

Healthy Eating

Overview

How do you get started on healthy eating?

Healthy eating starts with learning new ways to eat, such as adding more fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains and cutting back on foods that have a lot of fat, salt, and sugar.

A change to healthier eating also includes learning about balance, variety, and moderation.

- Aim for balance. Most days, eat from each food group—grains, protein foods, vegetable and fruit, and dairy. Listen to your body. Eat when you're hungry. Stop when you feel satisfied.
- Look for variety. Be adventurous. Choose different foods in each food group. For example, don't reach for an apple every time you choose a fruit. Eating a variety of foods each day will help you get all the nutrients you need.
- Practice moderation. Don't have too much or too little of one thing. All foods, if eaten in moderation can be part of healthy eating. Even sweets can be okay.

Why pay attention to what you eat? Healthy eating will help you get the right balance of vitamins, minerals and other nutrients. It will help you feel your best and have plenty of energy. It can help you handle stress better. Healthy eating is one of the best things you can do to prevent and control many health problems, such as:

- Heart disease
- High blood pressure
- Type 2 diabetes
- Some types of cancer

Is healthy eating the same as going on a diet? Healthy eating is not a diet. It means making changes you can live with and enjoy for the rest of your life. Diets are temporary. Because you give up so much when you diet, you may be hungry and think about food all the time. And after you stop dieting, you also may overeat to make up for what you missed. Eating a healthy, balanced variety of foods is far more satisfying. And if you match that with more physical activity, you are more likely to get to a healthy weight—and stay there—than if you diet.

How do you make healthy eating a habit? First, think about your reasons for healthier eating. Do you want to improve your health? Do you want to feel better? Are you trying to set an example for your kids? Next, think about some small changes you can make. Pick ones you can keep doing.

- Don't try to change everything at once.
- Set an easy goal you can reach, like having a salad and a piece of fruit each day.
- Make a long-term goal too, such as having one vegetarian dinner a week.

Where can you get support? Having support from others can be a huge help. The more support you have, the easier it will be to make changes. Ask family and friends to practice healthy eating with you. Have them help you make meals, and share healthy, delicious recipes and cooking tips. If you need more help, talk to your doctor or a registered dietitian. Look online for groups that support healthy eating and share success stories.

Tips for setting goals

- Focus on small goals. This will help you reach larger goals over time. With smaller goals, you'll have success more often, which will help you stay with it.
- Write down your goals. This will help you remember, and you'll have a clearer idea of what you want to achieve. Use a personal action plan to record your goals. Hang up your plan where you will see it often. It will remind you of what you're trying to do.
- Make your goals specific. Specific goals help you measure your progress and adjust your

plan. For example, setting a goal to eat 2 servings of vegetables each day is better than a general goal to “eat more vegetables.”

- Focus on one goal at a time. By doing this, you're less likely to feel overwhelmed and then give up.
- As soon as you reach a goal, set a new one.

Some ways to deal with barriers to healthy eating

Barrier:

"It takes a lot of time to prepare vegetables"

Solution:

I'll buy packaged salad mixes and precut vegetables that I can prepare quickly.

Barrier:

"Fruits and vegetables are expensive."

Solution:

I'll look for fruits and vegetables that are in season so they cost less. I'll buy frozen and canned fruits and vegetables when fresh produce is too expensive.

Barrier:

"I eat out a lot at restaurants."

Solution:

I'll pick a salad or cooked vegetables for the side dish instead of French fries at restaurants