

Helping Your Family Eat Healthy

The foundation of good health is the food we eat. Equally as important is controlling portion sizes, choosing nutrient-rich foods and maintaining physical exercise. Over the past 20 years portion sizes have almost doubled in the United States, which has contributed to an increase in obesity and obesity-related disease such as heart disease and diabetes. When your body gets all the nutrients it needs from a smaller portion of food, you are less likely to eat too much. Nutrient-rich foods like fruits and dark green vegetables help increase your body's intake of nutrients. Physical exercise is a key component of both maintaining a healthy weight and promoting weight-loss. The goal is to eat the same amount of calories that you burn to maintain a healthy weight. Adults need at least 30 minutes of physical activity most days, while kids need about 60 minutes everyday or most days.

A well-balanced diet includes portions from all food groups including grains, vegetables, fruits, milk, meat and beans, healthy fats and oils, and some discretionary calories. It is important to remember there is no such thing as "one size fits all" when it comes to nutrition. Daily intake depends on many things such as sex, height, weight, and level of physical activity. For more information on your ideal daily nutrition plan visit www.mypyramid.gov.

Grains provide the body with energy and fiber. When choosing grains, it is better to pick whole grains because they are more difficult for the body to digest. This helps control blood sugar levels and may protect against heart disease. Some examples of whole grains include whole-wheat flour, oatmeal, brown rice, whole wheat bread or pasta, and popcorn.

Fruits and vegetables are extremely nutrient-rich foods. Eating large portions of fruits and vegetables can decrease the chances of a heart attack or stroke and may protect against some forms of cancer. The best veggies are those that are dark green or orange such as broccoli, spinach, squash, corn, and sweet potatoes. Common fruits include apples, bananas, strawberries, and grapefruit.

Dairy products help build bones because they provide the body with calcium. The body absorbs calcium through vitamin D, but most people need more vitamin D than is supplied by one glass of milk. It is possible to get calcium through a calcium supplement that includes vitamin D, however, check with your health care provider before trying anything new. Healthy dairy choices are fat-free or low-fat milk, yogurt, and cheese.

The meat and beans category also includes nuts, seeds, tofu, and eggs. These protein rich foods can help reduce the risk of heart disease and provide the body with fiber. Although eggs are known to have high levels of cholesterol, egg whites can be substituted for omelets or baking. The best meat choices are fish and poultry because they contain less saturated fat and more heart-healthy omega-3 fats. When eating red meat, choose lean or low-fat options. The best choices are salmon, tilapia, chicken, almonds, and pistachios.

Did you know that some fats are good for your body? Healthy fats and oils such as olive oil, canola oil, and peanut oil can improve cholesterol levels and may protect the heart from potentially deadly rhythm problems. You can get these healthy fats from other sources too, such as nuts, seeds, avocados, and fatty fish like salmon. Your body also needs some

discretionary calories for physical activities. Most allowances for discretionary calories are very small, but some common uses are salad dressings, whole milk, sugar and butter.

It is important to remember to focus on the quality of the foods you and your family eat rather than the quantity. By emphasizing nutrient-rich choices, you can lower both the portion size and lower your salt intake. Don't forget to exercise! The United States Department of Agriculture offers these "Tips for Families:"

- Set a good example. Be active and invite your family to join you.
- Take the President's Challenge as a family. More information can be found at www.presidentschallenge.org.
- Establish a routine. Set aside time each day as activity time and stick to it!
- Have an activity party. Make the next party centered on a physical activity – try backyard Olympics.
- Set up a home gym. You can use cans for weights and stairs for stair machines.
- Move around. Instead of sitting while watching commercials or talking on the phone, get up and walk around.
- Give activity gifts. Choose gifts that encourage active games like soccer or basketball.

More information, including a meal planner and BMI calculator can be found at www.mypyramid.gov.