

Eating Well for a Healthy Weight

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Forget those fad diets. Eating the right foods is the best way to reach and maintain a healthy weight.

We eat to live, yet our eating habits can be hazardous to our health. A typical American diet is packed with too many calories and too much fat, salt and sugar. Fruit, vegetables, whole grains and fiber are often missing in action.

Add to that a sedentary lifestyle, and you have a recipe for heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and other health problems.

Eating a balanced diet can help you get to a healthy weight. But that's only one step. You also need to balance how many calories you eat with how many calories your body needs.

And that's where physical activity comes in. Exercise keeps your heart and body strong, and it burns calories, a key to weight loss. But always check with your doctor before you increase your activity level.

Healthful eating

The Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Agriculture publish guidelines on how to eat to stay healthy and lower the risk for disease.

Some recommendations from their most recent Dietary Guidelines for Americans include:

- Eat foods that are high in nutrition but low in calories. Limit saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol, added sugar, salt and alcohol.
- To limit saturated fats and cholesterol, avoid fatty meats, whole milk, cheeses and fried foods. Choose lean meat, poultry and fish. Remove skin from chicken and trim fat from meat. Limit trans fats by avoiding hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oils.
- Eat more dark green and orange vegetables, fruit, whole grains, legumes, low-fat milk and dairy foods.
- Aim for two cups of fruit and 2 1/2 cups of vegetables a day (based on a 2,000-calorie diet). You may need more or less based on your calorie needs.
- Have a variety of fruits and vegetables each day.
- Half of the grains you eat every day (breads, cereal, pasta) should be whole-grain.

Balance calories with what your body needs, for example:

Gender	Age	Sedentary	Somewhat active	Very active
Male	19 to 30	2,400	2,600-2,800	3,000
	31 to 50	2,220	2,400-2,600	2,800-3,000

	51 and over	2,000	2,200-2,400	2,400-2,800
Female	19 to 30	2,000	2,000-2,200	2,400
	31 to 50	1,800	2,000	2,200
	50 and over	1,600	1,800	2,000-2,200

Healthy weight

- To prevent gradual weight gain over time, reduce calories by 50 to 100 calories a day.
- To lose weight, cut 500 calories or more per day.
- To prevent weight gain, you need 60 minutes or more of moderate to vigorous physical activity on most days of the week. To lose or keep weight off, you need 60 to 90 minutes.
- To prevent several chronic diseases, get 30 minutes of moderate physical activity on most - and preferably all - days of the week.
- Children and teens need one hour of physical activity per day.
- Remember to always check with your doctor before you increase your activity level.

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Sources:

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. 2008 physical activity guidelines for Americans.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Dietary guidelines for Americans, 2010.

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