



# Eating 101

## The Basics of Good Nutrition



AMERICAN  
COLLEGE  
HEALTH  
ASSOCIATION

**Do you want to eat better, but you're concerned that you'll wind up eating lettuce sandwiches alone while your friends go out for burgers and fries? It doesn't have to be that way. You can improve your eating habits by making gradual adjustments to your food choices.**

### Changing Eating Behavior

Whether you're changing your behavior to eat healthier, lose weight, or both, remember that quick, dramatic changes in your diet usually don't last long. For a behavior change to stick, you have to stay with it until it feels natural.

Try to see changing your eating habits as an ongoing process. Take it slow and appreciate that making changes may take some imagination, especially if you're on a limited budget or relying on one eating establishment for most of your meals. Ask for help — a nutritionist, dietitian, or other health care provider in your campus health center can provide nutrition counseling and help you find support.

### Targets for Change

The biggest problem for most students is a diet with too much saturated fat and salt, too many calories, and too little fiber.

#### To Get Less Saturated Fat:

- Choose low- or non-fat yogurt, cheese, and cream cheese and 1% or skim milk.
- Eat more poultry (without the skin), lean red meat (remove excess fat), and fish.
- Choose canned meats/tuna packed in water, not oil.
- Eat fewer processed sandwich meats such as bologna, salami, and hot dogs; choose turkey or ham instead.
- Use less butter and animal fat; choose light margarine and canola and olive oils instead.
- Instead of cream sauces, use tomato or pesto sauces.
- Select fewer fried foods; choose broiled or baked fish or meat and fresh or steamed fruits and vegetables.
- Choose pretzels, low-fat and low-sodium popcorn, and nuts instead of potato chips.

#### To Get Less Sugar:

- Choose plain, low- or non-fat yogurt and add fresh fruit rather than eating commercially prepared fruit yogurt. Choose unsweetened cereal — you can always add a small amount of sugar yourself.
- Drink more water, low-fat or fat-free milk or unsweetened milk alternatives (almond milk, soy milk, rice milk, etc.), no-sugar-added fruit and vegetable juices, and fewer soft drinks and fruit “ades” (lemonade, orangeade, etc.). Note: fruit juice may have beneficial nutrients, but it is still rather high in calories; stick to one 8 oz. serving a day.

#### To Get Less Sodium:

- Flavor your food with spices like garlic, lemon, pepper, cumin, basil, and oregano.
- Choose unsalted (or lightly salted) popcorn, pretzels, and chips, rather than salted snack foods.
- Select more fresh foods and choose low-sodium canned vegetables.
- Cut back on condiments such as soy sauce, ketchup, and pickles.
- Taste your food before you salt it.

#### To Get More Fiber:

- Select more whole or coarse grain products such as oatmeal, wheat bread, and brown rice and fewer white flour products. But don't go by dark color alone — a darker product may be the result of adding molasses, not using whole or coarse grains. Read the label — choose bread that has two or more grams of dietary fiber per slice and look for the word “whole” preceding the grain (e.g., whole wheat, whole rye)
- Eat more legumes such as split peas, lentils, and kidney, pinto, and black beans.
- Eat more fresh or steamed vegetables and fruits (with skins) and fewer boiled, fried, breaded, or canned vegetables and fruits.

### Back to Basics

Your body needs more than 50 nutrients to meet its physical needs. To get these nutrients, eat a variety of foods every day.

**Bread, cereal, rice, and pasta** supply carbohydrates, vitamins (especially B vitamins), iron, and fiber. For the best nutritional value, select whole grain products.

**Fruits and vegetables** are a valuable source of carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and fiber. Aim to include at least one serving of food high in vitamin A (leafy dark green or deep orange/yellow fruits and vegetables) and at least one serving of food high in vitamin C (citrus fruits, tomatoes, strawberries, and bell peppers) per day.

**Milk, yogurt, and cheese** contain calcium, protein, and vitamins (especially vitamins A and D), important for energy and strong bones and teeth.

**Meat, poultry, fish, dry beans, eggs, and nuts** provide amino acids, vitamins (especially B vitamins), and minerals (especially iron) that are important for energy metabolism, cell repair, and growth.

**Fats, oils, and sweets** in small amounts help with the absorption of vitamins A, D, E, and K and are important for cell membrane structure. Foods in this group should comprise the smallest part of your diet. Fats and oils occur naturally in meats, dairy products, nuts, nut butters, seeds, avocados, and olives.

## Eating Better on a Tight Budget

Eating nutritiously may be difficult if you're on a tight budget, but it isn't impossible. To make it easier, use basic shopping tips — check online or your local paper for sales and coupons, shop in stores that use unit pricing, and read labels carefully. In addition, try some of the ideas below and check with your campus health center for more tips.

- Comparison shop, especially for your dietary staples. Check out different stores and brands.
- Take advantage of sales, but only for products that are healthful and packaged in useful quantities.
- Buy in bulk, but only those products you can store properly before they go stale or spoil.
- Avoid impulse buying — use a shopping list and don't shop when you're hungry.
- Cut back on alcohol and expensive, processed snacks and convenience foods.
- Don't assume that "natural" or "organic" foods are inexpensive or high in nutritional value.
- Consider using a standard vitamin and mineral supplement in addition to — not as substitutes for — balanced meals.
- Try to avoid vending machines. Nutritious snacks and juices are generally less expensive in grocery stores.
- Make your own casseroles, stews, desserts, and salads.
- Use less expensive protein sources — more legumes and less meat, frozen rather than fresh fish, and chicken parts rather than chicken breasts. Mix cooked legumes with leftover meat and poultry.
- Choose fresh and frozen vegetables more often than canned vegetables, but compare prices between fresh and frozen produce to get the best buy.
- Spend time finding inexpensive local restaurants that serve nutritious meals. Choose to eat half of the entree and take the other half home to eat for lunch or dinner the next day.

## Snacks

Incorporate healthful snacks into your day. Eating every 3–5 hours is a good way to prevent overeating at meal times, as well as keep your metabolism and energy level high. Before you choose a snack, figure out if you want something crunchy or smooth, cold or hot, liquid or solid, and for nibbling or eating in one sitting. Then select a snack from the "Healthful Snacks" list included in this brochure. But remember, if you are cutting calories, quantity matters even when choosing healthful snacks.

### A NOTE FOR WOMEN

Many women don't get enough calcium or iron. A calcium shortage increases the risk of developing osteoporosis or "brittle bones." Insufficient iron can lead to general fatigue and anemia.

Make calcium- and iron-rich foods a regular part of your diet. Good calcium sources include low-fat dairy products, canned sardines, canned salmon with bones, spinach, and broccoli. Good iron sources include liver, lean red meat, dark green vegetables, oysters, whole grain products, eggs, beans, and dried fruits.

## A Word on Alcohol

Beer, wine, and hard liquor have more calories gram for gram than carbohydrates or protein and almost as many calories as fat. And these calories give you almost no nutrients. Try drinking water, sugar-free beverages, or 100% fruit juice instead.

## The Salad Bar

To get the best health value from the salad bar, heap on the fresh vegetables and fruits while limiting croutons, crumbled bacon and other meats, and cheeses. Try to stick with oil and vinegar salad dressings and/or light dressings. Take very little of the prepared salads, such as cole slaw and potato salad.

If the salad is your meal, include some protein such as cottage cheese and plant-based fats like nuts or seeds.

## Fast Food

Fast foods are usually loaded with salt, fat, and calories. But you can make some healthful choices. Begin by selecting fast food restaurants that offer salad bars and broiled foods. Choose foods with less sodium, fat, and sugar. For example:

- Choose baked potatoes rather than french fries at least every other time you eat out. Go easy on sour cream, butter, and cheese; try plain, low-fat yogurt or cottage cheese instead.
- Order pizza with extra vegetables rather than extra cheese or meat. Try Canadian bacon or ham instead of pepperoni or other fatty meat toppings.
- Choose barbecue, sweet and sour, and honey sauces instead of ranch or tartar sauces.
- Avoid "super size" and "value meals."

Don't assume "light" menu items really have less sugar, fat, or sodium. Some ready-made salads, for instance, are loaded with fatty, salty ingredients. And keep in mind that a plain burger often has fewer calories and less fat than breaded and fried fish or chicken.

## If You Need To Lose Weight

If you think you need to lose weight, first check with a nutritionist, dietitian, or other health care provider on campus or in the community. Consulting with a professional will help you get a more realistic idea of whether you need to lose weight and how to go about it.

Despite the claims made for fad diets, losing weight and keeping it off is not easy. Work with a health professional to put together a plan that incorporates the three building blocks for successful, sustained weight loss:

- Eat balanced meals and snacks.
- Establish a regular exercise routine.
- Make changes in your behavior so that you eat in response to physical hunger and fullness rather than your emotional state.

## HEALTHFUL SNACKS

- low-fat, low-sugar yogurt
- reduced fat, part-skim mozzarella or ricotta cheese
- fresh fruits and vegetables (with low-fat dips if desired)
- toasted whole grain English muffins, bagels, and bread
- rice cakes with low-fat cream cheese or a small amount of peanut butter or other nut butter
- high-fiber flatbreads and crackers
- unbuttered and unsalted popcorn (try salt substitutes such as garlic powder)
- dry-roasted, unsalted nuts
- unsalted seeds, breadsticks, and pretzels
- raisins and other dried fruits
- low-sodium soup
- cocoa made with low-fat milk
- herbal teas
- baked fruits without sugar
- water-based sherbet, ice milk, or sorbet
- low-fat frozen yogurt
- skim milk, buttermilk, or soy milk
- 100% fruit and vegetable juices

## For More Information

### Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

(800) 877-1600

[www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)

### Food and Nutrition Information Center

<https://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic>

### U.S. Department of Agriculture

[www.choosemyplate.gov/college](http://www.choosemyplate.gov/college)

### American College Health Association

(410) 859-1500 | [www.acha.org](http://www.acha.org)

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