Eat Right

Food, Nutrition and Health Tips from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

Eating Right for a Healthy Weight

Reaching or maintaining a healthy weight can contribute to your overall health and wellbeing. Losing even a few pounds, if you are carrying extra weight, or preventing further weight gain, has health benefits.

Are you ready to make changes in your lifestyle and move toward a healthier weight? Here are some tips to get you started.

Start with a plan for lifelong health. Focus on the big picture of achieving overall good health – not just short-term weight loss.

Set healthy, realistic goals. You are more likely to succeed in reaching realistic goals when you make changes step-by-step. Start with one or two specific, small changes at a time. Track your progress by keeping a food and activity log.

Get a personalized eating plan. Go to www.MyPlate.gov for a plan that will give you the amounts of each food group you need daily. If you have special nutrition needs, consult a registered dietitian nutritionist for personalized nutrition advice.

Plan your meals ahead of time. Whether you're eating at home, packing a lunch or eating out, an overall eating plan for the day will help keep you on track.

Balance your plate with a variety of foods. Half your plate should be filled with fruits and vegetables, one fourth with protein foods like lean meat, poultry, fish or beans, and one fourth with grains. To round out your meal, add fat-free or low-fat milk, yogurt or cheese.

Start your meal with lower calorie foods like fruits, vegetables and salads. These foods are packed with nutrients your body needs.

Focus on your food. Pick one place to sit down and eat at home. Eating while doing other things may lead you to eat more than you're hungry for. Switching from a large plate to a smaller one may also help you become more mindful of portion sizes.

Know when you've had enough to eat. Quit before you feel full or stuffed. It takes about 20 minutes for your brain to get the message that your body is getting food. When your brain gets this message, you stop feeling hungry. So, fast eaters—slow down and give your brain a chance to get the word.

Get plenty of dietary fiber from fruits, vegetables, beans and whole grains. Dietary fiber can help you feel full longer and may lower your risk for heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

Watch portion sizes to manage your calorie intake. This is the key to an effective weight management plan. To make sure your portion sizes are "just right," visit www.MyPlate.gov for healthy eating guidelines in household measures and refer to the Nutrition Facts Label for serving size information.

Snack smart. Snacks can fit into a healthy eating plan, if they're planned right. To prevent hunger between meals, choose nutritious foods from the MyPlate food groups. Keep portable, healthy snacks in your desk, backpack or car.

Find your balance between food and physical activity. Regular physical activity is important for your overall health and fitness – plus, it may also help reduce the risk of chronic disease, promote a feeling of wellbeing and help manage body weight.

Find ways to be active throughout the day. Aim for 2 hours and 30 minutes, or more, each week of moderate-intensity aerobic activity, such as brisk walking. Muscle-strengthening activities at least two days per week are also recommended. If you are currently inactive, check with your doctor about increasing physical activity first.

Is it right for you?

Make sure your weight management plan is right for you. Does it include:

- Foods from all five food groups?
- The right number of servings from each group?
- Food you will enjoy eating for the rest of your life?
- Foods you easily have access to?
- Some of your favorite foods?
- Foods that fit your budget and lifestyle?
- Regular physical activity or exercise?

You're more likely to have success and stick with your weight management plan with every question you answer "yes" to above.

A registered dietitian nutritionist can work with you to develop a personalized weight management plan that meets your individual needs.

For more information about healthy eating, visit www.eatright.org and www.MyPlate.gov.

For a referral to a registered dietitian nutritionist and for additional food and nutrition information, visit www.eatright.org.

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The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics is the world's largest organization of food and nutrition professionals. The Academy is committed to improving health and advancing the profession of dietetics through research, education and advocacy.

This tip sheet is provided by:

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Sources: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion and Complete Food and Nutrition Guide, 5th edition

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