.
- Avoid negative self-talk or focusing on body image.
- Take family walks together.

Make healthier choices today

Small, daily lifestyle changes can lead to better health in the future. To get started, keep a food or activity diary for a week, then evaluate to see if you are eating a variety of foods from the food groups. For some people the simple act of writing what they eat and drink improves the quality of their choices.

For information on label reading, food groups, activity and more, download the [Activity + Eating for Adults](#), [Healthy Eating for Your Family](#) and [Activity + Eating for Teens](#) self-instructional booklets.

What Is Healthy Eating?

Megan Holdaway, RDN, discusses how you can build a foundation for healthy eating habits.

[Watch here](#) →

Related Resources

Discover the Activity + Eating booklet for information on label reading, food groups and more!

[Download Booklet](#)