

Healthy adult series

Nutrition facts

Healthy eating for life



KAISER PERMANENTE®

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Making healthy food choices can be a challenge. Unhealthy food is all around us. Advertisers spend millions of dollars making processed and fast foods appeal to everyone. These foods are all the more tempting because they're usually cheap, fast, and easy.

Most people make the worst food choices when they are too hungry or tired to take the time to prepare healthy food, even if healthy is what they prefer. However, by planning ahead, you can ensure that you have healthy food options readily available when you need something quick.

Why is healthy eating important?

By choosing nutritious foods and watching your portion sizes, you can make sure that your body gets the nutrients it needs to function at its best. A healthy, balanced diet can also help reduce your risk for developing cancer and heart disease. Eating healthfully also helps you to prevent or manage health conditions, such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

Here are some simple guidelines to keep in mind:

- ⁂ Eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day.
- ⁂ Choose whole-grain foods.
- ⁂ Substitute “good” fat for “bad” fat.
- ⁂ Get enough calcium and vitamin D.
- ⁂ Get enough folate, also known as folic acid. (Especially important for women of childbearing age.)
- ⁂ Watch your number of servings and portion sizes.

Read on for quick and easy tips on how you can follow these guidelines when planning your snacks and meals.

Eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables every day.

Fruits and vegetables are low in calories and fat, and high in vitamins, minerals, and fiber. One serving is 1 medium-size piece of fruit or a melon wedge, 1/2 cup canned fruit or vegetables, 1 cup leafy greens, 1/2 cup chopped or cooked vegetables, 1/2 cup berries, or 3/4 cup 100-percent fruit or vegetable juice (6 ounces).

It's easier than you think!

- ⁂ Throw an apple in your purse or backpack.
- ⁂ Sprinkle berries or raisins on your cereal.
- ⁂ Toss together lettuce, cucumbers, cherry tomatoes, and a low-fat dressing for an easy salad.
- ⁂ Sip on low-sodium vegetable juice over ice with a slice of lime.
- ⁂ Munch on celery, snap peas, or carrot sticks for a quick snack.
- ⁂ Slice up a melon and store it in the refrigerator to have handy for snacks and dessert.

Eat five or more servings of whole-grain foods every day.

When possible, choose whole grains instead of processed foods. Whole-grain foods are higher in vitamins and fiber than refined, processed grains (white flour, rice, and regular pasta). One serving is one slice of bread or 1/2 cup pasta, rice, cereal, or grain.

Good choices include:

- ⁿ 100-percent whole-wheat or whole-grain bread
- ⁿ Whole-grain cereal, such as Bran Flakes or Grape Nuts
- ⁿ Wild rice, whole-wheat pasta, or cooked whole-grain cereal, such as oatmeal

Why eating fruits, vegetables, and whole grains is important. These foods have little or no saturated fats and are high in vitamins and fiber.

Fiber helps to remove excess fat from your system. A diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains can decrease the risk for strokes or heart attack, lower blood pressure, guard against vision loss, and protect against a variety of cancers.

Look for colorful fruits and vegetables, such as leafy greens, red beets, orange carrots, blueberries, strawberries, watermelon, and oranges. In general, the more colorful the fruit or vegetable, the higher its nutritional value.

Substitute “good” fat for “bad” fat.

Good fats are monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats. These fats are liquid at room temperature. Good fats do not increase blood cholesterol or triglycerides. Using monounsaturated fats is especially healthy because they lower the bad cholesterol (low-density lipoprotein called LDL) in your blood without decreasing the good cholesterol (high-density lipoprotein called HDL). In addition, fats found in fish and some nuts can decrease the risk of certain heart conditions.

- Monounsaturated fats include olive and canola oils and can also be found in some fish oils as well as some seeds and nuts.
- Polyunsaturated fats include safflower, sunflower, corn, soybean, and cottonseed oils.

Bad fats are saturated fats and trans fats (sometimes called trans fatty acids). Bad fats, such as butter and stick margarine, are solid at room temperature. These fats have been linked to an increased risk of elevated cholesterol levels, hardening of the arteries, heart disease, and some cancers.

- Saturated fat is naturally found in foods derived from animals, such as meat and dairy products. It is also found in some vegetable oils, such as palm oil. While reduced-fat products have less saturated fat, they still contain saturated fat. For example, in whole milk, 40 percent of the calories come from saturated fats, while in 2-percent milk, 30 percent do. Fat-free dairy products, such as skim milk, have almost no saturated fat.

- ⁂ Trans fats are added to most processed foods and many fried fast foods, such as French fries. They appear in the list of ingredients on the package as hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oil. During the hydrogenation process, fats that are normally liquid at room temperature are changed to fats that remain solid at room temperature, extending the shelf life of the product. Foods containing partially hydrogenated oils are actually worse for you than those with hydrogenated oils because they are higher in trans fatty acids. Watch for new nutrition labels, listing the total grams of trans fat the product contains.

To reduce bad fat and increase good fat:

- ⁂ Choose canola or olive oil instead of butter, stick margarine, or palm oil.
- ⁂ Eat fewer processed foods such as candy, cookies, pastries, and chips.
- ⁂ Avoid fried foods. Eat food that is broiled, baked, poached, or steamed.
- ⁂ Use vegetable oil for cooking, sautéing, baking, and for salad dressings.
- ⁂ Select non-fat deli meats instead of fatty meats or cheese, and lean protein meat such as skinless turkey or chicken breast.
- ⁂ Choose non-fat or 1-percent fat dairy products, reduced-fat cheese, and low-fat or non-fat frozen desserts.
- ⁂ Eat tuna, salmon, white, and other types of fish one or two times per week (bake, steam, grill, or broil; avoid frying).

Food for healthy eating

This table can help you choose foods that are high in nutrients and balanced in calories. The first column (Eat more of these) is a good guide for weightloss because these foods are lower in calories. The middle column foods are also good for you, but if you are watching calories, you will need to be careful about serving sizes.

	Eat more of these
Fruits and vegetables	Fresh fruits and vegetables
Meat, eggs, and other protein	Lean fish and shellfish and skin-less chicken or turkey breast, lentils and beans, including garbanzo, pinto, kidney and black beans, low-fat or non-fat sandwich meats, and soy-based meat substitutes, egg whites and egg substitutes
Dairy products	Non-fat dairy products, including non-fat milk, non-fat cheese, such as non-fat cottage cheese, fat-free American, cheddar, or Swiss cheese, non-fat yogurt, non-fat sour cream and non-fat cream cheese
Breads, grains, rice, and pasta	Air-popped popcorn, rice cakes, brown rice, and fat-free whole grains including crackers and tortillas
Fats, oils, dressings, and sweets	Mustard, soy-based sandwich spreads, lemon juice, and flavored vinegars, non-fat desserts made with artificial sweeteners
Beverages	Water, tea, and sugar-free drinks

If you are at a healthy weight or have an active lifestyle, you may need to choose more foods in the middle column (Eat in moderation) and have larger serving sizes.

Foods in the last column have more empty calories and bad fats that can increase your risk for heart disease. Eat these foods less often and in smaller amounts.

Eat in moderation	Eat less of these
Dried fruit, such as raisins, canned fruit, and bananas, and starchy vegetables, such as potatoes and corn	French fries, fried onion rings, and other vegetables or fruits that are fried or served with butter, cream, or cheese sauces
Lean cuts of beef, pork, and lamb, whole eggs and egg yolks, nuts such as almonds, peanuts, and cashews	Fatty and fried meat including fried fish and poultry with skin.
Low-fat and reduced-fat dairy products, including reduced-fat milk, cottage cheese and yogurt, and reduced-fat butter and margarine (avoid those with trans fatty-acids)	Whole-fat dairy products such as regular milk, whole cream, half-and-half, cream cheese, sour cream, regular cheese, butter, and stick margarine
Vegetable-based pastas and low-fat, whole-grain cereals, granola, crackers and bread	White bread and bagels, white rice, white pasta, white flour tortillas, chips and sugary cereals
Olive oil, canola oil, vegetable oil, reduced-fat salad dressings, ketchup, peanut butter, sherbets, reduced-fat mayonnaise, low-fat ice cream	Regular mayonnaise and salad dressings, cream sauces and gravies, candies, cakes, pastries, pies, cookies, and regular ice cream
100% fruit juices	Regular soda, drinks that contain corn syrup, and alcoholic beverages

Get enough calcium and vitamin D.

Calcium is a mineral that you need throughout your life to build and maintain strong bones and teeth. While most of the calcium in your body is stored in your bones and teeth, a small amount is also essential to help your:

- Nerves carry messages to your brain.
- Muscles to contract.
- Blood to clot.
- Blood pressure stay within a normal range.

If you don't get enough calcium from your diet, your body will take the calcium it needs from your bones, causing them to become weak and brittle.

How can I get enough calcium?

- ⁿ Eat nonfat or low-fat dairy products. There are 300 mg of calcium in 8 ounces of milk or yogurt, and 2 ounces of cheese.
- ⁿ Drink calcium-fortified juice. An 8-ounce glass has 300 mg.
- ⁿ Eat dark green vegetables, beans, and tofu. One cup has 100–150 mg of calcium.

If you aren't getting enough calcium from food alone, take a supplement. Both men and women begin losing bone mass around age 30. Because estrogen helps maintain bone mass, women are at a greater risk of rapid bone loss after menopause, when estrogen levels drop dramatically.

Vitamin D is an essential vitamin that helps the body absorb calcium. Without it, bones can become soft, thin, or brittle, leading to osteoporosis and other skeletal conditions.

How can I get enough vitamin D?

You can get vitamin D by:

- ⁿ Drinking beverages fortified with vitamin D, such as milk, orange juice, and milk alternatives like soy, rice, or almond milk. Some yogurts and margarines are also fortified with vitamin D.
- ⁿ Eating cereal fortified with vitamin D.
- ⁿ Eating fatty fish, such as halibut, salmon, cod, herring, and sardines. You can get 200–600 IU in each 3-ounce serving.
- ⁿ Eating eggs. One egg yolk contains 50 IU of vitamin D. If you have high cholesterol or diabetes, limit yourself to four whole eggs or yolks per week.

Your body can also make and store vitamin D after exposure to ultraviolet rays of the sun. In the spring and summer months, expose your face and arms to sunlight for 15 minutes every day. However, if you plan to be out in the sun longer than 15 minutes, it is important to wear sunscreen. When it is cloudy and the sun is low, you won't get enough vitamin D from being outdoors, so it is important to include good sources of vitamin D in your diet.

As you age, your skin becomes less able to absorb vitamin D and your body less efficient at storing it. Vitamin supplements are recommended for people over 65.

Get enough folate.

Folate is a B vitamin that is important in producing red and white blood cells and platelets and in forming new genetic material (DNA) in cells. Low folate levels may increase the risk of heart attacks, strokes, and blood clots.

It is especially important for women of childbearing age to get enough folate, as folate is necessary for the normal development of a fetus. Women who do not get enough folate are more likely to have a child born with a birth defect, such as spina bifida (open spine) and anencephaly (absent brain). Low levels of folate can cause problems for the fetus even before a woman knows she is pregnant (within 28 days of becoming pregnant). Nutrition experts recommend that all women of childbearing age take a daily multivitamin supplement that has 400 mcg of folate every day to ensure that their minimum requirements are being met.

How much folate is enough?

Starting at age 12, both men and women need 400 mcg (micrograms) of folate every day throughout adulthood.

How can I get enough folate?

You can get folate from:

- Citrus fruits, juice, and melons
- Nuts, beans, split peas, and lentils
- Dark green vegetables
- Whole grains, folate-fortified cereals and breads

Most multivitamins contain the recommended daily amount of folate. It is important to take a multivitamin every day if you are concerned about getting enough from diet alone.

Watch portion sizes and number of servings.

Eating nutritious foods is important. Controlling your portion size is also important in helping you maintain good health. Even the healthiest foods can provide too many calories if you eat too much! Try to eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables, five or more servings of cereals and grains, two or three servings of dairy products, and two or three servings of meat, fish, eggs, and other protein.

Keep in mind, one serving of meat, fish, or poultry is about 2–4 ounces (the size of a deck of cards), and one serving size of pasta or rice is about 1/2 cup. Make sure to keep your total calories in a range that is appropriate for your age, weight, and activity level.

Tips to help you plan ahead

Here are some tips that can help ensure that you have healthy food options available.

- Stock your refrigerator and cupboards with quick, healthy food. Some choices include:
 - Pre-cut fruits and vegetables
 - Non-fat or low-fat yogurt, and cottage cheese
 - Frozen or fresh edamame (edible soybeans) and soy nuts
 - Lean deli meat and water-packed tuna
- Plan meals that are both nutritious and filling. Soups, skinless chicken breasts, fish, beans, and soy products are good choices. Include vegetables for added nutrients and bulk.

- ⁿ Shop the outside edge of the grocery store for fresh food, such as produce, dairy, meat and poultry, and fish. Avoid the temptation to buy a lot of processed foods, usually kept on the inside aisles at food stores. If you don't buy chips, candy, and cookies, they won't be in your home to tempt you.
- ⁿ Bring a snack bag to work or pack one for your child. Good snacking choices include:
 - Fruits and vegetables
 - Nuts and peanut butter
 - Low or non-fat cheese slices or sticks
 - Whole-grain crackers or rice and popcorn cakes
 - Air-popped or low-fat microwave popcorn
 - Low-fat granola, cereal, or protein bars
- ⁿ Try replacing just one food you like with a healthier alternative. For example, try preparing baked, skinless chicken breasts coated in breadcrumbs instead of fried chicken. Hold the French fries and get a salad. Eat a handful of nuts instead of a bag of chips.
- ⁿ It's OK to eat things that you crave, even if they're not the healthiest choices. By planning ahead, you can make sure that you eat them less often and in smaller portions.

Common challenges and possible solutions

“I always raid the vending machine at work/school.”

Solution: Keep a supply of hunger quenchers at your desk, such as nuts, whole-grain crackers, instant oatmeal, and low-fat granola or protein bars.

“I have a busy job. Instead of eating lunch, at 3 p.m. I locate the nearest desktop candy bowl.”

Solution: Make time for lunch, even if it's only 15 minutes. Identify stressors, and have some healthier snacks available. Crunchy foods are great snacks when you're stressed—try carrots sticks, an apple, or low-fat microwave popcorn.

“My kids drink soda pop at school.”

Solution: Next time you're at the grocery store, let your child help pick out milk, bottled water, or 100-percent juice for their lunch. Even chocolate milk is a better choice than soda. Although it still contains sugar, it's a good source of calcium and protein. Many of these drinks are available in small containers that can be packed in school lunch bags and boxes. You can also include snacks that are healthy, fun, and kid friendly—such as grapes, baby carrots, tangerines, fruit leathers without added sugars, string cheese, and granola bars.

“My husband and I don't get home until after 6:00 p.m. Planning a quick, healthy dinner is a challenge.”

Solution: Pre-cut vegetables and salad mixes are available in most grocery store produce sections. All you do is open and eat! Make a batch of brown rice on the weekend and during

the week add some steamed, microwaved, or stir-fried vegetables. Try different fresh pasta selections, such as ravioli with low-fat ricotta or spinach fettuccini. Pasta dishes are fast and easy, and leftovers are great for lunch the next day. Microwave frozen chicken and vegetable dinners. They are low in saturated and trans fats and high in protein.

“We have family in town, and we’re planning a huge party for the weekend.”

Solution: Enjoy eating with your family and friends, but consider having the party at your house. If you do the planning, you have more control over the food being served. You can grill lean meats and fish on the barbecue. Consider serving seasonal fruits for a fabulous dessert. If someone else is hosting the party, enjoy the special foods—just eat less of them and more of the healthier ones. For example, eat a small helping of potato salad, and a larger portion of spinach salad.

“The grocery store has a sale on potato chips and chocolate cookies.”

Solution: Processed foods, such as chips and cookies, are marketed as quick, cheap snacks. However, even if you save a little in your pocket-book, you pay the price in other ways. Processed foods are usually high in saturated fats, trans fats, and sodium and low in nutrients. Splurge on nutritious food choices, and you’ll reap the benefits with good health!

Resources

The Kaiser Permanente Resource Line can provide information on a variety of health topics including nutrition. Call weekdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. at 1-800-992-2279.

Visit the Health and Wellness Resources on our website at kp.org/wa for more information about healthy eating and physical activity.

You can purchase calcium and vitamin supplements from any Kaiser Permanente Pharmacy. Call 1-800-245-7979 or visit your Kaiser Permanente pharmacy.

Check out choosemyplate.gov to learn more about balancing calories and building a healthy plate for each meal. This site includes information about various food groups and tips for meal planning.