



# Eat Wisely



Did you know there are simple actions you can take to eat wisely? By eating wisely, you will maximize your health. Look for a variety of foods including vegetables, fruits and whole grains. Include fat-free or low fat milk products in your diet and try to limit salt, fat, sugar and alcohol.

## How much vegetables, fruits, and whole grains should I eat every day?

- Eat fiber-rich vegetables and fruits from fresh, canned, and frozen sources. Aim for 5–9 servings every day (2 ½ cups of vegetables and 2 ½ cups of fruit per day). Look for fruit without added sugar or syrups and vegetables without added salt, butter, or cream sauces.
- Select vegetables from the different vegetable groups. Choose **dark green** (broccoli, kale, spinach); **orange** (carrot, pumpkin, tomato); **legumes** (kidney, pinto and black beans, lentils, peas); **starchy** (potato, corn, plantain) and **others** (beets, eggplant, artichokes, cabbage). Starchy vegetables contain more calories so eat these less often.
- Eat 3 ounces or more of whole-grain cereals, breads, crackers, rice, or pasta per day. One ounce is about 1 slice of bread, 1 cup of breakfast cereal, or ½ cup of cooked rice or pasta. To see if a food is a whole grain, check the products list of ingredients. Whole grain should be the first ingredient listed. Examples of whole grain are: whole wheat, brown rice, quinoa, buckwheat, whole oats/oatmeal, whole rye, bulgur (cracked wheat), sorghum, whole grain, barley, or wild rice.

## How much salt and potassium should I eat?

- Eat less than 1 teaspoon of salt (about 2,300 mg of sodium) per day. Choose foods with little added salt and prepare foods without adding salt.
- People who are middle-aged or older, have high blood pressure, or who are African American should limit sodium intake to ½ teaspoon of salt (about 1,500 mg of sodium) per day.
- Eat potassium-rich foods, such as vegetables and fruits. Good sources include orange juice, beet greens, white beans, potatoes, tomatoes, tomato paste, and bananas.

## How much dairy, meat, and protein should I eat?

- Eat 3 cups per day of fat-free or low-fat milk or milk products, such as yogurt or soft white (cottage) cheese. If you don't consume milk, choose lactose-free milk products and/or calcium-fortified foods and beverages.

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about your goals.*



- Choose lean meats and poultry. Lean beef cuts include round steaks (top loin, top sirloin, top round) and roasts (round eye, top round, bottom round, round tip, arm, chuck shoulder). Choose cuts labeled **Choice** or **Select**. Avoid **Prime** cuts, which have more fat. Choose cuts with the least visible fat and trim away fat before preparing. Choose extra lean ground beef (at least **90% lean**); 93% or 95% is even better. Drain off fat during cooking.
- Choose a minimum of 8 ounces of seafood each week. Seafood is rich in heart healthy omega-3 fatty acids and includes **fish**, such as salmon, tuna, herring, trout, and tilapia, and **shellfish**, such as shrimp, crab, and oysters.
- You can choose dry beans or peas as a main dish or as part of your meal. Eat 2 or more meatless meals per week. Here are some examples of meatless meals: A meatless meal can be made of chili that has kidney or pinto beans instead of meat. Many soups are also meatless and include split pea, lentil, minestrone or white bean soup. Additional options for meals that do not include meat are black bean enchiladas, rice and beans, veggie or garden burgers, chef salad with garbanzo or kidney beans instead of ham or chicken.
- Choose nuts as a snack, or place them in salads or main dishes. Use nuts to **replace** meat or poultry. Use pine nuts in pesto sauce, slivered almonds on steamed vegetables, toasted peanuts or cashews in vegetable stir-fry, and walnuts or pecans in salads instead of cheese or meat.

### What about fats?

- When you select and prepare meat, poultry, fish, dry beans, and milk or milk products, choose lean (skinless), low-fat, or fat-free varieties. Don't add fat when you cook them.
- Capture flavor and retain nutrients in your food without adding fat or salt with these cooking methods: bake, broil, braise, roast, steam, sauté, poach, grill, or stir-fry.
- Look for foods low in saturated fats, *trans* fats, and cholesterol by using the Nutrition Fact Labels on food products. A Daily Value listed as 5% is low, whereas 20% is high.
- Avoid foods that contain *trans* fats. *Trans* fats are found in commercial baked goods (cookies, crackers, pies). Some restaurants use oils with *trans* fats for frying.
- Eat heart-healthy fats (polyunsaturated and monounsaturated) found in fish, nuts, and most vegetable oils. Limit saturated fats found in high-fat cheeses, high-fat cuts of meat, whole-fat milk, cream, butter, ice cream, palm kernel and coconut oils.
- Eat less cholesterol containing animal-based foods (meats, poultry, egg yolks, whole milk). You should limit egg yolks

to 1 per day. Choose egg whites or pasteurized egg white products as substitutes for whole eggs.

### What about alcoholic beverages?

- If you are female, limit yourself to one drink per day or less. If you are male, limit yourself to two drinks per day or less. Alcohol adds calories to your diet without providing any nutrition.

### What else can I do if I'm over age 50?

- If you are over 50, get enough **vitamin B<sub>12</sub>** by eating fish, meat, poultry, eggs, milk or milk products. The best sources of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> are fortified breakfast cereals, fish/seafood (trout, salmon, sockeye, tuna, clams), and supplements.
- If you are over 50, or if you have dark skin, or if you don't get exposed to enough sunlight, get extra **vitamin D** from vitamin D-fortified foods (cereal, breads, margarine, milk) and/or supplements. Foods high in vitamin D are fish liver oils (cod liver oil); fatty fish (salmon, mackerel, sardines, tuna, eel); shitake mushrooms, and eggs.

### What else can I do if I'm a woman of childbearing age or I'm in my first trimester of pregnancy?

- Eat enough **vitamin C**-rich fruits (orange, orange juice, cantaloupe, strawberries, kiwi, guava, mango) and vegetables (broccoli, asparagus, tomato, tomato juice, potato, green and red peppers). Eating vitamin C-rich foods along with iron-rich foods helps your body to absorb iron.
- Get **iron** from animal sources (turkey, beef, mussels, shrimp, clams, liver). Iron is also found in vegetable sources (enriched cereals, cooked beans, blackstrap molasses, and enriched pasta) but is not as easily absorbed.
- Get enough **folic acid** daily from fortified foods or supplements. Include fortified breakfast cereals, whole-wheat products, leafy green vegetables, asparagus, oranges, liver, eggs, beans (kidney, black, lima), and sunflower seeds.

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- VHA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention: [www.prevention.va.gov/](http://www.prevention.va.gov/)
- The Food Guide Pyramid\*: <http://www.mypyramid.gov/>
- Healthfinder — Eat Healthy\*: <http://www.healthfinder.gov/prevention/ViewTopic.aspx?topicId=21>

\* Indicates that the link leads to a non-VA website. The VA is not responsible for content on the site

If you have questions about how to make healthy living changes, please talk with your health care team.