

# Healthy eating guidelines

When people choose nutritious foods and watch serving sizes, their bodies get the nutrients they need to function at their best. A healthy, balanced diet can also help reduce the risk for getting certain kinds of cancer and heart disease. Instead of thinking that food is either good or bad, think about which foods support good health.

The following guidelines will help you eat healthier and take better care of yourself. And, these tips can benefit everyone in your family!

## **Eat a variety of foods**

When you eat a variety of different foods, you have a better chance of making sure you're getting the vitamins and minerals your body needs. Choose fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean meat and protein, and low-fat dairy products. Try a new food each week and mix things up.

## **Limit fat and cholesterol**

Your body needs some fat, but only about 30% of the calories you eat each day should come from fat. When you include fat in your diet, choose mono- and poly-unsaturated fat, such as olive, canola, sunflower, or safflower oil. Avoid saturated and trans-fats. These are usually solid at room temperature (such as butter and stick margarine) and are the least healthy of fats. Food labels on most packaged foods will tell you if the product contains saturated or trans-fat and the amount in each serving.

Avoid eating dairy and meat products that are high in fat. Fat from animal products, like dairy and meat, contains cholesterol. Too much cholesterol in your body can block the blood vessels that lead to your heart. That's why adults with high cholesterol are more likely to have heart attacks. Doctors recommend that adults lower their cholesterol levels to protect against heart disease.

## **Satisfy hunger with low-fat dairy and lean protein**

Include small amounts of lean protein with your meals and snacks. Protein will help you feel less hungry and gives your body the nutrients it needs for energy and growth.

Most adults need between 4 and 6 ounces of protein each day. Choose lean meat, such as poultry and fish, and legumes like dried peas, beans, and lentils.

Milk products are also a good source of protein and supply your body with calcium and other important nutrients. Choose non-fat or low-fat products to avoid cholesterol and saturated fat.

## **Eat plenty of vegetables, fruits, and whole grains**

The more vegetables, fruits, and whole grain products you include in your diet, the more vitamins, minerals, and fiber you'll get. Whole-grain breads and cereals, legumes, and green and yellow vegetables are high in fiber and loaded with vitamins and minerals.

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## **Know your serving sizes**

Read nutrition labels to see the serving size of a food. Even foods that are lower in fat and sugar can contain lots of calories per serving size. Plan your meals for single serving sizes. That way you won't be as likely to eat too much. Watching portions and serving sizes can help you maintain a healthy weight.

## **Keep a food diary**

Tracking the food and beverages you have in a day can help you keep track and learn more about what you're eating. Keep a food diary and count everything you eat and drink.

## **Use sugar in moderation**

Foods high in simple sugar (such as table sugar) usually don't offer much in the way of nutrients. They're also high in calories and should only be a small part of your diet. These foods include cake, cookies, sugar sweetened beverages, and other desserts.

## **Watch what you drink**

Alcohol contains sugar and/or calories. To lose weight or stay at a healthy weight, avoid the empty calories of alcohol. If you want to drink, be sure to drink in moderation. Include the sugar and calories in your daily food diary if you keep one.

Also watch the other beverages you drink, such as juice and soda. Choose only 100% fruit juice and limit the amount you drink. If you drink soda, switch to diet varieties. Soda contains sugar that adds up quickly.

For more information about healthy eating and other health topics, visit [kp.org](http://kp.org).