

Dietary Guidelines for Good Health

To prevent disease, the Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend a healthy eating pattern. All food and drink choices matter. Healthy eating includes eating lots of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat or nonfat dairy products or fortified soy beverages, and lean proteins. The guidelines also emphasize:

- Balancing the food you eat with your activity to reach and stay at a healthy weight.
- Drinking alcohol in moderation, if at all.
- Limiting foods high in salt, saturated fat, trans fat, and added sugar.

These guidelines from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) are updated every 5 years to promote health and reduce risk for major chronic diseases.

Key recommendations for the general public include the following.

Balancing calories

- Eat and drink the right amount for you. MyPlate is the U.S. government's food guide. It can help you make your own well-balanced eating plan.
- Avoid oversized portions.
- Prevent and/or reduce overweight and obesity through healthy eating and physical activity.
- Control your total calorie intake to manage your weight. For people who are overweight or obese, this means eating fewer calories from foods and drinks.
- Increase your physical activity, and reduce the time you are not moving.
- Eat enough calories, but not too many, during each stage of life—childhood, adolescence, adulthood, pregnancy and breastfeeding, and older age.

Foods to increase

- Make half your plate fruits and vegetables.
- Switch to fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk.
- Eat more vegetables and fruits.
- Eat different vegetables, especially dark-green, red, and orange vegetables and beans and peas. Eat more whole fruits instead of drinking juice.
- Eat at least half of all grains as whole grains, replacing refined grains with whole grains.
- Eat more fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products, such as yogurt, cheese, or fortified soy beverages.
- Eat different protein foods, such as seafood, lean meat and poultry, eggs, beans and peas, soy products, and unsalted nuts and seeds.
- Replace some meat and poultry with seafood.
- Replace protein foods that are higher in solid fats with choices that are lower in solid fats and calories and/or are sources of oils.
- Use oils to replace solid fats, like butter, where possible.

- Choose foods that provide more potassium, dietary fiber, calcium, and vitamin D. These foods include vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and milk and milk products.
- **For people 50 years and older:**
 - Eat foods fortified with vitamin B12, such as fortified cereals.

Foods to reduce

- Compare sodium in foods like soup, bread, and frozen meals—and choose the foods with lower numbers.
- Drink water instead of sugary drinks.
- Reduce daily sodium intake to less than 2,300 milligrams (mg).
- Reduce calories from saturated fats to less than 10% of total calories by replacing them with unsaturated fats: monounsaturated and polyunsaturated.
- Limit trans fats, which are in partially hydrogenated oils and other solid fats.
- Reduce the intake of calories from added sugar to less than 10% of total calories.
- Limit foods that contain refined grains, especially refined grain foods that contain solid fats, added sugars, and sodium.
- If you drink alcohol, drink it in moderation—up to one drink a day for women and two drinks a day for men.

Healthy eating patterns

- Choose a type of eating that gives you enough nutrition but not too many calories. Examples include the DASH diet, Mediterranean-style eating, and vegetarian.
- Remember to count the calories in what you drink.
- To reduce the risk of foodborne illness, follow food safety recommendations when preparing and eating foods.

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Healthy Eating and Older Adults

Having good nutrition is important at any age. But it is especially important for older adults. Eating a healthy diet can help keep your body strong and can help lower your risk for disease.

But as you get older, it can be harder to eat in healthy ways. If you have health problems or can't be active, you may not feel as hungry as you used to. You may not plan and make meals as often.

The following is a list of common nutrition problems older adults have, plus some ideas for solutions.

Solutions to eating problems older adults may have:

Problem	Ideas for solutions
You have health problems that make it hard to chew.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pick canned or cooked fruit and vegetables, which tend to be softer. • Chop or shred meat, poultry, and fish. Try adding sauce or gravy to the meat to help keep it moist. • Pick other protein foods that are naturally soft, such as peanut butter, cooked dried beans, and eggs.
You have trouble shopping for yourself.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find a local grocery store that offers home delivery service. • Contact a volunteer center and ask for help. • Ask a family member or neighbor to help you. • Pay someone to help you.
You have trouble preparing meals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use easy cooking methods, such as a microwave oven to cook TV dinners, other frozen foods, and prepared foods. • Take part in group meal programs offered through senior citizen programs. • Check for community programs that deliver meals to your home, such as Meals on Wheels. • Ask a friend or family member to help you.
You don't feel very hungry.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try eating smaller amounts of food more often. For example, try having 4 or 5 small meals throughout the day instead of 1 or 2 large meals.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat with family and friends, or take part in group meal programs offered in your community. Eating with others provides social interaction and may help your appetite. • Ask your doctor if your medicines could be causing appetite or taste problems. If so, ask about changing medicines. Or ask your doctor about medicines that may improve your appetite. • Increase the flavor of food by adding spices and herbs. • If you think you are depressed and it is affecting your appetite, ask your doctor for help. Depression can make you less hungry and can make it hard to do everyday activities like grocery shopping and preparing meals.
<p>You are worried about the cost of food.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find out if there are programs in your community that offer free or low-cost meals. • Find out if you can get food stamps. Call the food stamp office listed in the state government section of the phone book. • Look into the U.S. Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. • Buy low-cost nutritious foods, like dried beans, rice, and pasta. Or buy foods that contain these items, like split pea soup or canned beans. • Use coupons for discounts on foods. • Buy foods on sale and store-brand foods, which often cost less. • Buy shelf-stable foods in bulk or in large quantities.

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High Blood Pressure: Nutrition Tips

DASH diet

The DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet can help you lower your blood pressure. It includes eating fruits, vegetables, and low-fat or nonfat dairy foods.

Follow these daily recommendations:

The DASH eating plan

Food	Recommended servings	Examples
Low-fat and fat-free milk and milk products	2 to 3 servings a day	A serving is 8 ounces of milk, 1 cup of yogurt, or 1 1/2 ounces of cheese.
Fruits	4 to 5 servings a day	A serving is 1 medium-sized piece of fruit, 1/2 cup chopped or canned fruit, 1/4 cup dried fruit, or 4 ounces (1/2 cup) of fruit juice. Choose fruit more often than fruit juice.
Vegetables	4 to 5 servings a day	A serving is 1 cup of lettuce or raw leafy vegetables, 1/2 cup of chopped or cooked vegetables, or 4 ounces (1/2 cup) of vegetable juice. Choose vegetables more often than vegetable juice.
Grains	6 to 8 servings a day	A serving is 1 slice of bread, 1 ounce of dry cereal, or 1/2 cup of cooked rice, pasta, or cooked cereal. Try to choose whole-grain products as much as possible.
Meat, poultry, fish	No more than 2 servings a day	A serving is 3 ounces, about the size of a deck of cards
Legumes, nuts, seeds	4 to 5 servings a week	A serving is 1/3 cup of nuts, 2 tablespoons of seeds, or 1/2 cup cooked beans or peas.
Fats and oils	2 to 3 servings a day	A serving is 1 teaspoon of soft margarine or vegetable oil, 1 tablespoon of mayonnaise, or 2 tablespoons of low-fat salad dressing.
Sweets and added sugars	5 servings a week or less	A serving is 1 tablespoon of jelly or jam, 1/2 cup of sorbet, or 1 cup of lemonade.

Cut down on fats

Eating a diet low in both saturated fat and total fat will help lower your blood pressure.

Although you need some fat in your diet, limit how much saturated fat you eat. These fats are mostly in animal foods, such as meat and dairy foods. Coconut oil, palm oil, and cocoa butter are also saturated fats. Palm and coconut oils are often found in processed foods, including crackers and snack foods.

Follow the recommendations below to include healthy fats in your diet. DASH recommends that a little less than a third of your total calories come from fats. And most of these calories should come from healthy fats such as vegetable oils, nuts, and fish. Very few calories should come from saturated fat, which is found in animal meat, dairy products, and processed foods.

Cut back on sodium

There is a link between eating sodium and having high blood pressure. Reducing sodium in the diet can prevent high blood pressure in those at risk for the disease and can help control high blood pressure. Limiting sodium is part of a heart-healthy eating plan that can help prevent heart disease and stroke.

Try to eat less than 2,300 milligrams (mg) of sodium a day. If you limit your sodium to 1,500 mg a day, you can lower your blood pressure even more.

Eat fewer processed foods

Cutting back on the amount of processed or refined foods you eat can help. These foods, such as canned and instant soups, packaged mixes, and snack items, don't have enough calcium, potassium, and magnesium—the very nutrients you need to help lower your blood pressure. And these foods can be high in sodium, saturated fats, and trans fats.

Vegetarian diet

You also may try a vegetarian diet. In general, vegetarian diets reduce blood pressure, although experts don't know exactly why. The DASH diet could easily be a vegetarian diet if legumes (for example, beans, lentils, peas, and peanuts) were substituted for meat. Vegetarian diets tend to be higher in potassium, magnesium, and calcium, as does the DASH diet. Vegetarian diets also are higher in fiber and unsaturated fats than other diets.

Potassium, calcium, and magnesium

Not eating enough foods containing potassium, calcium, and magnesium may contribute to high blood pressure.

To get enough of these nutrients, eat a balanced diet that contains plenty of fresh fruits, vegetables, dairy foods, and whole grains. Most people do not need to take dietary supplements to get enough potassium, calcium, and magnesium.

Good sources of potassium

All fresh fruits and vegetables and meats are good sources of potassium. Examples include the following:

- Bananas, cantaloupe, oranges, and orange juice
- Raw or cooked spinach, lima beans, zucchini, broccoli, and artichokes
- Potatoes
- Legumes (cooked dried beans and peas) such as pinto beans, chickpeas (garbanzo beans), and lentils
- Nuts and seeds

Good sources of calcium

- Low-fat dairy products (yogurt, skim milk, cheese)

Good sources of magnesium

- Legumes (cooked dried beans and peas), seeds, and nuts
- Halibut
- Milk and yogurt
- Brown rice and potatoes
- Tomatoes
- Bananas and watermelon
- Leafy green vegetables

Dietary supplements

The safest way to ensure good nutrition is through a balanced, varied diet instead of through nutritional supplements.

Very large amounts of any of these minerals taken in the form of a supplement can cause problems, including possible death. See your doctor before taking large quantities of any supplement.

What does not lower blood pressure?

Garlic and onions.

Although eating garlic and onions has been recommended to reduce blood pressure, evidence shows that only very small decreases in blood pressure may result.

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Mediterranean Diet

What is the Mediterranean diet?

The Mediterranean diet is a way of eating rather than a formal diet plan. It features foods eaten in Greece, Spain, southern Italy and France, and other countries that border the Mediterranean Sea.

The Mediterranean diet emphasizes eating foods like fish, fruits, vegetables, beans, high-fiber breads and whole grains, nuts, and olive oil. Meat, cheese, and sweets are very limited. The recommended foods are rich with monounsaturated fats, fiber, and omega-3 fatty acids.

The Mediterranean diet is like other heart-healthy diets in that it recommends eating plenty of fruits, vegetables, and high-fiber grains. But in the Mediterranean diet, an average of 35% to 40% of calories can come from fat. Most other heart-healthy guidelines recommend getting less than 35% of your calories from fat. The fats allowed in the Mediterranean diet are mainly from unsaturated oils such as fish oils, olive oil, and certain nut or seed oils (such as canola, soybean, or flaxseed oil) and from nuts (walnuts, hazelnuts, and almonds). These types of oils may have a protective effect on the heart.

What are the benefits?

A Mediterranean-style diet may help lower your risk for certain diseases, improve your mood, and boost your energy levels. It may also help keep your heart and brain healthy.

The benefits of a Mediterranean-style diet reinforce the benefits of eating a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, fish, high-fiber breads, whole grains, and healthy fats.

For your heart and body, a Mediterranean-style diet may:

- Prevent heart disease
- Lower the risk of a heart attack
- Lower cholesterol
- Prevent type 2 diabetes
- Prevent metabolic syndrome

For your brain, a Mediterranean-style diet might help prevent:

- Stroke
- Alzheimer's disease and other dementia
- Depression
- Parkinson's disease

How can you make the Mediterranean diet part of your eating plan?

There are some simple things you can do to eat more of the healthy foods that make up the Mediterranean diet. First, check out what's on the menu. Then see what Mediterranean-type foods you can add to your eating plan.

The traditional Mediterranean diet calls for:

- **Eating a variety of fruits and vegetables** each day, such as grapes, blueberries, tomatoes, broccoli, peppers, figs, olives, spinach, eggplant, beans, lentils, and chickpeas.
- **Eating a variety of whole-grain foods** each day, such as oats, brown rice, and whole wheat bread, pasta, and couscous.
- **Choosing healthy (unsaturated) fats**, such as nuts, olive oil, and certain nut or seed oils like canola, soybean, and flaxseed. About 35% to 40% of daily calories can come from fat, mainly from unsaturated fats.
- **Limiting unhealthy (saturated) fats**, such as butter, palm oil, and coconut oil. And limit fats found in animal products, such as meat and dairy products made with whole milk.
- **Eating mostly vegetarian meals** that include whole grains, beans, lentils, and vegetables.
- **Eating fish** at least 2 times a week, such as tuna, salmon, mackerel, lake trout, herring, or sardines.
- **Eating moderate amounts of low-fat dairy products**, such as milk, cheese, or yogurt.
- **Eating moderate amounts of poultry and eggs.**
- **Limiting red meat** to only a few times a month in very small amounts. For example, a serving of meat is 3 ounces. This is about the size of a deck of cards.
- **Limiting sweets and desserts** to only a few times a week. This includes sugar-sweetened drinks like soda.

The Mediterranean diet may also include red wine with your meal—1 glass each day for women and up to 2 glasses a day for men.

Tips for changing your diet

Here are some things you can do to switch from a traditional Western-style diet to a more Mediterranean way of eating.

- Dip bread in a mix of olive oil and fresh herbs instead of using butter.
- Add avocado slices to your sandwich instead of bacon.
- Have fish for lunch or dinner instead of red meat. Brush it with olive oil, and broil or grill it.
- Sprinkle your salad with seeds or nuts instead of cheese.
- Cook with olive or canola oil instead of butter or oils that are high in saturated fat.
- Choose whole-grain bread, pasta, rice, and flour instead of foods made with white flour.
- Add ground flaxseed to cereal, low-fat yogurt, and soups.

- Cut back on meat in meals. Instead of having pasta with meat sauce, try pasta tossed with olive oil and topped with pine nuts and a sprinkle of Parmesan cheese.
- Switch from 2% milk or whole milk to 1% or fat-free milk.
- Dip raw vegetables in a vinaigrette dressing or hummus instead of dips made from mayonnaise or sour cream.
- Have a piece of fruit for dessert instead of a piece of cake. Try baked apples, or have some dried fruit.
- Use herbs and spices instead of salt to add flavor to foods.

A dietitian can help you make these and other changes to your diet. You can find information about the Mediterranean diet, recipes, and sample menus online and in cookbooks or videos.

Staying active

The Mediterranean diet isn't just about eating healthy foods. It's also about being active. So try to get at least 2½ hours of moderate aerobic activity a week. It's fine to do blocks of 10 minutes or more throughout your day and week.

Choose exercises that make your heart beat faster and make you breathe harder. For example, go for a swim or a brisk walk or bike ride. You can also get some aerobic activity in your daily routine. Vacuuming, housework, gardening, and yard work can all be aerobic.

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Quitting Smoking

Are you ready to quit?

Maybe you have already taken your last puff or are ready to quit today. That's great. This information will help you keep your resolve to kick the habit for good.

It's okay if you aren't ready now. But you may want to quit at some point. So keep learning and preparing yourself. Many smokers do quit. You can too.

Why do you want to quit?

Think about why you want to quit. Maybe you want to protect your heart and your health and live longer. Or maybe you want to be a good role model for your kids or spend your money on something besides cigarettes. Your reason for wanting to change is important. If your reason comes from you—and not someone else—it will be easier for you to try to quit for good.

How can you quit?

Quitting smoking is hard. Some people who have quit say that it was the hardest thing they have ever done. But most smokers eventually are able to quit smoking. And you don't have to do it alone. Ask your family, friends, and doctor to help you. Get what you need to help you quit for good.

- **Get ready.** If you're ready to quit right now, go ahead. Medicines and support can help you stay on track. But if you want to plan ahead, you don't have to stop right away. Set a date to quit. Pick a time when you won't have a lot of stress in your life. Think about cutting down on smoking before your quit date. You can try to decrease the number of cigarettes you smoke each day as a way to quit smoking. Get rid of ashtrays, lighters, or spit cups before you quit. Talk to your partner or friends about helping you stay smoke-free. Don't let people smoke in your house.
- **Change your routine.** For example, if you smoke after eating, take a walk instead.
- **Use medicine.** It can help with cravings and stress, and it doubles your chances of quitting smoking. You can buy nicotine gum, lozenges, or patches without a prescription. Your doctor may also prescribe medicine, such as bupropion (Zyban) or varenicline (Chantix). If you take varenicline, you can stop smoking a little bit at a time, which may increase your chance of quitting.
- **Get support.** Seek help from:
 - The national tobacco quit line: 1-800-QUIT NOW (1-800-784-8669).
 - Free smartphone, tablet, or handheld computer apps, such as the National Cancer Institute's QuitPal.

- A text messaging program from www.smokefree.gov called SmokefreeTXT.
- Internet programs, such as www.smokefree.gov, which also have chat rooms.
- Doctors, nurses, or therapists for counseling.
- A friend who has quit smoking.

After you quit, try not to smoke at all—not even one puff. Prevent a slip (smoking one or two cigarettes) or relapse (returning to regular smoking) by avoiding smoking triggers, at least at first. These triggers can include friends who smoke, alcohol, and stress. Don't keep cigarettes in your house or car. If you do slip, stay calm. Remind yourself that you have a plan, and think about how hard you've worked to quit for good.

Why is it so hard to quit?

Quitting is hard because your body depends on the nicotine in tobacco. Giving it up is more than just kicking a bad habit. Your body has to stop craving the nicotine. Nicotine gum, lozenges, patches, and other medicines can help reduce the cravings without the harmful effects of smoking.

You also have to change your habits. You may not even think about smoking. You just do it. You may not realize it, but seeing someone smoke—or just seeing cigarettes—may cause you to want to smoke. You may smoke when you drink alcohol or when you are stressed. Or maybe you have a cigarette with coffee. Before you quit, think of new ways to handle these things. For example, call a friend or practice deep breathing when you feel stressed. Try chewing sugarless gum instead of smoking. Go for a walk when you have a break at work. When you first start your quit, it's okay to stay around nonsmokers. And it's okay to avoid situations where you may be tempted to smoke (like occasions where alcohol will be served) until you feel more confident about staying smoke-free.

What if you feel bad when you are trying to quit?

You are likely to crave cigarettes and to have withdrawal symptoms. You may feel grouchy or restless or you may have a hard time concentrating for the first 2 to 3 weeks after you quit. It may be hard to focus on tasks. Or you may have trouble sleeping and want to eat more. But you won't feel bad forever, and medicine can help. Using medicines and products like nicotine gum or patches can help with cravings and make it easier to resist smoking.

Will you gain weight?

You may worry about gaining weight after you stop smoking. This is understandable. In fact, many smokers do gain weight during their quit attempt. In your plan to quit smoking, include eating healthy snacks and doing some physical activity to help you avoid weight gain during your quit.

If you do gain weight, you can focus on losing it after you have successfully quit smoking. Be patient with yourself and try to tackle one change at a time.

You can take steps to lower your chance of gaining weight:

- Try to be active. Exercise can also improve your mood and reduce your craving for a cigarette.
 - If you haven't been getting much exercise, start walking every day, gradually increasing how far you walk. Or take a beginning yoga class.
 - If you are already active, see about joining others for a sport you enjoy, such as biking, hiking, or playing volleyball.
- Eat more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and eat fewer high-fat foods. Cutting back on food (dieting) can make quitting smoking harder.
- Try not to substitute food for cigarettes. Instead, chew gum, or chew on a drinking straw or a coffee stirrer.

Use quit-smoking medicines or nicotine replacement. They may make gaining weight less likely while you are quitting smoking.

What if you start smoking again?

Most people quit and restart many times before they stop smoking for good. If you start smoking again after you quit, don't give up. If you return to smoking, but smoke less than before, try to keep your smoking at that lower level so it will be easier to quit in the future. Also, if you are ready to try to quit again soon, do so. You do not need to wait to try again. Each time you quit, even if it is just for a short time, you get closer to your long-term goal.

Remind yourself that by quitting you may avoid serious health problems and live longer. Remember your reasons for quitting. Maybe you want to protect your heart and your health and live longer.

Each time you quit, you learn more about what helps and what gets in the way. Think about why you started smoking again and about what you will do differently next time. If you tried to quit without medicines or counseling, think about trying them next time. If you did use a medicine and counseling, think about trying a different type next time, or think about changing other things in your life, like travel routines and recreation. Medicines and nicotine replacement (gum, patches, and lozenges) can double your chances of success. And using medicines and counseling is even more effective. You can do it!

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