

Hints for Healthy Eating



Sometimes it seems as if we go from one diet craze to another. The four food groups of yesteryear have been replaced with a pyramid, and it doesn't appear that "experts agree" on much of anything anymore. We really want to be good when it comes to choosing foods that are good for us, but how do we know what rules to follow? With all of the information out there, how can we watch our weight without losing our minds? Here are some straightforward tips which can help you make healthy eating a part of a healthier lifestyle.

Mix it Up & Know Your Limits

The keys to a healthy diet are variety, balance and moderation. No one food—or type of food—will give you all the nutrients you need or keep you satisfied. The body needs a balanced combination of proteins, carbohydrates and fats. Learning to make the best choices can mean changing patterns, which often leads to discoveries—steaks aren't the only source of protein! Limits on fats, sugar and salt are a good thing to keep in mind, but perhaps the most important clue in putting together a new diet is an old saying: moderation in everything, including moderation.

Concentrate on 5 to 9

Even the government's in on it: the goal is to get Americans to eat five to nine servings of fruits and vegetables a day. Suggestions include serving juices and adding berries to cereal for breakfast; using apples, bananas and cut veggies as easy snacks; adding vegetables to soups, pasta and pizza; making salads with plenty of variety—include dried fruit, spinach and other greens, or avocados; and blending smoothies for dessert or anytime.

Calories, Carbohydrates, Cholesterol & Fats

The truth is that a balanced diet contains all of the above. Cutting calories is necessary for weight loss—or maintenance once we reach a certain age—but the USDA recommends between 1,600 and 2800 calories per day. Eliminating carbohydrates takes away the essential nutrients and fiber in whole grains, fruits and many vegetables. Fats are also necessary, but certain types of fats should be limited to protect against harmful cholesterol levels and heart disease.

Keep it Colorful

When selecting fruits and vegetables, go for strong colors for more health benefits. In leafy vegetables, the darker the green the better. Red in tomatoes, peppers and papaya signifies powerful antioxidants. Foods naturally colored orange and yellow contain Vitamin C and beta-carotene. Blueberries are rich in folic acid. Creating multi-colored meals may also help you find interesting new fruits and vegetables.

Soup & Salad Strategies

Soup can be a lifesaver in a busy household, but avoid cream-based soups and be careful of added salt. At the salad bar, pass on the pre-made macaroni and potato salads. Whether dining out or at home, choose low-fat salad dressings, oil and vinegar—try balsamic vinegar for more flavor—or even salsa. And put the dressing on the side—dip your fork into the dressing and you'll use much less.

Meat: The Leaner the Better

You don't have to give up meat for your health, just choose leaner cuts or trim the fat. Poultry is naturally lower in fat, especially if you remove the skin. And don't forget about fish and shellfish, which are low-fat and also rich in protein and beneficial omega-3 fatty acids. Experiment with different recipes and try grilling, broiling or baking rather than frying in oil.

Beans, Beans, Beans

Beans and legumes are an excellent source of protein, high in fiber and easy to prepare for a variety of side dishes and entrees. Dried, canned or frozen beans are a terrific low-fat pantry staple, and green soybeans are the perfect anytime snack.

(Continued on next page)

Hints for Healthy Eating

(Continued)

Not All Carbs are Created Equal

The body needs carbohydrates for fuel, but there are good carbs and there are bad carbs. Good carbohydrates come from vegetables and whole grains. Leave the potato chips and white dinner rolls alone, and make choices which are nutritionally worth their weight in carbs: whole grain or pita bread, brown or long grain rice, whole grain crackers, corn tortillas and whole wheat pasta.

Don't Lose the Dairy

For years, kids were told to finish their milk. Now, studies tell us that adults need two to three servings of dairy products per day—many women need more. Fat-free or low-fat milk, yogurt and cheeses—try soy-based!—are loaded with nutrients and calcium.

A Fat Breakdown

Research has shown that controlling the type of fat we consume is just as important as limiting the amount of fat. The types to avoid are saturated fats—butter and animal fat—and fats added to processed foods called hydrogenated fats or “trans fats”—trans fatty acids. When buying food, it's easy to steer clear of saturated fats because they're included on the FDA's food labels. But trans fats are harder to spot—watch out for anything “partially hydrogenated.” Safe bets are olive and canola oils. When cooking, try flavorful oil sprays to use less.

Go Ahead and Snack

Snacking is a perfectly healthy habit. As a matter of fact, studies indicate we shouldn't go over four or five hours without eating (which is why breakfast is so important!). The trick is finding healthy snacks. Freeze some grapes, make low-fat dip for your veggie sticks or baked tortilla chips, eat low-fat yogurt or cheese, microwave fat-free popcorn, or grab raisins or nuts. Nuts are high in calories, but the oils in seeds and nuts—particularly walnuts—improve cholesterol levels.

Indulge Your Sweet Tooth

Eating healthy doesn't mean depriving yourself. If you've got a sweet tooth, try healthier desserts like fruit, sorbet or light ice cream. But if nothing else will do, go for your guilty pleasure... in smaller doses. You'll probably find that your cravings are satisfied, maybe after a bite or two. And welcome news for chocoholics: research shows that an ounce or so of dark chocolate daily is actually good for you!

Keep Your Eye on Size

Portion control is definitely central to a sensible diet. One serving = a small piece of fruit (tennis ball-sized) or ½ cup vegetables (1 cup leafy greens); a slice of bread or ½ cup rice or pasta; 1 oz of cheese (equal to two fingers) or 1 cup yogurt; 1 egg or 3 oz of meat (the size of a deck of cards). To help guide you, put portions in baggies or buy individual servings. Read labels. And once your body adjusts, when it comes to sugar, alcohol and caffeine, you're likely to find that a little really does go a long way.

Drink Water!

The recommended six to eight glasses of water a day can seem overwhelming. For variation, try carbonated and flavored waters, or no-calorie powdered drink mixes (but watch the sodium content). Keep a pitcher of water in the refrigerator with slices of lemon or lime, or sprigs of mint.

It's *Your* Life

The bottom line is that just paying attention to your diet will probably improve it. So make changes gradually that you can live with. Learn to get creative with flavors by experimenting with new foods, herbs, spices and sauces. And above all, listen to your body. Good nutrition is part of a fitness program which should always include exercise. As your physical awareness increases, so will your ability to make the kind of choices that are right for you.

This material is for individual assistance only. It is not intended to provide any reader with specific authority, advice or recommendations. If and when you determine it is necessary, please seek advice regarding your particular situation from the appropriate professional.