



HARVARD
MEDICAL SCHOOL

The Harvard Medical School 6-Week Plan for Healthy Eating



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Dear Reader,

Confusing messages about diet and nutrition are rampant. Whether you're reading a magazine, watching TV, searching the Internet, or talking to a family member, you will likely hear different views about what kind of diet is the healthiest. Many sources will tout extreme diets that require eating lots of something (meat or raw foods, for example) or very little of something else (carbohydrates—perish the thought). The problem is, there is very little long-term research to back up any of these extreme approaches.

By contrast, there is a great deal of solid evidence pointing to the benefits of a more balanced diet. Decades of research findings have contributed to a growing consensus that healthy patterns of eating are those that emphasize a range of minimally processed foods, such as fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, nuts, and fish, along with healthy oils. Conceptually, such a diet is pretty simple.

That doesn't mean it's easy to put into practice—at least, not at first. Many times each day, you make decisions about when to eat, what to eat, and how much. Even if you have the knowledge and desire to eat healthfully, it's challenging to translate intentions into actions. This report is designed to give you practical tools to choose as healthfully as possible. Whether you need a full-on nutrition makeover or you're just looking to tweak your eating habits, it will give you ideas to make your meals healthier.

Why should you bother? Here's why. Research shows that your food choices profoundly influence your health and longevity. A healthy diet can slash your risks for major chronic diseases, such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and some forms of cancer. The right dietary choices also cultivate the good bacteria in your digestive tract that can help ward off a variety of intestinal problems—and possibly even influence your weight and mood. About half of Americans have at least one preventable chronic disease that is linked to poor dietary habits or to a lack of physical activity. You don't need to be one of them.

This report distills the latest nutrition science into a simple, clear picture of a healthful dietary pattern that can be adapted to fit a wide variety of cultural backgrounds and lifestyles. It translates that information into practical steps. It helps you analyze your diet and set goals, then create a week-by-week plan to make them a reality. We'll equip you with recipes and tips for meals and snacks that are healthful and hassle-free. If you stick with it, this six-week plan will improve your quality of life.

Enjoy the journey!

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What is “healthy” eating?

Are you confused about nutrition? You’re not alone. News headlines can make it seem as if views on good nutrition are changing all the time. Common ingredients like wheat are suddenly deemed “bad,” while foods that were once demonized, like coffee, are now accepted as good. As one fad diet after another grabs the spotlight, conflicting information can make it difficult to distinguish scientifically backed nutrition advice from marketing and hype. Gimmicks abound. And extreme diets can make it seem as though you have to purchase specific foods or only eat at certain times of day to stay healthy. It’s enough to make you give up trying.

But here’s the good news. Decades of scientific study have bolstered the understanding of what constitutes a healthful diet, and that’s led to a growing consensus among nutrition scientists. Although the media presents differing results from studies as flip-flops, it’s more accurate to see individual studies as puzzle pieces that are coming together to form a clearer picture—and that picture shows that eating wisely is not complicated. What’s more, a healthful diet can be flexible, affordable, and adaptable to different lifestyles and health conditions. This chapter will

elaborate on just what that good eating pattern is.

That said, improving your diet takes some effort—and trying to overhaul it in one fell swoop is simply unrealistic. Habits are hard to break. And even if you want to make healthy changes, you may not know how. That’s where this report comes in. It offers practical, doable steps that you can tackle one at a time. It includes recipes and shopping lists, along with tips for setting goals, keeping a food diary, becoming label-savvy, and tracking your food intake to reveal overall eating patterns you may not be aware of. It helps you tweak your choices—making better sandwiches or salads, for example. It shows you how to sneak in more vegetables, choose more healthy meals at restaurants, and change the external cues in your environment to help you make the changes you want. Once your habits start to change, they’ll become routine and feel less challenging.

While the primary goal of this report is eating for optimal health, many people change their diets because they want to lose weight. The good news is that a healthy diet *does* contribute to weight loss, and that the loss you achieve through healthy eating is more sustainable than what you can get by going on



The healthiest eating patterns include a lot of minimally processed foods, such as fruits, vegetables, and legumes.

a fad diet. But even if you don't lose weight, you can improve your risk factors for heart disease and other conditions by making smart food choices.

Are you ready to begin? This chapter is a good place to start. It gives the latest wisdom on nutrition.

7 practical steps for a healthful diet

Healthy eating isn't as complicated as some people make it out to be. At the most basic level, it boils down to three easy rules: eat a varied diet with more minimally processed plant-based foods; eat fewer animal-based foods; and eat only as much food as your body needs. What that means is the following:

- A good eating pattern is rich in minimally processed fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, paired with healthy sources of protein and fats. It emphasizes plant-based foods—preferably a broad variety of them to provide a greater range of nutrients.
- Protein should come primarily from legumes, nuts, fish, and skinless poultry.
- Fats should come from vegetable oils and foods like avocados, nuts, and fatty fish. (Despite messages in the media, the saturated fat in red meat and dairy products has not been exonerated.)
- Red meat should be eaten sparingly—and processed or cured meats like ham, hot dogs, and corned beef are not on the menu at all.
- Equally important: cut back on refined carbohydrates (basically, anything made with sugar or refined flour).

Later in this chapter, we delve into specifics, but below you'll find some overarching principles to help guide you toward this healthy ideal. If you keep these principles in mind, you will be well on your way to improving your diet. As you work your way through the six-week plan, it may help to review this list periodically.

1 Eat more unprocessed or minimally processed foods. If you do, you'll naturally consume foods that have the amounts and combinations of fiber and nutrients that nature intended. Many factory-made foods are stripped of natural fiber and nutrients and filled with unwelcome extras: added salt, sugar, and fat. Even if some vitamins and miner-



Your food choices profoundly influence your health and longevity. A healthy diet can slash your risks for chronic diseases, including heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and certain types of cancer.

als are added back in, processed foods can't replicate the complex nutrient content of natural foods. For example, a whole apple comes with fiber and a wealth of nutrients in the skin that are missing when you drink apple juice or eat processed fruit snacks made with apples. Drinking fruit juice is *not* the equivalent of eating fruit.

2 Go for novelty. You may assume good nutrition is boring because you can think of only a few kinds of healthful foods. To get a broader range of disease-fighting nutrients, try new vegetables, fruits, and grains. Farro, bulgur, and quinoa are alternatives to rice. Novel kinds of beans, fruits, and vegetables abound. When choosing vegetables and fruits, aim for a variety of colors, which will ensure you get a wide array of beneficial antioxidants and phytonutrients naturally present in these foods. Unsure how to cook these new items? Experiment with new recipes that rely less on meat and make use of herbs and spices for flavor. (For suggestions, see "Cooking kickoff: Recipes for success," page 46.)

3 Cover all your bases. Every day, strive to eat three servings of fruit, three to four servings of vegetables, some lean protein, some whole grains, healthy oils, some nonfat or low-fat dairy, and a serving of nuts or legumes. At each meal, look at your plate: about one-half should be fruits and vegetables, one-quarter lean protein (fish, poultry, beans, or tofu), and one-quarter whole grains. (To see what this looks like, see Figure 1, page 5.)



You can't survive without water. Among other things, it aids digestion, prevents constipation, normalizes blood pressure, stabilizes your heartbeat, and maintains your electrolyte balance.

4 Stay hydrated. Because water is part of many foods, such as fruit, tea, and soup, most people get sufficient liquid without making a special effort. Generally, your sense of thirst tells you when and how much to drink. That said, it can be helpful throughout the day to sip water or another no-calorie liquid as an alternative to snacking. As you increase your fiber intake with whole-grain foods, water helps ferry it smoothly through your digestive tract, protecting you from constipation. Drinking 4 to 6 cups of water or other low-calorie liquids a day is a reasonable and healthy goal.

5 Keep protein portions modest. Most Americans consume more protein than they need, and many common sources of protein (such as meat and dairy products) also contain saturated fat and are high in calories. Recommended portions for protein-rich foods are smaller than you might expect (and much smaller than what you'd typically get in a restaurant). For proteins like meat, poultry, and fish, 3 ounces for lunch and slightly more for dinner is a good goal. Keep in mind that 4 ounces of meat is about the size of a deck of cards. For beans, the standard serving size is about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of cooked beans, which is about half the size of a baseball. (For more on lunch and dinner, see "Week 3: A healthy break for lunch," page 27, and "Week 4: A dinner makeover," page 33.)

6 Aim for at least two servings of fish each week. Fish such as cod, haddock, and tilapia are healthy sources of protein, and some species—especially salmon, anchovies, herring, mackerel, and sardines—are excellent sources of omega-3 fats, which

are good for your heart. Fresh, frozen, or canned fish are all fine (be aware, however, of the high sodium content in canned fish). Large, predatory deep-ocean fish (such as swordfish, shark, king mackerel, and bluefin tuna) and some shellfish (especially clams, shrimp, and scallops) have a higher mercury content and should be eaten only on rare occasions, if at all.

7 Plan ahead for healthy snacking. When you grab a snack on the spur of the moment, you are more likely to choose tempting sweets and unhealthy processed foods that are packaged for convenience. Instead, plan healthy snacks ahead of time so you don't eat whatever is handy or in the vending machine. Avoid sugary drinks and their empty calories. (See "Week 5: Sensible snacking," page 39.)

Harvard's Healthy Eating Plate

Another simple rule to keep in mind is to look at the food on your plate before eating and see how much space fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and protein occupy. You may find that you need to start reimagining what a standard meal should look like. Over the years, many of us have become used to thinking of the hunk of meat or the pile of pasta in the center of our plates as "dinner." The small salad or vegetables on the side were seen as extras, not the star attraction. Nutritionists have worked to overturn that view.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) uses MyPlate—a graphic representation of the ideal dinner—to educate people about nutrition. It gives a large role to vegetables, fruits, and whole grains, but it also misses some key information. Nutrition experts at Harvard developed Harvard's Healthy Eating Plate as an alternative to the USDA plate. It's meant to be an easy and informative tool to help you understand how to make healthful choices and eat a balanced diet, but with more detailed, science-based recommendations.

Of course, not every meal will look like the Healthy Eating Plate (most of us don't eat vegetables at breakfast), but your meals over the course of the day can add up to this goal. Here's what's on the plate:

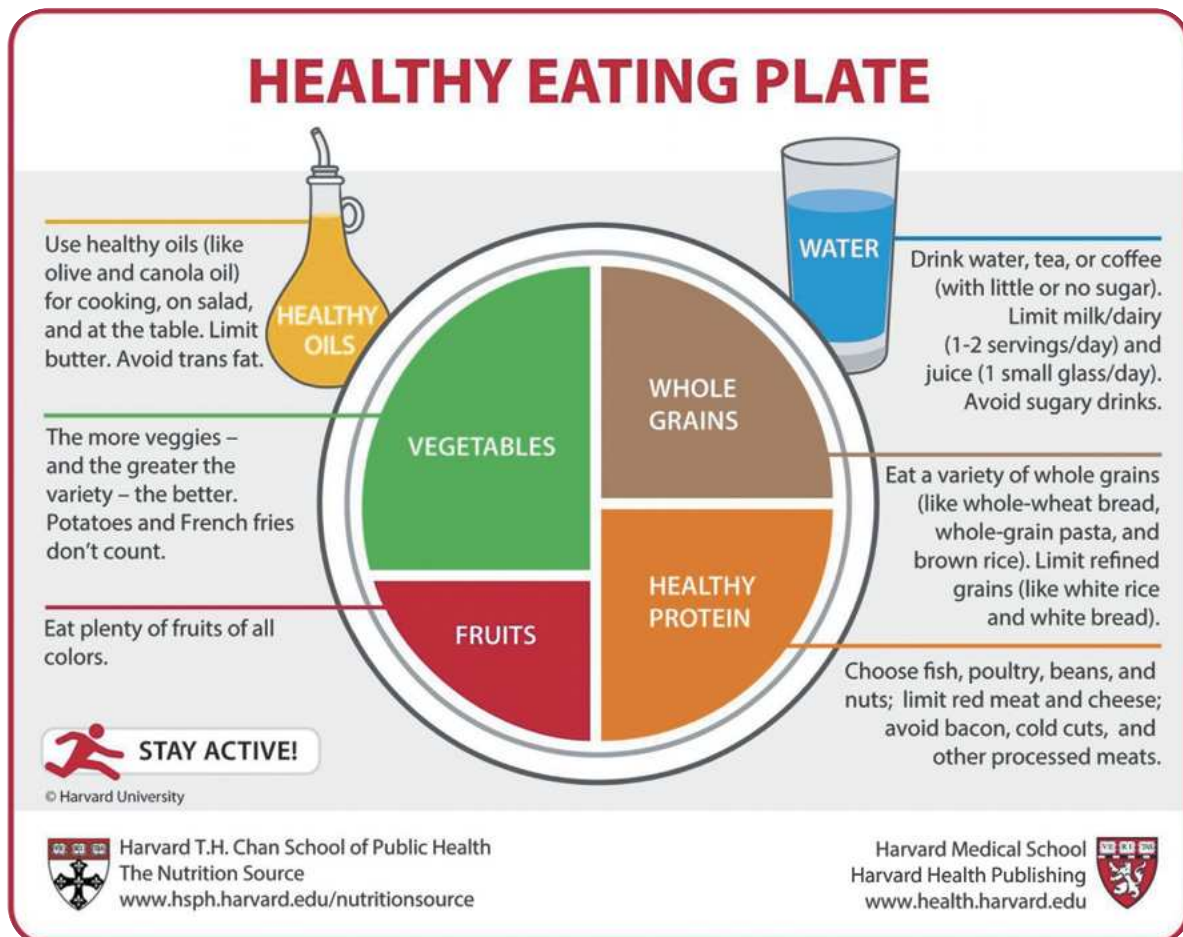
- Fully half of the plate contains fruits and vegetables. Most Americans don't get enough vegetables, so the more you can add, the better, and aim for a variety

of colors and types. For these purposes, potatoes and French fries don't count as vegetables.

- A quarter of the plate is whole grains—not just any grain, as in the USDA version. Choosing whole grains over refined grains can help curb appetite, lower risk of diabetes, and lower “bad” cholesterol levels.
- The final quarter is healthful sources of protein, like fish, beans, nuts, seeds, and poultry. High-fat meats and processed meats don't appear here.
- The bottle on the left side is a reminder to use healthy oils, like olive and canola, in cooking, on salads, and at the table. Limit butter, which is high in saturated fat.
- The glass on the right side is a reminder to drink low- or no-calorie liquids like water, coffee, and tea; limit milk and juice; and avoid sugary drinks.
- At the bottom is a reminder to stay active for good health and weight control.

People who follow these guidelines reduce their risk of a number of chronic diseases that can shorten life and diminish quality of life. Research following the diets of more than 100,000 health professionals found that men whose diets most closely followed these guidelines lowered their overall risk of major diseases by 20% over eight to 12 years, compared with men whose diets scored lowest on the healthy eating recommendations. Women in the study who followed the guidelines lowered their overall risk by 11% compared with those who scored lowest. And as the women enrolled in the study have aged, those following the guidelines were less likely to experience impaired physical function. Both men and women who most closely followed the recommendations cut their likelihood of heart disease by one-third or more, and even people who were already taking medications for high cholesterol or high blood pressure benefited.

Figure 1: Harvard Healthy Eating Plate



The Dietary Guidelines for Americans

Every five years, the USDA and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services update the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. A committee of scientists analyzes reams of nutritional research as it relates to national health problems, such as our high rates of obesity, cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes. The scientists debate the evidence and ultimately make recommendations that distill the latest nutritional research into practical advice.

An updated version of the guidelines was released in 2020. The 2020–2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans provides advice that's very similar to what you will read in this report. The guidelines recommend adopting any of the following three healthful eating plans in order to reduce disease risk, combat obesity, and meet nutritional needs for optimal health:

- a healthy U.S.-style dietary pattern, which focuses on plenty of fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains with moderate amounts of lean meat and poultry, seafood, low-fat dairy products, and nuts and seeds
- a healthy vegetarian-style pattern, which includes lots of fruits, vegetables, legumes (including soy foods), whole grains, and low-fat dairy
- a healthy Mediterranean-style pattern, which includes a bounty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, fish, nuts, seeds, and olive oil.

The overall guidelines can be adapted to other cultural eating patterns. For instance, Asian diets may

emphasize brown rice instead of whole-grain pasta, and leafy greens such as bok choy and Chinese broccoli instead of salad greens and collards. What's important is what they have in common. They all focus on whole and minimally processed plant foods, such as whole grains, legumes, nuts, seeds, and healthy fats. Below, you'll find some of the main take-home messages from the Dietary Guidelines.

Foods to increase

Let's start with the foods that you *should* be eating—the ones that ought to be the primary focus of your eating pattern. These may not be what you're used to consuming, but, over time, you will find that such fare is actually more satisfying.

- Increase your vegetable and fruit intake. You will find some delicious recipes at the end of this report to get you started (see “Cooking kickoff: Recipes for success,” page 46). Adults should consume about 2½ to 3 cups of vegetables and 1½ to 2 cups of fruit per day. A 2022 report from the CDC found that only about one in 10 Americans eats enough fruits and vegetables. A 2017 study in *JAMA* found that eating more produce could help prevent chronic diseases that are leading causes of death in this country (see “10 life-or-death dietary factors,” page 7).
- Also focus on increasing the variety of produce you consume. Eating a broad range of fruits and vegetables—especially dark green, red, and orange vegetables and fruits—will ensure that you also take in a broad range of nutrients.
- Make sure that at least half the grains you consume are whole grains (such as brown rice, barley, quinoa, or whole-grain bread with 100% whole-wheat flour) rather than refined grains (such as white bread and white rice).
- Make healthy protein choices, including seafood (at least twice a week), poultry, and eggs (one or two per week). Choose more plant-based proteins, such as beans, peas, lentils, nuts, seeds, and soy foods, including tofu, tempeh, and soy milk.
- Use healthy vegetable oils (such as olive, canola, corn, safflower, avocado, or sunflower) to replace solid fats where possible.
- Choose foods that provide more potassium, fiber,

What about plant-based “meats”?

Veggie burgers and other meat substitutes have been around for a long time. But newer products like the Impossible Burger and Beyond Burger are raising the bar with products that really capture the taste and texture of meat. These products have similar levels of protein, vitamins, and minerals compared with meat, but they are also heavily processed and can be high in saturated fat and sodium. So, nutritionally, they're not a good choice for frequent eating.

The healthiest choice? Make your own easy veggie burgers with mashed cooked or canned beans, an egg, finely chopped onions and peppers, a little flour or breadcrumbs, and your favorite seasonings.

calcium, and vitamin D—nutrients that many Americans don’t get enough of. These foods include vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts, seeds, seafood, and milk and milk products.

- Consider adding fermented foods, which contain probiotics (live microbes that aid digestion and may provide other health benefits as well; see “Marvelous microbes,” page 8). Fermented foods that deliver “good” bacteria include yogurt, kefir, sauerkraut, and kimchi.

Foods to reduce

The idea that you will snap your fingers and eliminate all sources of unhealthful ingredients from your diet overnight is unrealistic. However, the following guidelines give you some targets to aim for.

- Reduce daily sodium intake to less than 2,300 milligrams (mg) to help control your blood pressure. Further reduction to 1,500 mg per day may be even more effective and is recommended for people who have high blood pressure (hypertension). Avoiding processed food is one way to limit salt intake, since 80% of the salt in the average diet is not from what you add in your kitchen or at the table, but what is already contained in packaged, prepared, and processed foods. When cooking, use spices and herbs rather than salt to make food more flavorful.
- Consume less than 10% of calories from saturated fats. These fats are found in animal products such as butter, cream, cheese, fatty meats, and tropical oils, such as palm, palm kernel, and coconut oil. Instead, try replacing them with monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, such as vegetable oils, olives, nuts, seeds, and avocados. Note: Red meat, such as beef, pork, and lamb, tends to be high in saturated fat, so it’s best to limit your consumption of these. According to the American Institute for Cancer Research, you should also avoid cured and processed meats, such as ham, sausage, and bacon.
- Limit added sugars—that is, sugar added in the factory to processed foods—to no more than 10% of total calories daily (about 50 grams, or 12.5 teaspoons of sugar, for someone consuming 2,000 calories a day). The American Heart Association has criticized the current federal guidelines for not

10 life-or-death dietary factors

Your food choices help determine your risk of death from disease. A major study in *JAMA* found that nearly half of deaths in the United States from heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes are associated with eating either too much or too little of 10 components listed below.

The foods and ingredients we need to eat less of—in other words, those that are linked to disease if consumed in excess—are

- sodium
- processed meats
- sugar-sweetened beverages
- unprocessed red meats.



The foods and ingredients we need to emphasize—that is, those that are associated with disease if we don’t get enough—are

- nuts and seeds
- seafood that contains omega-3 fats
- vegetables
- fruits
- whole grains
- polyunsaturated fats (as a replacement for saturated fats).

going even further; it recommends no more than 6 teaspoons of added sugar (24 grams, which is 100 calories) per day for women and no more than 9 teaspoons (36 grams, or 150 calories) per day for men. For reference, a can of soda has 9 teaspoons (39 grams) of added sugar.

- Limit the consumption of foods that contain refined grains, such as white flour and white rice, especially products that also contain high amounts of saturated fat, added sugars, and sodium.
- If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation. The Dietary Guidelines advocate no more than one drink per day for women and two drinks per day for men. (One drink is about 5 ounces of wine, 12 ounces of beer, or 1½ ounces of spirits.) Those who are pregnant or under the legal drinking age should not drink at all.

Maintaining a healthy weight

Although many people want to lose weight so they can squeeze into their skinny jeans again or look better for a special event, managing your weight is also an

intrinsic part of good health—and, as you age, pounds tend to creep on. With that in mind, here are some tools to help you incorporate weight control into your plan.

Don't count calories, but be aware of them

In general, calorie counting is not the best approach to weight management. When you rely solely on counting calories, you never learn to listen to your body's hunger and satiety signals, which can be a powerful tool in helping to keep off unwanted pounds. That's not to say calories don't matter. But there's no need to obsess about them. Instead, it can be more useful to have a general idea of how many calories you require to reach your goal—and which foods are more likely to help you get there. Think of it as calorie awareness versus calorie counting.

Of course, people's caloric needs differ depending on many factors, including age, body size, activity level, and metabolism. Most women need 1,600 to

2,000 calories per day to maintain their weight, while most men require 2,000 to 2,400 calories per day. Your own optimal intake may be more or less.

In lieu of calorie counting, one approach is to simply limit your portions, which automatically has the effect of limiting calories. Standard servings are generally much smaller than those dished out in restaurants or even what you're used to at home. In the next chapter, at the start of your healthy eating journey, you will learn to measure servings for your food diary. However, unless you're paying attention, your portions may creep up over time. After a month or so, measure your food again as a refresher course on standard serving sizes and to make sure you're staying on track. Note that there is no need to reduce your vegetable portions—you can eat as many vegetables as you like every day.

It also helps to pay attention to the sources of your calories. In one randomized controlled trial in which people's food intake was rigorously monitored, those

Marvelous microbes

Your gut is home to about 100 trillion bacteria (5 pounds worth), collectively known as your gut microbiome. A healthy and varied bacterial ecosystem is important for proper gastrointestinal function and for maintaining robust health in general—for example, helping to prevent infections and producing certain vitamins. It may even affect your mood. The gut is known as the “second brain” because it produces many of the same chemical messengers your brain does. In fact, scientists estimate that 90% of mood-enhancing serotonin is made in the digestive tract. The gut microbiome also appears to help regulate appetite.

Your gut microbiome is largely established early in life, but the foods you eat also affect it. There are several approaches to helping it thrive.

Eat more probiotic foods. Probiotic foods—such as yogurt, sauerkraut, miso, kimchi, or kombucha—are

fermented foods that were formed through the action of beneficial bacteria. Unless processing destroys the bacteria, they remain in the foods. Cheese that has been aged and not heated afterward (such as Swiss cheese, Gouda, or Gruyere) contains some probiotics. The drink kefir is a rich source, but it is also calorie-dense, so don't drink too much. Yogurt is perhaps the leading source of probiotics in the American diet—but look for the words “live and active cultures” on the label, because processing (especially heating) can kill them.

Eat more prebiotic foods. These are foods that feed the beneficial bacteria that are already in your gut, thereby helping to keep the colony healthy. Prebiotic foods include unprocessed plant-based foods that are high in fiber. Foods containing a soluble fiber called inulin are particularly good bacteria-boosters; these include asparagus, garlic, onions, bananas, and chicory.



Reduce foods that harm the good bacteria. While prebiotics nurture the good bacteria, other foods actively harm them. Studies have found that a high-fat Western-style diet—which is high in red meat, sugar, processed foods, and saturated fat—reduces certain types of common beneficial bacteria in the gut.

What about probiotic supplements? It's not clear whether these pills—which usually contain just one or a few strains of bacteria—can have a beneficial effect. Study results have been mixed—and one recent study found that some people may be resistant to being colonized by bacteria from supplements.

who ate highly processed foods consumed more calories and gained an average of 2 pounds over a two-week period, while people eating unprocessed foods *lost* an average of 2 pounds. All the participants were told to eat as little or as much as they wanted. The highly processed diet led to greater consumption.

Outwit your cravings

You may have good intentions to limit your portions, but what happens when your appetite or cravings kick in? Your appetite is influenced by more than hunger. It's also influenced by the sight of food, the ambience of the room, and what the people around you are eating. That's why it's important to pay attention to external cues that tend to trigger overeating, like the sight of snack food.

It's also helpful to pay attention to your body's internal cues. Do you eat when you're actually hungry, or when you're bored? Do you tend to stop as soon as you're satiated, or keep eating until your plate is clean? Your own body and emotional state will serve as a better guide than a calorie count. Notice whether you tend to eat more in response to stress, anxiety, or nervousness, and think about strategies to avoid overeating when those moods strike.

Here are some ways to counteract common eating cues:

Hide snack foods—or better yet, don't buy them. People joke about the “see food” diet—you see it, you eat it. But it's not really a joke. You do tend to eat more snack foods if you see them lying around. If you have snack foods, put them in the back of a drawer, where you won't be tempted by the sight of them.

Serve in the kitchen. To discourage second helpings, pre-serve your portions onto each plate in the kitchen rather than bringing serving bowls to the dining table. Keeping the remaining food off the table makes it less likely you'll reach for more.

Don't multitask. Keep meals free of distractions: don't drive, watch TV, read, or check email while eating. All of these can result in mindless eating. Instead, find a quiet spot and just sit down and eat (see “Eat mindfully,” above right). Multitasking while eating makes it easy to consume more food without even

Eat mindfully

Mindful eating is a tool to prevent overeating while boosting the enjoyment of food. It's a simple strategy that asks you to slow down and savor your food.

Try this: After you take the first bite of your next meal, put your fork or spoon down. Don't prepare to eat the next bite right away, but focus instead on what's in your mouth at the moment. Chew slowly, and tune in to the taste and texture of the food. Smell the meal that's in front of you, and notice its color and appearance. You might even think about the steps that brought the food to your plate: the sun and water that helped the plants grow, and the farmers, drivers, and laborers who brought it you.

These steps can help put the brakes on your eating velocity, which in turn will give your brain a chance to receive the message that your stomach is full. When you feel full, stop eating. In addition, mindful eating can boost your enjoyment of your meal, which in turn often means you'll be satisfied with less. Even if you don't eat an entire meal like this, make a habit of eating three bites of each food on the plate mindfully during each meal. This acts like a speed bump and brings your awareness to what you're eating.



realizing it—while you're reading or working on the computer, for example. In contrast, mindful eating—paying attention to what you're eating, while savoring the flavors, aromas, and texture of your food—can help you enjoy your meals more and eat less. (That goes for snacks, too.) If you're eating on your feet, you're not paying attention to your food.

Learn to distinguish hunger from cravings. Next time your body is calling out for chocolate or chips, ask yourself if you're truly hungry. Physical hunger has a variety of indicators, including fatigue, light-headedness, or an emptiness you feel in the pit of your stomach. A craving is more likely to be a sense of discomfort or agitation in your mouth or your head. Hunger disappears with any food you eat, while a craving is satisfied only by the particular food you're longing for. If you've recently eaten—and especially if the urge is for a specific comfort food like ice cream—it's more likely to be a craving. If so, try distracting

yourself. Go for a walk, call a friend, or put on some music and dance around the house. Most cravings go away in 15 or 20 minutes. Hunger doesn't. It only gets stronger.

Pace yourself. It's standard advice to chew slowly, so that you'll feel full after eating less food than if you ate quickly. Eating slowly doesn't always work, but when it does, the reason has as much to do with the brain as with the gut. Scientists have known for some time that the fullness of your stomach is only part of what makes you feel satisfied after a meal; the brain must also receive a series of signals from digestive hormones secreted by the gastrointestinal tract. The complex signals that control appetite are only partially understood,

but by eating too quickly, you might not give this intricate hormonal cross-talk system enough time to work.

Keep physically active

Exercise is not as effective as diet when it comes to weight loss, because you generally work off fewer calories than you think—and it's so easy to put them back on again by consuming an energy bar or drink afterward. But exercise is essential for good health, and it plays a major role in helping you *maintain* weight loss.

There are many reasons why exercising helps you keep off pounds. Not only does it burn calories, it also nudges up your metabolic rate—an important factor when you consider that losing weight generally

Eat for a healthy environment

If you follow the guidelines in this chapter, your health will benefit—and so will the health of our planet. In fact, your diet may be one of the most powerful ways that you as an individual can affect the environment.

A meat-heavy diet requires a lot more resources—and creates a lot more pollution—than a plant-based diet like the one recommended in this report. On average, it takes 11 times more fossil fuel energy to produce animal protein than an equivalent amount of plant protein. Meat and dairy production account for the majority of greenhouse gas emissions in the food industry, and 24% of greenhouse gas emissions globally. By contrast, a plant-based, whole-foods diet uses fewer resources—such as land, water, and fuel—and creates less air and water pollution and waste. One study found that if meat and dairy consumption stopped altogether, we'd be able to feed the world with 76% less farmland and could lower greenhouse gas emissions from food by up to 73%.

The United Nations Environment Programme now endorses a global shift toward a more plant-based diet to curb climate change and environmental degradation. In addition, these measures will help make your meals more sustainable:

Purchase more foods that are grown closer to home.

This reduces the number of miles your food has to travel to get to your plate. Also eat more foods that are in season, so that they are not trucked or flown in from faraway places.

Avoid food waste. Purchase the amount of food you really need, and make an effort to use what's already in your fridge and pantry. Every time you throw away food, the gallons of water, fossil fuels, and agricultural inputs used to grow the food go in the trash, too.



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Pay attention to packaging. We have a habit of overpackaging food, which generates a huge amount of trash. When possible, avoid overpackaged convenience foods. Fortunately, there are many reusable products available, including grocery bags, food wraps and storage bags, utensils, and straws.

Don't use bottled water. Bottled water uses fossil fuels to produce the plastic bottles, as well as to transport them. And countless bottles end up in landfills.

Grow your own food. Even if it's just a tomato plant or a pot of basil, try to produce some of your own food to reduce food transportation.

Buy organic. Organic farming can be beneficial to the environment by avoiding synthetic herbicides, pesticides, and fungicides that can harm wildlife, and using methods that keep soil fertile without the use of polluting synthetic fertilizers. Organic foods are more expensive, however, and research does not support that they have a superior nutrient profile, so nutrition is not the main reason to go organic.

depresses your metabolic rate. What's more, exercise enhances your gut bacteria, which play a role in regulating appetite (see "Marvelous microbes," page 8). And it reduces stress and improves your mood, helping you dial back on emotional eating.

Aerobic exercise, such as walking or running, plays an obvious role in calorie burn. But strength training is also important. Muscle cells burn far more calories than fat cells do. As you age, you lose muscle mass, explaining why, at midlife, you may find that you have to eat less and exercise more just to stay in the same shape. Regular strength training sessions—aim for at least two per week—can help you maintain muscle mass, stamina, and healthy bones as you age. Research suggests that strength training can also reduce age-related fat accumulation and physical decline.

All this is on top of the benefits to general health that you derive from exercise. Regular exercise is a proven treatment for high blood pressure, and mod-

erate-intensity activities (such as brisk walking, yard work, doubles tennis, or active housework) seems to be at least as good for blood pressure as high-intensity options like running. In addition, exercise can help you prevent or manage diabetes. Physical activity lowers your blood sugar levels, because muscles draw glucose from the blood for fuel. It also trains muscles to respond better to insulin, the hormone that enables tissues to take in glucose from the blood. ♥

Does it matter what time you eat?

The timing of food intake has become a hot topic. In fact, research strongly suggests that if you can manage it, shifting more of your food intake to breakfast and lunch and eating a small dinner has several advantages, including decreased hunger. Why? Because when the bulk of your daily food intake is later in the day, it may interfere with the synchronization of your circadian rhythms, which govern your sleep-wake cycle, release of hunger hormones, and other cyclical functions.

In addition, some studies of time-restricted eating—in which the "eating window" during your day is reduced—suggest metabolic benefits, including better blood glucose control and improved insulin sensitivity. For example, a small 2021 study in the journal *Nutrition* found that eating dinner at 6 p.m. versus 9 p.m. led to improved 24-hour blood glucose levels, as measured by a continuous glucose monitoring device.

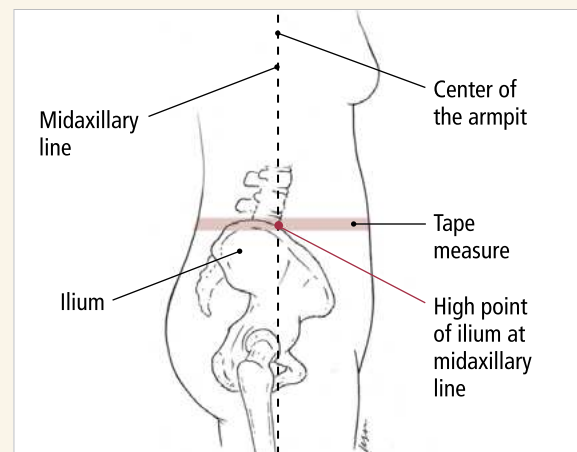
While there's no need for most people to adopt an extreme eating schedule, in general, it's best to match your eating to when you need fuel. For most people, that's earlier in the day, not at night when you're heading to bed. You also tend to make better food choices earlier when you're not tired. Late-night snacking trends heavily to processed carbs.



Know your waist size

Waist circumference can be an important indicator of health. Excess visceral fat (which collects in the abdomen around your organs) raises your risk of chronic diseases, including heart disease. How much belly fat is too much? In general, a measurement of 35 inches or more (for women) or 40 inches or more (for men) is considered a sign of excess visceral fat, although those guidelines might not apply if your overall frame is large. Measuring your waistline is especially important as you age (see Figure 2, below); older adults may gain abdominal fat without putting on a lot of weight, because they're also losing muscle mass. Rather than focus on a single reading or absolute cutoff, keep an eye on whether your waist is growing over time (for instance, are your pants getting snug at the waist?).

Figure 2: Measuring your waist



To get an accurate measurement of your waistline, measure at the level of the navel—not at the narrowest part of the torso—and always measure in the same place. The bottom of the tape measure should be level with the top of the right hip bone (ilium). Don't suck in your gut or pull the tape tight enough to compress the area.



Getting started on the 6-week plan

Perhaps, in the past, you had the best intentions to eat right but got derailed. Maybe you couldn't resist sweet, high-calorie snacks in the afternoon, or you turned to processed foods for dinner too often because it was easy. To turn intentions into actions, you need to anticipate these obstacles. In this first week of your six-week healthy eating journey, we'll do just that. You'll learn to use a food diary to develop an awareness of what you're consuming, identify the dietary changes you want to make, and set goals for yourself. You'll also learn strategies for shopping wisely, reading food labels, and calibrating appropriate portions—skills that will help you set better eating patterns in the weeks to come.

Creating your food diary

We begin this week by helping you create a food diary, because it's one of the most effective tools available to help you analyze your current eating patterns and develop a more healthful plan for the future.

How a food diary can help

One of the reasons change is difficult is that habits are ingrained—you don't even think about them. To make change happen, you have to become aware of your behavior. If you wanted to improve your financial habits, the first step would be to account for all your spending. A food diary is similar: it will put your eating habits down in black and white. It will help you see what foods you are eating on a regular basis and discover your areas of strength and weakness.

Are you getting enough fruits and vegetables? Not enough fiber? Are you eating the same meals day after day? Eating too many sugary desserts or processed foods? Reaching for a sweetened soda when you could have water? Find out by putting pen to paper, or using a computer file or app to track food (see “Be tech-savvy,” page 13). A food diary encourages you to write down



If you want to improve your financial habits, the first step is to account for all your spending, so you see the patterns. A food diary is similar: it will put your eating habits down in black and white.

and really think about your food selections. After all, if you don't keep track of what you eat, it's easy to forget that cheese-filled croissant you snacked on.

A food diary can help you pinpoint other problematic eating patterns. Do you skip breakfast, and then ambush the vending machine at 11 a.m.? Do you eat well during the day, only to binge on junk food at night? Are you eating out more often than you think? Do you tend to munch mindlessly on chips or pretzels when you watch TV? You may not be aware of how many unhealthy foods you're consuming at odd moments if you don't track your habits with a diary. Seeing it all recorded in one place can help you take responsibility for changing your behavior.

If you're trying to lose weight, consider this: a study of 1,685 participants in the Weight Loss Maintenance Trial at Kaiser Permanente in Portland, Ore., showed that dieters who kept a food diary more than five days a week lost almost twice as much weight in a six-month period as those who didn't. A diary can also help you become accountable in several other ways: you can include your daily exercise in your

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diary and also monitor your mealtime moods to see if emotions are pushing you to overeat or consume the wrong foods.

Armed with information from your diary, you can determine your own personal policies for healthy eating and weight management rather than looking to some arbitrary “diet” every time you feel you’re steering off course. If you lapse from your intentions, simply return to your tried-and-true personal plan of smart eating and exercise.

Diary dos and don’ts

The sample food diary on page 14 shows one way to record a detailed breakdown of your diet using pen and paper. You can also find online food sites that enable you to keep a diary, or, on your mobile device, there are applications for the same purpose (see “Be tech-savvy,” below right).

To begin, keep your food diary for two weekdays and one weekend day. That’s all you need to get the big picture. Before you get started, though, if you intend to use the diary provided in this report rather than an electronic program, make several copies of the blank diary or print out copies from www.health.harvard.edu/Diary. In the weeks to come, you’ll be asked to record what you eat again. There’s nothing like a before-and-after food diary to help you see how far you’ve come on your journey to eating more healthfully and changing habits.

Here are some tips for record-keeping success.

Don’t wait to write. To get the most accurate information about what and how much you consume, jot down what you’ve eaten as soon as you eat it. If you wait until the end of the day, you are likely to forget some of the things you ate earlier. If you don’t have your journal page with you, make notes on your cellphone, tablet computer, pocket calendar, or memo pad and record them in your food diary later. Strive to write down every mouthful of food—even tastes, snacks, and sips—within 15 minutes of consuming it.

Do get the details. Record relevant details, including the time of your meal or snack; where you ate (such as at a restaurant, at your kitchen table, or in the car); whether you were doing something else while you were eating, such as watching TV or reading

email; and the type of food you consumed—whether, for example, it was a meal from scratch or fast food you picked up on the go. These added data will help reveal patterns.

Do record portion sizes. Record the specific amounts of each food you eat—for example, 1 cup of orange juice or 3 ounces of chicken. (For help in determining portion sizes, see Table 1, page 16.) If you can, measure portion sizes with standard measuring utensils and a kitchen scale. This not only helps you track your food consumption but will also make you familiar with standard serving sizes. You’ll probably be surprised by what a 3-ounce serving of chicken or a half-cup of pasta looks like on your plate. Over time, you can begin to “eyeball” servings more accurately and skip the actual measuring.

Don’t sweat your mistakes. Did you overeat after a difficult day at work? You may be tempted to forget about it and not record it, but do it anyway—food records can help you regain a sense of control. A “bad” day can actually give you important information to

Continued on page 16

Be tech-savvy

Many people use pen and paper to fill out their food diaries or to track their exercise routines, but technology can help keep you organized and keep you on track, too. Saving your food diary as a file on a Web-based note-taking program like Evernote allows you to access it from any computer or smartphone, making it easier to keep information handy and updated. Food diary and exercise tracking websites—such as MyFitnessPal (www.MyFitnessPal.com) or Lose It (www.loseit.com)—will do the same.

You can explore the multitude of health apps that are freely available for smartphones and tablet computers, such as calorie counters, cooking guides, and shopping guides. A few we like are Fooducate (www.fooducate.com) and ShopWell (www.innit.com/shopwell). *Food & Nutrition Magazine*, from the American Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, regularly reviews nutrition apps at www.foodandnutrition.org. Keep in mind that not all apps will be useful, and they can’t always be customized to meet your needs as well as your own notebook can.





SAMPLE FOOD DIARY

TIME Record start and end time of meal or snack	PLACE Kitchen, living room, bedroom, car, desk at work	WITH WHOM Alone, or with family, friends, colleagues	ACTIVITY Reading, watching TV, talking, cooking	MOOD Neutral, happy, tense, depressed, angry, bored, rushed, tired	HUNGER Rate from 0–5: 0=no hunger, 5=starving	AMOUNT	FOOD	FRUITS OR VEGETABLES Number of servings	FULLNESS AFTER EATING 1=still hungry, 2=quite satisfied, 3=uncomfortable	FILLED OUT JUST BEFORE OR AFTER EATING? X=yes
8:30–8:45 a.m.	Kitchen	Alone	Watching TV	Rushed	4	1.5 cups	Shredded wheat cereal		2	X
						1 cup	Skim milk			X
						1 medium	Banana	1		X
						2 teaspoons	Sugar			X
10:00–10:10 a.m.	Car	Alone	Driving	Happy	3	1 medium	Apple	1	2	
11:00–11:05 a.m.	Car	Alone	Driving	Rushed	2	1	Granola bar		2	
1:30–2:00 p.m.	Work	Colleagues	Talking	Happy	5	2 large slices	Cheese pizza		3	X
						1 large	Chocolate chip cookie			X
6:00–6:10 p.m.	Kitchen	Alone	Cooking	Tired	5	2 pieces	Low-fat string cheese		1	
6:30–7:05 p.m.	Kitchen	Husband	Talking	Tired	4	6 ounces	Baked chicken		2	X
						1 cup	Brown rice			X
						1 cup	Broccoli	1		X
						2 glasses	Iced tea			X
9:30–9:45 p.m.	Bed	Alone	Watching TV	Tired	2	1 cup	Frozen yogurt		3	
							TOTAL:	3		



Make three copies of this page and track your eating patterns for three days.

Date: _____

[illegible]

Continued from page 13

help you understand why you did or didn't achieve your goals. Think long-term. One day is not going to make or break anything.

Do be specific in describing the food. Is the pasta white or whole-wheat? Is the meat lean or fatty? Is it butter, margarine, or olive oil on your bread? These are the things that make a difference to your heart, brain, and overall health.

Do keep it private. Your food diary is for your

own self-discovery. No one else has to see it or judge it. The more honest and accurate you are about your food intake and exercise habits, the more enlightened you will become in the next several weeks and beyond.

Do keep track of exercise, too. A food diary is even more helpful if you also track your exercise. You can use a simple chart like the one on page 17 or an app such as MyFitnessPal or Lose It. Give yourself credit for everyday activities, too, such as taking the stairs at work and walking the dog. You'll begin to see

how exercise and eating are linked, which is helpful, especially if you're trying to lose weight. Many smartphones track steps automatically, or you can purchase a smart watch like the Apple Watch or Samsung Galaxy Watch. Another option is a small, wearable fitness tracker from a company like FitBit, Amazfit, Garmin, or Oura, which can help you get a sense of how much you're moving throughout the day, not just at specific exercise sessions. It's also helpful to track how much time you spend sitting, as sedentary time is linked to poor health.

Table 1: What's a serving?

Portion sizes in restaurant meals, take-out foods, cookbooks, and packaged snacks have increased over the years, sometimes even doubling. A typical movie theater soda, for example—once about 7 ounces—can now be “supersized” to 32 or 42 ounces. A typical bagel, once 2 to 3 ounces, now weighs 4 to 7 ounces and has as many calories as five or six slices of bread. This chart will help you downsize your servings so you can maintain a healthy weight. When reading a Nutrition Facts label, look at the serving size as well as the calories to be sure you know how many servings (and calories) you're eating.

FOOD GROUP	EXAMPLES OF ONE SERVING	SERVING SIZE EQUIVALENT
Whole grains	1 slice whole-grain bread	a CD case
	½ cup cooked brown rice, whole-wheat pasta, or other whole-grain product	½ baseball
	½ whole-grain English muffin	½ hockey puck
	¼ whole-wheat bagel	¼ hockey puck
Vegetables	1 cup raw leafy greens	a fist
	½ cup (cooked or raw) chopped, nonleafy vegetables	a rounded handful
	½ cup (4 ounces) vegetable juice	a small juice glass
	1 small sweet potato	a computer mouse
Fruits	½ cup (sliced or diced) fruit, fresh, frozen, or canned	a rounded handful
	1 medium apple, orange, or peach	a baseball
Dairy	1½ ounces hard cheese	4 dice
	2 ounces processed cheese	6 dice
	1 cup (8 ounces) low-fat milk	a mini (8-ounce) water bottle
Meats, fish, and beans	4 ounces fish	a checkbook
	3 ounces meat or poultry	a deck of cards
	½ cup cooked dried beans	½ baseball
	1 ounce nuts or seeds	a golf ball
	1 tablespoon peanut butter	½ walnut
Fats and oils	1 teaspoon butter or margarine	tip of thumb
	1 tablespoon oil	about ½ shot glass

Shopping wisely

With thousands of foods and food products in the supermarket, how do you know what to buy? Here are some general guidelines. For a list of specific foods, see “Healthy food shopping ideas” on page 18.

Make a shopping list. Plan a week's worth of menus at a time, and do your grocery shopping on the same day of each week. Before going to the market, make a list of foods you need and stick to your list. A simple routine eliminates the need for midweek trips to the store, which may tempt you to buy food that's not on your list.

Start at the perimeter of the grocery store. That’s where you’ll find the most healthful, freshest, least-processed options. Concentrate on filling your basket with fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy, and lean protein. After you’ve shopped the outer aisles of the store, use your list to navigate the rest of the aisles, trying as much as possible to avoid the temptations lurking among the snack cakes, chips, sodas, and other packaged and processed foods. When you do buy packaged foods, look for those with a short ingredient list containing real foods rather than loads of additives.

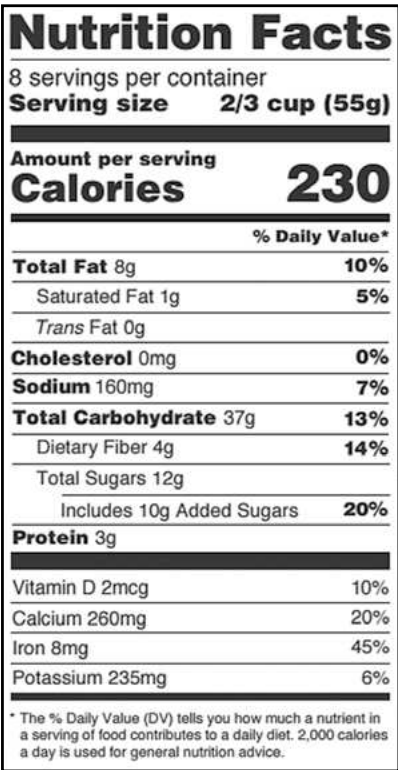
Stop by a farmers’ market. Picking up fresh seasonal produce at a farmers’ market or produce stand, if there’s one available to you, is a great way to ensure that you eat a lot of fresh fruits and vegetables rather than processed foods. In warmer months, consider purchasing a farm share through a community-supported agriculture (CSA) program, which will provide a regular supply of seasonal, locally grown produce and an incentive to eat more healthfully.

Don’t shop on an empty stomach. We all know what happens

when you go to the grocery store when your stomach is rumbling! Everything looks good, especially those quick, easy-to-eat snacks. If you’re hungry, have a healthful snack or meal before shopping. You’ll be less tempted to buy impulse items.

Become a comparison shopper. Whether you’re most concerned about sodium, fiber, sugar, calories, or saturated fat, reading and comparing nutrition labels can help you make better decisions. If you’re trying to lose weight, pay particular attention to calories and the serving size listed.

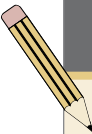
Figure 3: The nutrition label



Becoming label-savvy

Most of the truly healthful foods like fruits and vegetables don’t have nutrition labels on them. Packaged foods, on the other hand, do, and reading the label is your best guide to choosing the best options. How can you tell whether one breakfast cereal, for example, is better than another? Compare them by checking the Nutrition Facts panel (for a sample, see Figure 3, at left). Here’s a guide on what to look for.

Step 1: Check the serving size,
Continued on page 19



YOUR EXERCISE DIARY

DATE	TIME	EXERCISE TYPE	DURATION, DISTANCE, OR NUMBER OF STEPS	INTENSITY OR SPEED	DURATION OF SEDENTARY TIME	NOTES

Healthy food shopping ideas

To help you make healthy eating a priority, you'll need to be organized. Plan your menu for the week and take this general list to the store for ideas on what to buy. Having it with you will help you make healthier choices, stock your pantry with the right foods, and prevent impulse buying.



Fruit: Aim for two to three fruits each day. Buy at least two different fruits each week. Frozen fruits with no added sugar are great when seasonal fruit becomes limited.

- apples
- grapes
- oranges
- pineapple
- bananas or plantains
- guava
- papaya
- strawberries
- blueberries
- kiwi
- peaches
- pears

Grains: Choose a whole-grain variety whenever possible.

- bread (whole-grain; the first ingredient should list the word "whole")
- cereal (choose cereals with 5 grams or more of fiber and fewer than 5 grams of added sugar per serving)
- flour (whole-wheat; may be white or brown in color)
- oatmeal (old-fashioned rolled oats or steel-cut oats)
- pasta or noodles (whole-wheat)
- rice (brown), quinoa, or farro
- tortillas, pita, naan, or other flatbread (whole-grain)

Vegetables: Eat at least 3 to 4 cups of vegetables each day. Variety can make food more interesting and delicious. Buy at least two different vegetables each week.

- asparagus
- green beans
- ready-to-eat veggie snacks:
- beets
- greens: chard, collards, kale, rabe, carrots, celery, mustard greens, radishes
- bok choy or Chinese broccoli
- lettuce: bibb, red, spinach
- broccoli
- romaine
- squash: acorn, butternut, yellow, zucchini
- Brussels sprouts
- mushrooms
- sweet potatoes, yams, or cassava
- cabbage
- onions, shallots, leeks
- tomatoes
- carrots
- peas, pea pods
- cucumber
- peppers: green, red, yellow
- eggplant

Nuts and seeds: Eat unsalted nuts and seeds as snacks, or sprinkle them on top of salads or casseroles.

- almonds, cashews, hazelnuts, peanuts, pecans, pistachios, walnuts
- peanut butter, almond butter
- pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds

Fish and poultry: Healthy protein choices include seafood (at least twice a week) and poultry. But be aware that canned fish and poultry tend to be high in sodium unless you choose low-sodium products or rinse the salt away before eating.

- canned fish (low-sodium): salmon, sardines, tuna
- fresh fish: cod, haddock, halibut, salmon, tilapia, tuna
- shellfish: crab, mussels, oysters, shrimp
- chicken (skinless or remove skin)
- turkey (skinless)

Meat: Try to limit red meat to no more than one to two servings per week. Avoid cured and processed meats like ham, hot dogs, and many lunch meats, and choose lean cuts of uncured meats instead.

- lean beef: top round, flank, rump roast
- pork: tenderloin

Dairy: Use small to moderate amounts of nonfat or low-fat dairy—mostly as a topping or in a side dish.

- cheese (low-fat)
- milk (nonfat or skim)
- yogurt (low-fat or nonfat, plain)

Beverages: Stick with drinks that are low in calories and have no added sugar. Fruit juice has as many calories from sugar as soda, so keep servings small.

- water (plain, or flavored with lemon, orange, or cucumber slices)
- seltzer (including flavored seltzers)
- 100% fruit juice (½ cup serving)
- tea or herbal teas
- tomato or vegetable juice (low-sodium)
- coffee

Oils

- canola oil
- olive oil
- peanut oil
- safflower oil
- sesame oil

Spices, fresh and dried herbs, and other seasonings

- basil
- cumin
- mustard
- bay leaves
- curry powder
- oregano
- chili powder
- dill
- parsley
- chives
- garlic
- pepper
- cilantro
- ginger
- rosemary
- cinnamon
- miso paste
- thyme

Frozen foods

- egg substitutes
- vegetables (no added sauces)
- whole-grain waffles
- fruit, such as berries
- veggie burgers

Canned goods

- beans (low-sodium, or rinse to reduce sodium)
- tomatoes, tomato paste, tomato sauce (no added salt)
- broths (low-sodium, low-fat)
- vegetables (bamboo shoots, beets, mushrooms, roasted red peppers, water chestnuts; rinse to reduce sodium)
- evaporated skim milk
- spaghetti or pasta sauce (low-sodium with less than 5 grams of sugar)

Staples

- salsa
- vinegars (balsamic, cider, white wine)
- tub margarine (look for less than 2 grams of saturated fat per serving)

Continued from page 17

calories, and servings per container. Serving size is always the first item on the label. All other information is based on that serving size. In the sample nutrition label on page 17, you can see that the serving size is $\frac{2}{3}$ cup. The 230 calories listed on the label refer to each $\frac{2}{3}$ -cup serving, not the entire package. When comparing products, make sure they have the same serving size for an accurate comparison. The “servings per container” line tells you how many portions are in the whole box, package, or can. Most of the time a package will have more than one serving in it. If you want to know the package’s total calories, sugars, or anything else, multiply by the number of servings.

Step 2: Check the saturated fat content. For a general healthful diet, look for foods that are lowest in saturated fat. This type of fat raises your level of LDL (“bad”) cholesterol. It is found in products such as fatty meats, whole milk, cheese, and ice cream.

Step 3: Look at the sugar content, especially added sugars. Fruits, vegetables, and dairy contain naturally occurring sugars. These are not generally a problem, but manufacturers add sugars, too—sometimes a lot of them. It’s the added sugar you want to look out for. The American Heart Association recommends limiting daily added sugar intake to no more than 25 grams for women and no more than 36 grams for men. For any individual item, try to choose foods

The scoop on “natural” sugars

Is a “natural” form of added sugar better for you?

Many foods tout sweeteners like agave nectar, organic cane sugar, honey, fruit juice concentrate, or brown rice sugar in their ingredient lists in order to appear healthier. Agave nectar in particular has gotten attention for having a lower glycemic index than sugar, meaning that it raises your blood sugar more slowly. But the truth is that all added sweeteners should be limited in your diet. Research does not support the idea that any particular forms of sugar are healthy or better for you than others. One study, for instance, had participants consume either sugar, high-fructose corn syrup, or honey each day for two weeks, and found no difference in the way the sweeteners affected their health.

that have less than 3 grams of added sugar per serving. For additional guidance, you can also check the ingredient list. In general, you want to steer clear of foods that list a sweetener—such as sugar, honey, molasses, corn syrup, or high-fructose corn syrup—as one of the first five ingredients, or include multiple kinds of sugars further down the list, adding up to a high total content (see “The scoop on ‘natural’ sugars,” above).

Step 4: Look at the fiber content. Any food with more than 5 grams of fiber per serving is a good choice for fiber. Aim for 25 to 35 grams of fiber per day in total.

Step 5: Compare the sodium content to the calories per serving. You’ll want to keep sodium as low as possible. A rule of thumb: choose items in which the sodium number is less than or equal to the calories per serving. For a food with 230 calories per serving, look for a sodium content of no more than 230 mg. Also look for low-sodium, low-salt, or unsalted versions—but be aware that “reduced sodium” or “light” versions of salty products like soy sauce and soups can be misleading; they still contain a lot of sodium. In most cases, the less processed the food, the less sodium it has.

Step 6: Don’t get hung up on the vitamin or mineral content. Vitamin or mineral content is less important as a basis for buying a product than whether everything else adds up to a healthy choice. The



When comparing products, make sure they have the same serving size for an accurate comparison. Note that most of the time, a package will have more than one serving in it.

The “salty six”

You may rarely reach for a salt shaker at the table, but you might still consume a surprising amount of sodium by eating processed and prepared foods. According to the American Heart Association, these six food categories account for a large proportion of the salt in Americans’ diets:

- bread and rolls
- cold cuts and cured meats
- pizza
- soup
- sandwiches and burgers
- tacos and burritos

Why are they so high in sodium? Bread and rolls are not so salty per serving, but many people eat several servings a day. Cheese found on pizza, sandwiches, tacos, and burritos is also a significant source of salt. Sodium is used to preserve cured meats and cold cuts and to make packaged raw poultry plumper. Prepared foods and canned soup are often much higher in sodium than what you’d make at home.

To scale back sodium, check labels to find low-salt varieties, go light on cheese, and choose veggies instead of meats for pizza toppings, sandwiches, and Mexican food. Buy fresh meats without seasoning or breading, and opt for quick homemade soups.

label always includes calcium, iron, potassium, and vitamin D, regardless of how much of these nutrients the food provides, so the fact that they’re listed doesn’t necessarily mean the foods are good sources. The amounts are nice to know, but don’t worry too much about them. You generally get sufficient vitamins and minerals when you eat a varied diet that includes healthful foods like fruits and vegetables. The more important information on a Nutrition Facts label is serving size, servings per package, calories, saturated fat, added sugars, fiber, and sodium.

Making a clean start

How can you stick to your new healthy eating plan when your cupboards are full of chips, cookies, or candy? While you’re stocking up on healthful foods, get rid of stuff that’s not so healthy. The mere sight of food can stimulate your appetite. Some of these foods may be on hand for your children or other fam-

ily members, and filling your shelves with healthier options will benefit them, too.

Remove or phase out these unhealthy foods from your pantry and refrigerator:

- bacon
- energy or protein bars with added sugars
- candy
- French fries
- jam-filled cereal bars
- fruit roll-ups
- full-fat cheese
- ice cream
- chicken nuggets
- muffins
- chips
- popsicles
- cold cuts and processed meats
- snack cakes
- cookies
- soda and energy drinks
- crackers (other than whole-wheat)
- toaster tarts
- doughnuts
- white bread
- whole milk.

Setting goals

In this first week, it’s important to have a clear idea of your goals for the coming weeks. Your task at the moment is to use your food diary to determine which aspects of your food intake need improvement. Whether you’re aiming to cook at home more, eat fewer processed foods, or consume less sodium, setting personal goals is an important part of your healthy eating plan. They give you something meaningful to strive for and a standard by which you can judge your success. Only you can identify your own goals, but here are some starting points.

Fruits and vegetables. Let’s face it: eating enough fruits and vegetables is a challenge for most of us. After three days of tracking your eating (two weekdays and one weekend day would be best), take stock of which fruits and vegetables you consumed and how many you ate in relation to your goal. Ideally, in three days, you should have about nine servings of fruit and about 12 servings of vegetables. How did you do? Where do you need to improve? *Write your answers here:*

Cooking from scratch. There is no better way to rein in excess sodium, calories, unhealthy fats, and added sugar than to prepare your meals at home using whole, unprocessed ingredients. According to your food diary, how often did you eat out or order take-out food? How many processed foods did you consume? In those three days, how many times did you cook from scratch? *Write your answers here:*

Eating habits. Most of us could benefit from slowing down and devoting our attention to eating. When we multitask during meals or eat quickly, we can consume more food without realizing it and sacrifice a feeling of satisfaction. How many times did you eat while also doing something else? How much time did you spend eating at each meal? *Write your answers here:*

Take a look at your answers and establish general goals based on your current habits. To set goals successfully, keep the following guidelines in mind.

Start small. Aim to make just a few small changes in the weeks to follow (about two goals per week) rather than trying to radically overhaul your eating habits all at once. A gradual approach sets you up for success by avoiding excessive pressure or stress that can derail you. Even though you're setting mini goals, you can often get lots of mileage out of them. By eating out less often or consuming fewer processed foods, for example, you'll most likely reduce the number of calories you're taking in, slash your intake of saturated fat, and lower your sodium. Or you can try making a small changes like adding extra veggies to your noodle bowl or switching your sandwich bread to whole-grain.

Be realistic. Start from where you are now and try to improve. If, according to your food diary, for example, you ate lunch out five times in five days, a

Get active

Fitness and a healthy eating plan go hand in hand. Increasing your activity level will complement all the work you're doing to improve your eating habits. In fact, a study that amassed records on nearly 350,000 people in Britain found that those with the lowest risk of early death had both higher levels of physical activity and a high-quality diet, not just one or the other.

According to the CDC, the perceived lack of time to exercise is among the top excuses we use to keep from being active. In part, that happens because our society often portrays exercise as something that requires a gym membership and hours of free time. But that's simply not the case. You can easily squeeze in a few short walks during the day or put on your favorite music at home and dance. Try marching in place in front of the microwave while you're waiting for it to heat your food. Straighten up the living room while you watch TV. Or invent excuses for yourself to go upstairs and downstairs more often. Anything that gets you up and moving—even for five minutes at a time—is good. To fit more structured physical activity into your routine, schedule it on your calendar just like you would a business meeting. Once you invest time in daily activity, the feeling of well-being that exercise yields will encourage you to make dietary changes, too, so that you can feel even better.

How much exercise should you do? Physical activity guidelines from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the American Heart Association emphasize moving frequently throughout the day, whether or not you're able to exercise for long periods of time. That said, the guidelines urge all adults—including people with disabilities—to accumulate a weekly total of 150 to 300 minutes of moderate aerobic activity (such as brisk walking), or 75 to 150 minutes of vigorous activity (such as running), or an equivalent mix of the two. A 2021 study of more than 2,000 middle-aged adults found that people who took at least 7,000 steps per day—an amount of





You're more likely to eat fruit if it's on hand. That way, when the munchies strike, it's easy to grab it. For a healthy and satisfying snack, pair fruit with some nuts or a small amount of low-fat cheese.

good goal to set for yourself would be to cut back to three restaurant or take-out lunches and bring your lunch to work two days. Once you get used to that change, you can add even more days to your bring-lunch-from-home routine, so that eating lunch out eventually becomes the exception.

Keep goals measurable and specific. Specific, short-term, behavioral goals are more motivating and easier to measure than general, long-term, end-

result goals. Instead of "I want to lose 10 pounds by my birthday," for example, a specific, behavior-driven goal would be "In place of my usual bakery muffin at breakfast, I'll have a small bowl of oatmeal with berries for the next five days." Instead of "I'll stop snacking," make it your goal to set out a tangerine or some other fruit for your afternoon snack. Behavior-driven goals are easier to achieve because they focus on single steps toward a result that can take months to accomplish.

Based on your food diary, what specific goals would you like to set? List three goals for changes you will make in your diet in the coming six weeks. State your goals as "I will ...". It's a more powerful proclamation than "I want to ..." or "I'd like to ...".

Goal 1: _____

Goal 2: _____

Goal 3: _____



A breakfast boost for your health

Breakfast will be your focus for this week. We'll tackle lunch, dinner, and snacks in the coming weeks, but breakfast is the logical place to begin. Many people skip breakfast because they are in a rush, aren't hungry, or are trying to cut calories. While there's no need to eat as soon as you wake up, studies suggest that regular intake of a healthy morning meal may help combat high cholesterol, decrease insulin resistance (a condition that increases the risk of diabetes and heart disease), improve your performance on memory-related tasks, minimize impulse snacking and overeating at other meals, and boost your intake of essential nutrients, including fiber, protein, vitamins, and minerals.

The healthy breakfast plate

To create a healthy, balanced breakfast, include three food groups: lean protein, whole-grain carbohydrates, and fruit or vegetables. It helps to visualize the plate as divided into thirds, even though you're unlikely to rigidly separate out items like this in real life. Figure 4 (at right) gives an example. It shows a Western-style pattern of one-third protein (such as an egg-white omelet, low-fat cottage cheese, plain nonfat or low-fat Greek yogurt, nuts, or nut butters), one-third starch (such as whole-grain bread or oatmeal), and one-third fruit (such as fresh oranges, cantaloupe, or berries).

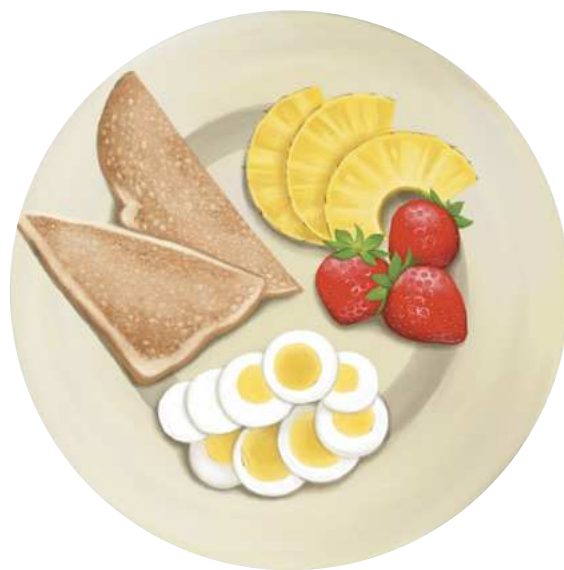
Breakfast ground rules

- Don't skip your morning meal.
- Follow the balanced-breakfast formula: whole-grain carbohydrates, lean protein, and fruit.
- Keep breakfast portions moderate.
- Make calorie-laden coffee drinks an occasional treat if you drink them at all. (Coffee with milk is fine.)

Notice that bacon, sausage, and other cured and processed breakfast meats are nowhere in sight. That's because these meats are high in sodium and saturated fat. Even turkey bacon and turkey sausage, while lower in saturated fat, are still processed meats with lots of sodium. In addition, science has linked cured or processed meats to an increased risk for heart disease, diabetes, and colorectal cancer, and a daily serving of these kinds of meats to a 20% higher risk of early death. Making your own versions of foods like granola, energy bars, and smoothies tends to be healthier than purchasing those foods premade.

If you're not a "breakfast person," it's fine to keep portions small, but try to include all three food groups, especially protein, which can create a feeling

Figure 4: The healthy breakfast plate



Fill one-third of your plate with lean protein such as a hard-boiled egg, one-third with whole grain such as whole-wheat toast, and one-third with fruit or vegetables. What if you like cereal for breakfast? Have 1 cup whole-grain cereal or ½ cup oatmeal with fruit and a scoop of nonfat or low-fat yogurt on the side. Try to limit eggs to two a week. An egg-white omelet is a good alternative; so is low-fat cottage cheese or Greek yogurt.

of fullness and prevent carbohydrate cravings. Try a tablespoon of natural peanut butter on a slice of whole-wheat toast with a piece of fruit. If you don't like breakfast foods, you can eat a small amount of leftovers from the night before.

Making vegetables part of your breakfast

Most Americans don't eat a lot of vegetables at breakfast, if they eat any at all. But there's no reason why veggies can't be part of your morning meal. (Potatoes don't count.) Figure 5, below, shows a traditional breakfast dish from North Africa and the Middle East called shakshuka, in which eggs are cooked on top of a sauce of spiced tomatoes, peppers, and onions. In it, vegetables take center stage, with eggs adding protein. Starch can come from a small slice of whole-grain bread or flatbread to mop up the sauce.

Another option is to add chopped vegetables to your omelet or breakfast burrito. Or make a smoothie incorporating vegetables. Toss some spinach leaves into the blender along with orange juice, and you have a delicious concoction that's easy to make. Another plus: the vitamin C from the orange juice

Your breakfast shopping list

Use this list while food shopping to give yourself a morning advantage. Stocking your kitchen with smart options will help you avoid making unhealthful choices.

- bananas
- berries (fresh or frozen)
- cheese (low-fat)
- cinnamon
- eggs
- English muffins (100% whole-wheat)
- grapes
- melon
- milk (skim, 1%, or soy)
- nuts
- oatmeal (old-fashioned rolled oats or steel-cut oats) or other hot cereal
- peanut, almond, or cashew butter (with no added sugar)
- pineapple
- vegetable juice (low-sodium)
- whole-grain bread (such as oatmeal or wheat)
- whole-grain cereal
- whole-grain crackers
- whole-grain mini bagels
- whole-grain waffles
- whole-wheat tortillas
- yogurt (plain low-fat or nonfat)

helps your body absorb the iron from the spinach.

And don't forget vegetable juice. Carrot juice is a popular option. Some blends of tomato juice include many other vegetables, too.

Figure 5:



Shakshuka is a traditional Middle Eastern dish that is often eaten for breakfast. In it, spiced tomatoes, peppers, and onions form the base of the meal, with an egg adding protein. Throw in a slice of whole-grain toast, and you can see how neatly it falls into the pattern shown in Figure 4, page 23, but with vegetables substituting for fruit.

Setting goals for breakfast success

In addition to the overall goals you set for yourself in Week 1, your task for this week is to create and pursue a goal relating to your breakfast choices. Use your food diary to evaluate your breakfast routine, if you have one. During the three days you kept your food diary, what did you eat for breakfast? Did your breakfasts already follow the basic formula (one-third healthy carbohydrate, one-third lean protein, one-third fruit or vegetables)? Are you missing any food groups? Is there a general pattern to your breakfast routine? Write your answers here:

Comparing your own habits to the healthy ones we discussed, do you see a breakfast goal to aim for?

What do you have to do to achieve it? Do you want to switch to a cereal with less sugar? Do you want to eat at home instead of grabbing a high-calorie muffin at the coffee shop? Do you want to cut back on bacon and sausage and strive to eat more fruit?

Be as specific and as realistic as possible when setting your breakfast goal and planning how to accomplish it. And be sure to troubleshoot. If your goal is to eat breakfast before leaving for work in the morning, think about the practical changes you would need to make in order to succeed. Will the extra time it takes to eat at home make you late for work? If so, can you get up 15 minutes earlier or shave the time from elsewhere?

In any case, make sure to have quick, healthy foods on hand that don't require much preparation, such as low-fat cottage cheese, nonfat plain yogurt, whole-grain bread or cereal, fresh fruit, and nuts. Buy fruits like pineapples and melons pre-cut, or prepare them the night before so they're ready to eat. If you eat breakfast out, look for healthier options like an egg-white omelet with vegetables, or whole-grain cereal with low-fat milk and fruit.

For my breakfast goal this week, I will ...

Example: I will prepare overnight oats at night so I have time to eat in the morning before I leave for work.

Choosing a breakfast cereal

There are hundreds of types of cereal on the market, but the healthiest are typically bran cereal, bran flakes, and steel-cut oatmeal. To choose a breakfast cereal, check the label for

- 5 grams or more of fiber per serving
- less than 150 mg of sodium per serving
- less than 5 grams of sugar per serving
- whole grain as the first item on the ingredient list.

Serving sizes for cereal can vary widely, though 1 cup is common. Make sure to choose low-fat or nonfat milk.

Pizza for breakfast?

If you're not wowed by traditional breakfast foods like whole-grain cereal or eggs, make your own quick-fix breakfast pizza.

Start with a whole-grain pita or English muffin and add a dose of low-sodium tomato sauce or a couple of slices of fresh tomato and low-fat cheese, such as part-skim mozzarella. Even better, dice up some green and red peppers to sprinkle on top. Put it in a toaster oven or a regular oven set at 350° F and check after five minutes; remove when the cheese is melted and the bread's edges are crispy.

Have a piece of fruit on the side. Keep the general breakfast formula in mind: whole grains, lean protein, and fruit, so you'll have a balanced meal.

Fresh starts

Morning routines are hard to break. If your idea of breakfast is grabbing coffee and a doughnut on your way to work, finding time to eat healthfully in the morning may seem daunting. With a little planning, however, it's easier than you think. Here are some healthy breakfast suggestions, which follow the basic formula of equal parts whole grains + lean protein + fruit or vegetables:

- one serving whole-grain cereal (at least 5 grams of fiber and less than 5 grams of sugar) + ½ cup milk (skim or 1% milk or unsweetened soy milk) + a small banana or ½ cup berries
- ½ cup cooked oatmeal with cinnamon + 2 tablespoons nuts + ½ cup berries
- a slice of 100% whole-grain bread + 1 tablespoon peanut butter + a small banana



Quick tip | Skip the individual instant oatmeal packets, which can be loaded with sugar. You can prepare ordinary oatmeal in the microwave in minutes. Just mix $\frac{1}{3}$ cup of oatmeal with $\frac{1}{3}$ cup of skim milk and heat on high for two minutes. Slice a small banana on top and sprinkle with cinnamon and chopped nuts. You can also prepare a large batch of slower-cooking steel-cut oats on the weekend and reheat the leftovers during the week.

- breakfast sandwich: 100% whole-wheat English muffin or whole-grain mini bagel + an egg or a slice of low-fat cheese + an orange
- breakfast burrito: one small whole-wheat tortilla + a scrambled egg or a slice of low-fat cheese + salsa + diced pepper
- two slices of whole-grain toast or one whole-grain English muffin + $\frac{1}{3}$ cup low-fat cottage cheese + $\frac{3}{4}$ cup pineapple
- one whole-grain waffle + $\frac{1}{2}$ cup low-fat milk + $\frac{1}{2}$ cup berries
- a homemade smoothie made with frozen fruit, plain nonfat yogurt, spinach, and a dash of cinnamon (blend with water as needed)

If you prefer a lighter breakfast, consider these suggestions:

- one serving whole-grain crackers + 1 ounce low-fat cheese + $\frac{3}{4}$ cup grapes
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup nuts + one orange or small glass of low-sodium vegetable juice
- one small apple or banana + 1 tablespoon peanut butter
- one hard-boiled egg + $\frac{1}{2}$ cup baby carrots + 2 tablespoons low-fat dip

Scheduling morning exercise

The best time to exercise is often first thing in the morning, so that it doesn't compete with work and other activities that demand your attention and get in the way of a

regular exercise program. Even if you're not a morning person, you can train yourself to become a morning exercise person. Put your fitness clothes out the night before. Set your alarm a half-hour earlier, and go out the door for a brisk walk before you do anything else. Head to an early-morning exercise class. Or get a simple exercise bike, so you can fit in a quick workout in your pajamas! It's just a matter of getting into a habit.

What if you'd really rather push the snooze button? Get up anyway, but give yourself the 10-minute rule. If you're still miserable after 10 minutes of working out at the gym or running or walking outside, you can skip your morning session for that day. Chances are, though, if you've already gotten dressed and you're moving, you won't give up so easily. To hold yourself accountable and give yourself credit, be sure to cross exercise off your to-do list when you're through. On mornings you can't work out, keep sneakers with you and look for ways to get a walk or a jog in during the day. Even small steps toward your goals help you maintain momentum.

Curbing coffee-drink calories

Coffee by itself isn't a bad thing. It contains caffeine, which boosts alertness. It also contains antioxidants and has been linked to lower risks for diabetes, heart

disease, Parkinson's disease, and early death, when consumed in moderation. But many people order large coffee drinks laden with milk and sugar. These drinks make it easy to load up on unhealthy fat, sugar, and calories without eating a bite of food. And since liquid calories are less satiating than solid food, you're not likely to cut your food intake to compensate. In fact, research cites sugar-sweetened beverages like coffee drinks as a major source of added sugar in the American diet and a major contributor to weight gain. ♥



Even if you're not a morning person, you can become a morning exercise person by cuing up a favorite exercise video or going for a brisk walk.

A healthy break for lunch

During a busy day, it's easy to get sidetracked from your healthy eating goals, but having a healthful lunch is important. A lunch break in the middle of the day can be an opportunity to focus on your nutrition and overall well-being. It can be a time to go for a short, brisk walk or to take a mental break from daily stresses by reading a book or sitting in a park. Eating four hours or so after breakfast helps maintain your blood sugar level so your energy won't take a midday dive. The energy you take in will also help you concentrate and function better throughout the afternoon and ward off hunger that can lead to overeating at dinner—a setup for weight gain.

The healthy lunch plate

To create a healthful, balanced lunch, include three food groups: lean protein, whole-grain carbohydrates, and fruit or vegetables. Think of a healthy lunch (and dinner, too) in halves and quarters: roughly half of your plate should be vegetables and some fruit; one-quarter should be lean protein such as fish, chicken, turkey, hard-boiled egg whites, tofu, lentils, beans, or low-fat cottage cheese; and one-quarter should be whole grains, such as a slice of whole-grain bread or half a cup of brown rice, whole-wheat pasta, or quinoa (see Figure 6, at right). Feel free to include a small amount of healthy fat, such as a tablespoon of oil-and-vinegar dressing on your salad, a few tablespoons of nuts, or sliced avocado. Mediterranean and other cuisines can fit the same pattern (see Figure 7, page 28).

Setting goals for lunch success

This week, use the food diary you created during Week 1 to zero in on your lunch choices. Take a look at your entries for the three days. During that time, what did you eat for lunch? Did your lunches already follow the basic formula (lots of vegetables, whole grains,

and lean protein)? Are you missing any food groups? Is there a general pattern to your lunches? *Write your answers here:*

Now, looking at your lunch pattern, what goal will you set for improving your lunch? What do you have to do to achieve it? Remember to be as specific and as realistic as possible when planning how to accomplish your lunch goal. If your objective, for example, is to eat a healthy lunch even though you're so busy at work that you can't take much time to eat, you could bring

Figure 6: The healthy lunch plate



Fill half your plate with vegetables (such as a mixed salad), one-quarter with whole grain (such as a whole-wheat pita pocket), and one-quarter with lean protein (such as beans, low-fat cheese, or 3 ounces of fish or chicken). If you prefer a traditional sandwich, choose whole-wheat bread with dark green lettuce and other vegetables, plus some lean protein like slices of grilled chicken or low-fat cheese. Avoid cured lunch meats.

Figure 7: A Mediterranean lunch



This Mediterranean-style lunch includes plenty of vegetables, with a tomato and cucumber salad, a dollop of hummus, and red peppers on the skewers. Protein comes from the chicken souvlaki (chunks of chicken marinated with lemon juice, oregano, and garlic, then grilled, baked, or sautéed), the hummus, and yogurt-based tzatziki. Olives provide healthy oil.

your lunch to work and keep it in the refrigerator or in an insulated bag with an ice pack.

Also, troubleshoot by thinking about the barriers you typically encounter. If you eat lunch at a workplace, do you tend to be too rushed in the morning to think ahead about lunch? If that's the case, prepare your lunch the night before, refrigerate it, and keep a note by the door so you don't forget it. Bringing lunch from home helps you control what you're eating. If you plan to buy lunch that day, bring something healthful from home with you, such as an apple, to round out the meal.

For lunches at home, try having a small plate of dinner leftovers, or make a sandwich with whole-grain bread, lean protein, and 1 tablespoon or less of mayonnaise. Fill the other half of your plate with a salad or raw veggies to munch. People who work remotely at least part of the week may need to plan different strategies for different days.

No matter where you are, make sure you take time for your lunch to focus on enjoying your food

instead of eating mindlessly. Many people grab food on the fly and fail to eat a real lunch, perhaps eating a croissant on the way to a meeting or snacking at a home office. When that happens, acknowledge it and mentally account for the extra food by saying, "This is part of lunch." Then fill in with an apple and a container of low-fat or nonfat plain yogurt when you get the chance. Don't shortchange yourself on food during the day. Research shows that people who skip lunch expend fewer calories because they don't move as much. Moreover, you'll likely feel cranky and lethargic. And by dinnertime, look out! You're apt to overeat to make up for the day's lack of fuel.

Remember to start with baby steps and to set small, process-driven goals. If you're going out for lunch five days a week now, for example, aim to bring your lunch on two of those days, or aim to bring fruit or cut vegetables to supplement the sandwich or slice of pizza you buy. That's realistic and achievable for many of us.

For my lunch goal this week, I will ...

Example: I will bring my lunch two out of the five work days.

What's for lunch?

Once you've set your lunch goal and looked over the healthy lunch plate, you'll need to decide what to eat for lunch. Need help? Here are some lunch ideas to rotate through. No matter what you choose, be sure to add a serving of fresh fruit—an apple, orange, small banana, peach, pear, a cup of melon, or a cup of grapes. And include flavored seltzer, water, or another unsweetened beverage. Lunch ideas might include

- whole-wheat pasta tossed with garbanzo beans, fresh tomatoes, basil, olive oil, and a small amount of low-fat mozzarella or grated Parmesan
- one whole-wheat tortilla, topped with ½ cup low-sodium canned black or pinto beans, 1 ounce low-fat shredded cheese, and 1 tablespoon salsa, heated

in the microwave and rolled up with some chopped lettuce and tomatoes

- two slices whole-grain bread with ½ recipe Tuna Salad with Curry and Apples (see page 48), plus plenty of tomatoes and romaine lettuce—or skip the bread, and have a scoop of the tuna on a green salad
- one serving whole-grain crackers and 2 ounces low-fat cheese, with carrot and jicama sticks
- California turkey wrap (whole-wheat tortilla, 4 ounces turkey, hummus, sprouts)
- one whole-grain roll, 1 cup Tabbouleh Salad (see recipe, page 50), with grape tomatoes and a small amount of feta cheese
- spinach salad with red beans, cooked quinoa, diced red onion, olive oil, cumin, and paprika
- peanut butter sandwich made with 2 tablespoons peanut butter on whole-grain bread with a side of carrot sticks
- wasabi grilled chicken sandwich (whole-grain bread, 3 ounces chicken breast slices, 1 tablespoon wasabi mayonnaise, and spinach)
- chicken Caesar wrap (whole-wheat tortilla, chicken, and romaine lettuce with 1 tablespoon Caesar dressing)
- 1 cup low-sodium soup (minestrone, chicken vegetable, or lentil) with a serving of whole-wheat crackers
- 1 cup chili made with lots of vegetables and ground turkey
- 1 cup whole-wheat pasta salad made with vegetables and 4 ounces chicken or tuna
- stuffed peppers made with roughly ½ cup brown rice and 4 ounces ground turkey
- 1 cup low-fat or nonfat plain Greek yogurt with berries or other fresh fruit and 2 tablespoons nuts
- vegetable quesadilla made with 1 whole-wheat tortilla, 2 ounces part-skim mozzarella, and vegetables
- smashed avocado spread on whole-wheat toast with ½ cup cottage cheese
- veggie burger with lettuce and tomato on a whole-wheat bun, with a small green salad
- 1 cup low-fat cottage cheese and 1 cup of fresh fruit
- hard-boiled egg with a green salad and some oil-and-vinegar dressing.

Your healthful lunch shopping list

Fruits and vegetables:

- avocados
- bananas
- carrots
- celery
- cucumbers
- green peppers
- lettuce (dark green leafy varieties)
- mushrooms
- pineapple
- red peppers
- snap peas
- tomatoes (regular and cherry)

Healthy proteins:

- beans: kidney, garbanzo, white (cannellini), black
- cheeses: feta, mozzarella (low-fat)
- chicken (baked or grilled, not processed)
- eggs
- lentils (green, black, or red)
- peanut butter or other nut butter (with no added sugar)
- sardines
- tuna (canned, packed in water)
- turkey (fresh baked)
- yogurt (plain, nonfat)

Healthy prepared foods:

- hummus
- salsa (fresh, if possible, because it has much less sodium than bottled)
- soups: chicken, lentil, minestrone (low-sodium)
- veggie burgers
- whole-grain products: bread, rolls, tortillas, bagels, pitas

In addition to these nutritious foods, don't forget to stock up on any accessories you might need, such as an insulated lunch bag, sandwich bags (reusable or compostable paper bags are a nice alternative to single-use plastic), and utensils (plastic is convenient, but consider reusable metal ones if you're regularly taking your lunch with you).

Lunchtime survival strategies

Lunchtime can be a minefield of temptation. From sandwich shops exploding with high-calorie sandwiches to salad bars stocked with tempting mayonnaise-based salads, it can be difficult to get through lunch without making some poor choices. Here are some lunch survival strategies.

Get smart on salads

Salads are a convenient way to load up your lunch with vegetables. But while salads sound healthy, they can quickly add hefty doses of calories and artery-clogging

Quick tip | If you bring a frozen entree to heat up in the office microwave for lunch, look for one with no more than 400 calories, 4 grams or less of saturated fat, 15 grams or more of protein, and 400 mg or less of sodium per serving. To make the meal more filling and nutritionally complete, add frozen vegetables to the meal before you microwave it, or pair it with a handful of baby carrots, celery, or fresh fruit.

saturated fat, if you choose poorly. Regular salad dressings, cheeses, and mayonnaise-based salads (such as tuna, chicken, pasta, and egg salads) drive up calorie counts. Take these steps to build your own healthy salad or choose what to order from a restaurant.

Step 1: Build a vegetable base. If you visit a salad bar, choose the largest container and load it up with leafy greens and vegetables. By getting the large-size salad, you'll eat more produce when the pickings are plentiful. Emphasize plain ingredients, since prepared salads may contain hidden calories from oils and sweeteners.

Step 2: Add some protein. To the veggie base, add a couple of spoonfuls of garbanzo or kidney beans. Beans are an excellent source of disease-fighting fiber—and they're filling! Add some grilled chicken, low-fat cottage cheese, tofu, or chopped eggs to complete the picture of a fulfilling lunch.

Step 3: Add a small amount of healthy fat. Sprinkle on some nuts or seeds. They are high in heart-healthy unsaturated fat and healthy protein, give

you a feeling of fullness, and help food stay in your stomach longer.

Avoid large cheese chunks or use them only sparingly. Cheese packs a calorie-and-saturated-fat wallop. But a light sprinkle of a strongly flavored cheese like feta or Parmesan can deliver flavor with fewer calories. Feta, especially, is so flavorful that you can add less of it (but keep in mind that it also contains a lot of sodium).

Creamy salad dressings have the most saturated fat, so oil-based dressings are a better option. To limit calories, use dressing sparingly or dilute it with a little vinegar, or opt for a light or low-fat dressing. If you add nuts and seeds, try to limit calories in your dressing (or, conversely, if you choose a high-fat dressing, skip nuts, seeds, or cheese on your salad). Prepared salad dressings tend to be high in sodium and contain added sugars, so simple oil and vinegar is the best choice.

Croutons also have little nutritional value; if you want crunch, use sunflower seeds or nuts instead.

Step 4: Finish with whole grains and fruit. Look for whole grains like quinoa to sprinkle on top. And add a few slices of fruit.

Solve deli dilemmas

Let's face it: sandwich shops are everywhere, and at lunchtime they can be a convenient choice. The downside? Many deli sandwiches are made with cured and processed meats, which have been linked to higher rates of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and colon cancer. In addition, deli meats, cheeses, and may-

Lunch ground rules

- Don't skip lunch, no matter how busy you are.
- When possible, avoid eating quickly on the run or while you're distracted with an electronic device (see "Eat mindfully," page 9).
- Follow the healthy-lunch formula: lots of vegetables, lean protein, whole grains, fresh fruit, and a small amount of healthful fat.
- Plan ahead. Know what you're going to have for lunch before leaving the house in the morning. This means either bringing your lunch from home or knowing what healthy selections you will make before going into a restaurant or cafeteria. Try to bring lunch from home more often so you can take nutritional control of this important meal.
- Add some physical activity to your lunch break.



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onnaise-based salads can be loaded with unhealthy fats, calories, and sodium. One example is a foot-long spicy Italian sandwich offered at a popular sub chain. It weighs in at 860 calories and packs 2,560 mg of sodium, which is more than a day's worth in one meal. Another national upscale sandwich chain offers a chipotle chicken avocado melt with 940 calories and 2,010 mg of sodium. Before succumbing to your favorite deli sandwich, check out its nutrition profile. Many national chains offer online nutrition information that can be enlightening.

To find a healthy sandwich, bypass the red and processed meats and choose one with grilled fish, grilled chicken, or turkey, or choose a meatless option. Then look for these features:

- no more than 500 calories per serving and 500 mg of sodium (this often requires ordering a half sandwich rather than a full one)
- no more than 4 grams of saturated fat
- vegetable additions such as tomatoes, spinach, arugula, kale, green and red peppers, shredded carrots, parsley, asparagus, and beets
- healthy fats (such as avocado or olive-oil pesto).

Build a better sandwich

The benefit of making your own sandwich is that you have full control over what's in it. A balanced sandwich-based lunch contains lean protein, whole grain, and a hefty serving of vegetables. Here are three basic formulas to follow for a sandwich-based lunch:

- full sandwich (two slices of whole-grain bread)
- half sandwich (one slice of whole-grain bread) + a salad
- half sandwich (one slice of whole-grain bread) + 1 cup vegetable-based clear soup.

To build a balanced sandwich, follow these steps:

Step 1: Start with a healthful foundation. You can make a sandwich on bread, pita, or any number of grain-based products so long as you choose a whole-grain variety. Some good choices are whole-wheat bread, oat-bran English muffins, whole-grain tortillas or flatbreads, mini whole-wheat bagels, whole-grain crackers, whole-wheat pitas, or oat-bran bread. Remember to choose breads that list “whole” before the grain's name as the first ingredient. Beware

Talking turkey

Many people choose turkey breast as a lean option for sandwiches, but how healthy is it? Cold cuts made from turkey breast are lower in saturated fat than beef or pork, but they're still processed and can be high in sodium. Fresh-sliced turkey breast, offered at some grocery delis, is a better option, or you could bake and slice a turkey breast on the weekend to use in your weekday lunches.

of terms like wheat flour, stone-ground, seven-grain, multigrain, pumpernickel, enriched, fortified, and organic. They don't necessarily indicate that a particular loaf is whole-grain. Avoid extra-large sandwich rolls, bagels, or wrap breads that pack a lot of calories.

Step 2: Spread on a flavorful accent. Try a small amount of guacamole, mustard, olive oil-based mayonnaise (check the label), pesto, roasted red peppers, or fresh salsa. Hummus makes a particularly good substitute for mayonnaise.

Step 3: Add lean protein. Try flaked tuna, grilled chicken, fresh turkey breast (see “Talking turkey,” above), low-fat cheese, hard-boiled egg, or beans (such as black, kidney, or garbanzo).

Step 4: Accessorize with produce. Consider romaine lettuce, flat-sliced carrots or celery, sliced apples, sliced red and green peppers, sliced cucumbers, tomato, roasted red peppers, mushrooms, pineapple slices, or snap peas.

Step 5: Layer it. To make a large and appetizing creation, layer your sandwich with spinach and watercress, tomato, and onion. Roll bean sprouts, shredded cabbage, and slices of green or red pepper into tortillas or flatbread.

Go for a brisk walk

Lunch is the perfect time to treat yourself to a walking break. Eat a quick, healthy meal and go for a brisk walk by yourself or with a friend or co-worker. Assess your speed by taking the “talk test”: If you can walk and talk effortlessly, you're moving at a moderate pace. At a brisk pace, you can't say more than a few words without pausing for breath. You will get greater cardiovascular benefits at the faster tempo.



A fitness tracker can help you keep tabs on the steps you take every day. If you're taking daily walks at mealtimes, the steps can add up quickly.

Take walking breaks during the rest of your day as well, such as once an hour when you're at your computer. A pedometer or digital fitness tracker can help you keep tabs on the steps you take. You'll be surprised at how those little walking breaks add up over the day.

Tap into the benefits of water

Water is a vital nutrient and an important player in your diet, and lunch is a great opportunity to remind yourself to drink some. Among its many functions, water helps to aid digestion, prevent constipation, normalize your blood pressure, and stabilize your heartbeat. Water also carries nutrients and oxygen to cells, cushions joints, protects organs and tissues, helps regulate body temperature, and maintains electrolyte (sodium) balance. Most people should aim for about 6 to 8 cups of fluids each day. Anything watery counts, including water, tea, coffee, and other water-containing foods like soup, oranges, and watermelon. But water itself—because it's naturally calorie-free—is an excellent choice. You're drinking enough if your urine is pale or clear.

There is some evidence that drinking water before a meal helps people avoid excess eating. Drinking water between meals is also a good strategy. If you wait until you're thirsty to drink, it's easy to mistake thirst for hunger and end up eating food when all you really needed was a tall, cool glass of water. ♥

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A dinner makeover

Dinner is often a chance to relax after work, spend time with family, or socialize. By now, you probably realize that to make the healthiest meals you need to prepare them yourself, as much as possible. Happily, more Americans are starting to fix meals at home, thanks in part to grocery delivery services, meal-kit companies like Blue Apron and HelloFresh, and appliances like Instant Pot or air fryers that cut down on cooking time.

Whether or not you use any of these, you need to have healthy groceries on hand in your kitchen. Otherwise, you'll arrive home at the end of day to an empty refrigerator and quickly turn to fast food, frozen entrees, or takeout. Even if you try to make healthy choices from a restaurant menu, they often contain lots of excess calories with few nutrients, almost no vegetables, and no whole grains.

A little advance planning can avert these potential dietary disasters.

The healthy dinner plate

What's for dinner? Use the healthy dinner plate (see Figure 8, below left) as your basic model of what to eat and how much. The idea, as with lunch, is to fill half of your plate with vegetables (about 1 cup cooked or 2 cups raw). Then make one-quarter of your plate healthful carbohydrates like brown rice or 100% whole-grain pasta or bread. The remaining quarter of your plate should be lean protein such as beans, lentils, tofu, fish, chicken, or turkey. Extra-lean beef or pork can be included about once a week. Aim for 4 to 6 ounces of protein-rich foods for dinner, ideally with fish in the protein spot at least twice a week (see Figure 9, page 34). Keep in mind that 4 ounces of protein is about the size of a deck of cards. If you crave dessert, have fresh fruit (perhaps with a small portion of dark chocolate) instead of sweets. Or plan to have dessert only once or twice a week instead of every night.

Figure 8: The healthy dinner plate



Fill half your plate with vegetables, one-quarter with lean protein, and one-quarter with whole grains.

Setting goals for dinner success

Your task for this week is to use your food diary to determine how you're doing with dinner and what you may need to do to improve it. During the three days you kept a food diary, what did you eat for dinner? Did your dinner already follow the basic formula (vegetables, whole grains, lean protein)? Are you missing any food groups? Are you eating too much or too little? Are you able to eat mindfully, or are you often rushed or distracted? How often did you eat dinner out? Is there a general pattern to your dinners that might be working against your overall goal of healthy eating? *Write your answers here:*

Now, looking at your dinner routine, what goal will you set for yourself for dinner? What do you have to do to achieve it? Remember to be as specific and as realistic as possible. And be sure to troubleshoot. If your goal, for example, is to prepare and eat dinner at home at least three days a week, ask yourself why you haven't been doing it already, and anticipate how this change is going to affect your life. Decide how and when you will take the time to plan healthful home dinners. If your goal is to make better choices when you eat out, plot some new strategies, like checking out menus online beforehand and deciding what you'll order in advance.

Whether you eat out or at home, you may be one of the many people who need to reduce their dependence on meat as the main dish for every meal. To do that, plan some time to look for meatless recipes or recipes that use very little meat, such as Asian stir-fry meals or Mexican burritos with mostly beans and vegetables. (For more ideas, see "4 smart, easy dinners," at right, and the recipe section starting on page 46.)

For my dinner goal this week, I will ...

Example: I will stock up on healthy quick-fix meal options, such as frozen or precut raw vegetables, pre-

Figure 9: A healthy Asian dinner



This plate shows a Japanese-style meal of miso-glazed fish topped with sesame seeds on a bed of brown rice, with snow peas, cucumber, and avocado.

cooked skinless chicken, frozen fish, whole-wheat pita bread, whole-wheat pasta, and low-sodium canned tomatoes—items I can just heat up that need only a side salad to become a balanced meal.

Tasty ways to sneak in more fruits and vegetables

Few Americans meet the Dietary Guidelines' recommendations to eat about 1½ to 2 cups of fruit and 2 to 3 cups of vegetables each day. Dinner may be the largest meal of the day, and it's also your last chance to strike a healthful balance of foods for the day. If you

4 smart, easy dinners

1 Spread low-fat refried beans on a whole-wheat tortilla, add thawed shrimp or leftover chicken, sprinkle with chopped green peppers, and add a spoonful of salsa. Roll it up, and bake for 15 minutes at 350° F. (The refried beans you buy in a can do not have a lot of fat—just 3 grams per half cup. Some versions are even fat-free. But look for low-sodium products with around 220 mg of sodium, versus 440 mg for the full-sodium version.)

2 Cut a tofu block into large slices (about three slices per block) and place in a baking pan; add chopped scallions, garlic, and a little low-sodium soy sauce. Toss vegetables (such as strips of red pepper) in olive oil. Roast the tofu and vegetables in the oven for 20 minutes at 375° F. Serve with brown rice or whole-wheat couscous.

3 Toss a large salad, and add salmon chunks or half a can of black, white, or garbanzo beans (buy low-sodium varieties or rinse regular canned beans). Serve it with a dressing of olive oil and balsamic vinegar plus a hearty slice of whole-wheat bread.

4 Whip together two eggs plus a teaspoon of water to make an omelet. In a small pan, cook the eggs slowly. Fill the omelet with any vegetables you have around, such as tomatoes and onions or steamed broccoli left over from last night's dinner. Season with pepper. Or sprinkle on your favorite herb or spice combination, like herbes de Provence or curry powder.

didn't eat many or any fruits and vegetables at lunch, now's your chance to meet your produce quota. Plus, piling on the produce means there's less room in your dinner for unhealthy options. Here are some tasty ways to boost the produce in your dinner.

Roast vegetables along with whatever entree is in the oven. Roasting is a great way to let the deep, rich flavors of vegetables shine through because their starches convert to sugar, releasing a deep, nutty sweetness. To roast, just drizzle olive oil over cut-up vegetables and bake at 450° F for 15 or 20 minutes or until they're lightly browned. Any vegetable is a roasting candidate—for instance, mushrooms, onions, eggplant, zucchini, tomatoes, broccoli, or carrots—so don't limit yourself. You can add some dried herbs or spices for more flavor. Enjoy roasted veggies as a side dish or toss them into pasta dishes and other recipes.

Poach veggies in low-sodium vegetable or chicken broth and white wine. To poach, boil enough liquid to cover the vegetables. When it boils, add the vegetables. Turn down the heat to just below boiling and cook the vegetables for about five to seven minutes, until they're brightly colored and tender-crisp. To retain nutrients, keep a watchful eye on the pot or set a timer so you don't overcook. Add garlic, basil, thyme, oregano, or tarragon for a flavor bonus (see "Spice it up," at right, for more ideas).

Add fresh-cut vegetables to main dishes. Try adding mushrooms, peppers, zucchini, onions, or carrots into pasta sauce, casseroles, soup, stews, scrambled eggs, and chili.

Smuggle finely chopped or pureed vegetables into recipes. Add chopped vegetables to clas-

sic foods like casseroles, macaroni and cheese, or even a loaf of bread to boost veggie consumption. Pureed cooked vegetables can easily be used as sauces, soups, spreads, and toppings.

Replace grains with vegetables. Cauliflower "rice" or "pasta" made out of spiralized zucchini, butternut squash, or sweet potato can be a great substitute for grains.

Have a salad with dinner. Stock your salad with dark green leafy lettuce and toss in petite peas, tomatoes, onions, celery, carrots, and peppers. Bonus: in addition to the nutrient bonanza you'll get, studies

Spice it up

To reduce salt in your diet without sacrificing flavor, get creative with fresh or dried herbs and spices. Here are a few ideas.

- Basil: Use in sauces, vegetables, egg dishes, and salads.
- Bay leaf: Use to flavor soups and stews.
- Cayenne pepper: Use to spice up vegetables, meats, eggs, stews, and sauces.
- Chili powder: Add to vegetarian chili, meat, and poultry.
- Cilantro: Add to whole grains and Mexican- and Asian-influenced dishes.
- Cinnamon: Sprinkle on fruit, cooked whole grains, and toast.
- Cumin: Use in stews, grains, vegetables, poultry, and fish.
- Curry powder: Add to vegetables, poultry, and fish.
- Dill: Add to fish, chilled cucumbers, and eggs.
- Garlic (fresh or powdered): Add to vegetables, soups, and sauces.
- Ginger (fresh or powdered): Add to stir-fries, soups, and salads.
- Oregano: Use in sauces, vegetables, cooked grains, meats, and poultry.
- Paprika: Use in soups, stews, fish, meats, and poultry.
- Parsley: Use for garnishing stews, salads, and vegetables.
- Rosemary: Use with roasted vegetables, root vegetables, and poultry.
- Sage: Use with winter vegetables, soups, and poultry.
- Thyme: Use in grilled fish and poultry.
- Turmeric: Use in curries.

You can also look for herb blends, such as herbes de Provence, and spice blends and rubs like ras el hanout, the Moroccan spice blend that can include 30 or more ingredients. Be aware that many spice mixes contain salt along with the spices, so check the ingredients.

Quick tip | Become a weekend warrior in the kitchen. Use the weekends to plan menus, shop, batch-cook, and prep healthful meals for the work week. Pre-portion single or family-size servings of casseroles, vegetarian chili, and soups in freezer-proof containers and stack them in your freezer. During the week, make it your mission to have a strategy for dinner before starting your day.



show that starting meals with a healthy salad can help you avoid eating too much. A healthy salad consists of dark leafy greens, along with a variety of vegetables (for example, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup carrots, a tomato, and $\frac{1}{4}$ cucumber) and an oil-and-vinegar dressing.

Choose fruit for dessert. Fresh or frozen, stewed or baked, minimally processed fruit counts toward your daily produce quota. Try making homemade popsicles with blended fruits in the summer, or have some berries with a small amount of dark chocolate. Dried fruits are healthy, but may have added sugars, so check the ingredients.

Upgrading prepared entrees

Supermarkets are full of quick-fix dinner options, from frozen entrees to prepared foods in the deli. But like restaurant fare, these dishes are typically high in sodium and saturated fat and scant on vegetables. For example, one brand's frozen fettuccini with chicken and broccoli packs 950 mg of sodium (most of us need no more than 2,300 mg of sodium for the entire day), 10 grams of saturated fat, and not much broccoli. To

make complete meals like these more healthful when you're in a pinch, stretch the package into two servings by fortifying it with your own fresh or frozen vegetables and a can of rinsed, drained beans. You can do the same with almost any supermarket or restaurant take-out dish, including the fresh prepared entrees at the supermarket. Toss fresh vegetables in with your ravioli. Cook up some Brussels sprouts to mix in with tortellini. Add a salad on the side.

Here's a bonus: by adding your own healthy ingredients, you'll reduce the cost of the meal, which is typically pricey compared with, say, a quick pasta sauce you could make yourself. In fact, why not come up with your own fast, cheap, and delicious pasta sauces to have in your arsenal? (See "Quick tip," page 38, for an easy recipe.)

Eating healthfully at restaurants

Dining out is full of potential pitfalls if you're trying to eat healthfully. For one thing, restaurant food tends to be higher in unhealthy fats, salt, sugar, and refined carbohydrates than what you'd prepare at home using healthy eating guidelines. It's not obvious, but butter is in almost everything in many restaurants—chefs like the flavor and are trained to use it liberally, even on those healthy-looking fresh vegetables. The same goes for salt and sugar. Plus, restaurant portions are often overly large. However, if you're smart about what you order, you can get a healthy meal—including dessert—when eating out. Here are some guidelines.

► Lunch on "planned-overs" from dinner

While you're writing your dinner shopping list for the week, think about making dinners that leave enough leftovers for one or two lunches. Cook enough roasted chicken, for example, for Sunday's dinner and to use in lunches during the week. Chop the chicken and mix in fruit and a handful of nuts, then layer this over a salad, stuff it into a whole-wheat pita, or roll it into a whole-grain wrap. Or slice chicken and add a few slices of avocado, tomato, sprouts, and pesto to whole-grain bread for a great sandwich. Round out lunch with a piece of fruit and grape tomatoes or some crunchy carrot, celery, or jicama sticks.

Quick tip | Make your own fish tacos. Season a filet of any fish with a mix of chili powder, cumin, garlic powder, or other spices, then grill, bake, or pan-fry the fish in a nonstick pan with olive oil. Prepare a mix of toppings, like shredded red or green cabbage, diced avocado, tomato, and onion. Warm some corn tortillas on a hot skillet, then assemble your taco. Add salsa or hot sauce and a squeeze of lime.

Plan ahead. Check the restaurant's website before leaving the house. Many restaurants now show their menus online. You can also check menus at websites such as Open Table (www.opentable.com). In general, menus don't tell you very much about an item's nutritional value (chefs often add a lot of butter, salt, and sugar), but they can give you a general idea of the type of food served—is it meat with creamy sauces or fish with vegetables? Knowing what to order ahead of time can give you more control. Also, go to restaurants that offer plenty of options à la carte.

Outsmart entree envy. When you're eating out with others, be the first to order so you're not enticed by other people's food decisions. If everyone is indulging in the prime rib and twice-baked potatoes, for example, you're less likely to order the grilled fish. Conversely, if you set a healthier tone by ordering a salad and salmon first, others may follow suit.

Start with a salad or a broth-based soup. Starting a meal with a small salad or a healthy, vegetable-rich soup can help you “front-load” nutrients rather than empty calories (i.e., the bread basket), and may help prevent overeating. Choose salads with a dark green leafy lettuce such as romaine or arugula rather than iceberg lettuce (which is lower in nutrients), and ask for a low-calorie dressing or vinegar and oil on the side so you can use it sparingly; avoid rich, cream-based soups.

Skip fried foods. Frying adds more fat to a food than broiling, baking, or sautéing, so the calorie count is likely to be high. The sodium content is also frequently higher. A better strategy is to skip fried foods altogether.

Ask for extra vegetables. Many restaurant entrees don't come with a generous serving of veg-

Dinner ground rules

- Plan your dinners for the week and try to make your own food at home as much as possible. If you rely on prepared foods, takeout, or eating out, try to add one extra home-cooked meal a week.
- Take control of restaurant meals by looking for dishes that are prepared simply, without heavy sauces, and come with lots of vegetables, lean proteins, and only small portions of white starches like pasta, rice, and bread. Don't eat everything on your plate—bring some home. You might even make it a policy to set aside half.
- Practice portion control at home, too, and be sure to pile at least half your plate with vegetables.
- Go for a walk after dinner.

etables. But you can easily remedy that by ordering vegetables from the side dish selection, substituting vegetables or a salad for a less healthful side dish, or asking for more vegetables. Many Chinese restaurants, for example, can easily accommodate your request to add extra broccoli or pea pods to your entree.

Avoid dishes prepared with gravy and heavy sauces. Or ask that the dish be made with half the sauce. Because gravy is often made with fatty pan drippings from meat, it's relatively high in saturated fat. Many sauces are made with butter and cream, which are also high in saturated fat.

Ask the waiter how large the entrees are. If they're bigger than the meals you usually eat, consider ordering an appetizer instead or sharing an entree with someone else. And keep in mind that you don't have to eat everything on your plate. Try eating only half the portion and taking the rest home for tomorrow's lunch.

Share desserts. If you want a sweet dessert, consider sharing it with others at your table. You'll get the full taste, but just a fraction of the calories, sugar, and unhealthy fats. You can also order fruit—or skip dessert and just sip coffee or tea.

A drink with dinner?

Research finds that people who drink alcohol moderately have lower rates of age-related health problems such as heart disease, diabetes, and stroke. But alco-

Quick tip | Make your own easy pasta sauce: Sauté chopped garlic, ½ cup chopped onions, and ½ cup chopped green peppers in 1 tablespoon olive oil. Add a can of low-sodium crushed tomatoes. Serve over whole-wheat pasta.

hol consumption also carries numerous health risks. Excessive alcohol consumption can raise your risk of a host of ailments, including liver disease, high blood pressure, depression, and dementia. Alcohol use—even moderate use—has also been linked to several types of cancer.

The Dietary Guidelines define “moderate” as no more than two drinks per day for men, and no more than one drink per day for women. However, the American Institute for Cancer Research and some other health organizations have advocated that both women and men limit their alcohol use to no more than one drink per day—truly meaning one drink on any given day, not passing up several nights’ drinks so you can have a week’s worth at once. Drinking several drinks on one night (binge drinking) doesn’t “average out” for the week, and is associated with many additional health risks.

Here’s another reason to go easy. Like other beverages, alcoholic drinks can be a caloric blind spot

for many people—they add plenty of calories but are often overlooked in daily tallies. A 12-ounce glass of beer has about 150 calories (the same as a can of non-diet soda). A 5-ounce glass of wine, a 1.5-ounce shot of distilled liquor, and a 12-ounce glass of light beer each has about 100 calories. Mixed drinks can have hundreds of calories per glass, since they often contain sweetened liquids as well as alcohol. The bottom line: when ordering a drink, keep it simple and small, and steer clear of the sweet drinks.

Creating a healthful dinner list

At this point, you probably have plenty of healthful food in the house, so this week, it’s time to plan dinners you want to make at home over the next several days and create a shopping list that builds on what you already have on hand. You can begin with the “4 smart, easy dinners” on page 34, or use the recipes starting on page 46. Adapt recipes you know or those you find in cookbooks to meet the healthy eating guidelines in this report. *Write your dinner ideas here:*





Sensible snacking

Americans are snacking more than ever. There's nothing inherently wrong with eating snacks; some people find that their energy dips unless they eat something every four hours or so. The problem is that, rather than planning ahead to have healthy snacks on hand, people typically grab things like chips, cookies, sweet or salty snack mixes, and chocolate-dipped granola bars from vending machines or checkout counters. According to the USDA, snacks provide nearly one-third of all daily calories from added sugars and solid fats for both men and women. Such snacking can lead to weight gain if you're not careful.

If this sounds familiar, then it's time to start thinking about snacks in a new way. Try to envision them as part of a healthy diet rather than as extras, and plan for them the way you would any meal.

Setting goals for snacking success

Your task this week is to keep a detailed snacking diary to determine how much you are snacking and what you can do to improve your snacking choices. To pinpoint your patterns, keep track of your snacking habits for three days (two weekdays and one weekend day) using the detailed snacking diary. (If you're keep-



When choosing snacks, simply follow the same guidelines as you do for meals—prioritize whole foods with as little processing as possible. Also try to combine carbs, protein, and a little fat.

Quick tip | Food at parties and receptions can be decadent, so plan ahead. Eat healthy food before leaving home so that you won't be ravenous when you arrive. Then, when you get there, look for the most nutritious offerings.

ing track on paper, you'll need three copies.) Keep note of the time you're snacking, where you're snacking, with whom you're eating, what else you're doing while snacking, how you feel, whether you're hungry, what you ate and how much, and how you feel afterward. Then, look at the big picture. Are you typically snacking when you're not really hungry? When you're stressed? When you're doing something else? What are you eating? Do you tend to reach for the same kinds of snack foods at the same time each day? Are you eating more than you need? *Write your answers here:*

Next, determine the right approach to snacking for you. Do you have diabetes or a health issue that requires you to eat every few hours? If not, do you feel that a snack truly helps you maintain energy levels, or are you just snacking out of boredom or habit? If the latter is the case, try to avoid snacking for a day and see how you feel. Did you miss having snacks? Did avoiding snacking help you eat less or avoid unhealthy foods? Where do snacks fit into your overall eating plan? *Write your answers here:*

Continued on page 41



Make three copies of this page and track your snacking patterns for three days.

Date: _____

[illegible]

Continued from page 39

Take a hard look at what you're munching on between meals. Are the snacks you're consuming unprocessed or minimally processed (as in fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, nuts, and seeds)? Low in sodium (less than 300 mg per serving)? Are you eating them at the right time, such as before and after your workouts (see "Snacking and exercise," at right)? Have you gotten into bad habits such as eating every night before bed?

What could you do to improve your snacking habits? *Write your answers here:*

Looking at your answers, what goal will you set for yourself for snacking? What do you have to do to achieve it? Remember to be as specific and as realistic as possible. If your aim, for example, is to eat more fruit for snacks, ask yourself why you haven't been doing it already. Maybe you need to add more fruit to your grocery list. Are leftovers from entertaining a problem? Consider giving them to guests as they leave the house, bringing them to the office kitchen, or freezing them for the next time you entertain. Avoid buying the foods that tempt you—no one needs that store-bought cookie dough.

For my snack goal this week, I will ...

Example: I will plan ahead and buy melon from the farmers' market on the weekend, then cut and bag slices so I'll have a week's worth of grabbable snacks.

Smarter snacks

It's easy to see that many common snack foods like chips, cookies, doughnuts, and candy bars are not healthy choices. But many snack foods marketed as

Snacking and exercise

Just as healthy snacks can help sustain your energy levels during the day by stabilizing your blood sugar (the fuel required by your body's cells), healthy snacking before a workout can increase your energy and endurance levels while you exercise. If you eat a snack that offers a healthy combination of carbohydrates, protein, and some fat one hour before working out, you'll have more energy available during exercise and you won't dip into your glycogen reserves (carbohydrates stored in muscles) as quickly for energy. The result? You'll get a better workout as well as more energy for activities later in the day.

It's also a good idea to eat a snack with carbohydrates and protein within 30 minutes after a long aerobic workout (one that lasts 60 minutes or more). Refueling helps to repair muscle and replaces muscle glycogen stores so you won't feel spent the next day.

healthy, organic, or natural are just as bad for your health. Snack bars increasingly advertise healthy additions like omega-3s, probiotics, organic ingredients, and protein, but also have large amounts of added sugars and excess calories. The same goes for many single-serve yogurts, fruit snacks, and organic candies. Remember, an organic chocolate chip cookie is still a cookie.

Eating these foods occasionally won't hurt, but making a habit of it can take its toll. Foods with high amounts of sugar and other simple carbohydrates can cause your blood sugar to rise. These foods won't keep you feeling full for very long, and eating them may promote overeating and weight gain, as well as possibly raise your risk of developing diabetes and heart disease down the road.

What should you snack on?

Many people are confused about what makes a healthy snack, but it's not complicated. When choosing snacks, simply follow the same guidelines as you do for meals—prioritize whole foods with as little processing as possible. It's also good to have a combination of carbs, protein, and a little fat, such as whole-grain crackers (carbohydrate) with low-fat cheese (protein, fat), or fruit (carbohydrate) with nuts (protein, fat). The mix of the three macronutrients is more satiating than straight carbohydrates.

Here are some ways to make this approach easy:

- Keep a bunch of grapes or a tangerine handy, so that you reach for those rather than calorie-dense chips or cookies. You can add a wedge of low-fat cheese or some nuts for a bit of protein and fat. Nuts, such as almonds, walnuts, peanuts, cashews, hazelnuts, and filberts, or roasted pumpkin seeds or sunflower seeds are all good choices. Nuts and seeds contain many beneficial nutrients and other substances, including vitamin E, folic acid, protein, potassium, and fiber. Although some are high in fat, the fat is healthy because it's mainly unsaturated. About 1 ounce or ¼ cup is the right amount for a serving.
- Have small containers of nonfat plain yogurt along with chopped fruit and nuts within easy reach.
- Bring peeled orange wedges to work, or keep a bowl of cut-up seasonal fruit in the fridge at home. Pair them with a small amount of low-fat cheese.
- Have some carrot sticks along with a dollop of hummus.

You can also use snacks as an opportunity to fill in food group gaps—for instance, eating a piece of fruit to boost your intake of fresh produce. See “Snacks that satisfy,” above right, for some additional ideas.

Snacking strategies

Once you have evaluated your snacking habits, you can decide whether it's better for you to limit your eating to three healthful meals a day or whether you would like to add a snack or two as well. If you do snack, follow these suggestions.

Zero in on hunger. Before you snack, ask yourself, “Am I hungry?” Many of us mistake emotions, such as stress and fatigue, for hunger. If the answer is yes, make sure you're not confusing hunger with thirst. Drink an 8-ounce glass of water, then wait 10 to 15 minutes. If you're still hungry, have a healthy snack.

Know your cravings. If you want a snack but you're not hungry, attack cravings from a psychological level. Ask yourself how you're feeling. Lonely? Bored? Stressed? Then, ask yourself the bigger question: will food fix this problem? The answer is always no. Eating a cookie, for example, won't address a problem at work that you're worried about. Go for a walk

Snacks that satisfy

Reaching for these snacks will quell hunger while helping you reach your nutrition goals.

- ½ cup edamame (soybean in the pod)
- 1 ounce low-fat cheese with ½ cup grapes
- ½ cup vegetable sticks with 2 tablespoons of hummus
- ½ cup low-fat cottage cheese with ½ cup fruit or vegetables
- ½ small whole-wheat tortilla with two slices of turkey, tomato, and avocado
- English muffin pizza: ½ whole-wheat English muffin with 2 tablespoons tomato sauce, ½ ounce low-fat shredded cheese, and a few green pepper strips
- 4 ounces plain nonfat yogurt with ½ cup berries
- ¼ cup unsalted nuts (almonds, filberts, peanuts, or soy nuts)

around the block, do a few stretching exercises, put on some music, or choose another simple activity that might distract you or boost your mood. Then, if you still want the food, fine. Ask yourself what food you really want. Then eat only a small amount, and make it good. If you're craving chocolate, for example, eat one small square and savor it. It's important that you snack on what you're craving rather than denying it. Eating around a craving may only cause you to eat more because the craving isn't satisfied.

Control your portions. If you tend to fill up on too many snacks, try limiting the size of your snacks by dividing snack foods into individual portions and sticking to that amount. Single-serving containers of chips and nuts are helpful, but create a lot of wasted packaging. Another option is to portion out bulk foods into reusable sandwich bags or containers ahead of time—or, dish yourself a serving, then put the rest away before you start to eat.

Manage snacking opportunities. The mere sight of food, such as the office goodie jar or that box of crackers on your kitchen counter, can stimulate your appetite. To avoid making unhealthy choices, keep snack foods that aren't healthy out of sight—in covered containers in the pantry, for instance, or in the office kitchen instead of at your desk. Put healthier options, like fruit or carrot sticks, within easy reach. ♥



Keep it going

Over the past five weeks, you've gained an awareness of your eating habits and started making more healthful choices, putting your knowledge into practice by getting organized. Congratulations! Chances are, you're eating and enjoying more healthful meals, keeping portion sizes reasonable, and generally consuming more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Are we right? It's time to take stock.

The big picture

By now, you may have several specific goals you're working on in relation to breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacking—in addition to your three initial healthy eating goals. How well are you managing to address each one? To find out how far you've come, keep another three-day food record (two weekdays and one weekend day), using the food diary or an equivalent app. It may feel like going back to the drawing board, but tracking your eating again can help you assess your progress and fine-tune your overall plan. After doing another three-day food record, compare it to your old record from five weeks ago. Then ask yourself: Where have I made the most progress? What do I still need to tweak? What's working? What's not?

Assess your goals

Restate your three initial goals from Week 1 and note how well you've been doing.

Goal 1 progress: _____

Goal 2 progress: _____

Goal 3 progress: _____

Did you discover other goals you'd like to set?



If you've started making more healthful food choices, congratulations! Now the time has come to move beyond short-term goals and establish your personal set of healthy eating guidelines to live by.

New goal(s): _____

Personal food rules for the future

Next, it's time to move beyond goals and establish your own personal set of guidelines to live by, based on your knowledge and experience about what works for you. Take a look at your answers to earlier questions about your food habits and formulate some specific principles to govern your food behavior from now on. They should reflect what you've learned about yourself and your eating habits over this past month and how you're going to behave going forward. Focus on realistic steps that will improve your health, rather than attaining some perfect diet.

You can have as many personal guidelines for

healthy eating as you want. To give you an idea, here are several examples that might be appropriate:

- “I will plan menus and shop for food every Saturday so I have healthful options on hand for breakfast, lunch, and dinner for the week.”
- “I’m no longer going to snack unless I truly feel hungry.” Or, “I will limit my snacking to two healthy snacks per day.”
- “I will choose healthy vegetarian foods at least one or two days a week.”
- “I will eat breakfast before leaving the house in the morning.”
- “I will bring a lunch that includes lean protein, fruits, vegetables, and whole grains to work at least three days a week.”
- “I will buy a new vegetable or other healthful food

Enlist your friends and family

Even if you’re an independent person, you’re more likely to succeed if you are surrounded by people who encourage you. Research finds that eating patterns are transmitted through social relationships, particularly those between spouses. Despite your best intentions, it’s not easy to eat healthfully if you have family or friends who prefer a steady diet of burgers and fries. But often the people around you need a little support themselves. The changes you’re making could indirectly affect them, and they may not want to change along with you.

These strategies can help you turn any negativity they might toss your way into positive support.

Your spouse and your kids

You’re a powerful role model to your family. Tell them you’re not on a “diet”—you’re establishing a healthier way of eating for the long term.

Begin by sharing some of the tastier healthy treats you are eating. Cut up a bowl of pineapple and offer it around. Make some healthy tortilla roll-ups for lunch (see “What’s for lunch?” on page 28). Put out nuts and sunflower seeds for snacks.

Next, begin introducing healthier meals and snacks that play to their preferences. If they love meat and potatoes, buy and prepare lower-fat cuts of meat. Balance the meal

with plenty of vegetables. Whether other family members actually eat as many vegetables as you do is not the point—exposing them to healthy foods is a positive step that will broaden their palates.

If your family tends to eat a lot of meat, try “meatless Monday” nights. Get the family involved in planning the meal. You could also ease into it, gradually replacing the meat in your usual chili, for instance, with beans and vegetables.

In time, your family may take to eating some of your more healthful foods. Instead of acting as if these foods are designated as “yours,” allow your family to embrace the change.

Meanwhile, give your spouse or partner realistic and specific requests—to keep the bags of chips out of the house, for example, or to go for a nightly walk together after dinner. The more doable your requests, the better. A couch potato isn’t likely to run a marathon with you, but he or she might join you for a walk.

Your friends

Friends can be tremendously supportive in helping you follow your food rules. They can also unwittingly work against you. We’re influenced by the behaviors of those around us, and when more people you know gain weight or have unhealthy diets, the behavior becomes acceptable, much like any social norm.



If you want to maintain or lose weight, be aware of how your friends’ behavior might influence you.

This doesn’t mean giving up on friendships—you can be a healthy influence on your friends, too. Try these strategies for setting healthier patterns:

- If you tend to meet a friend for lavish restaurant meals, suggest meeting for a walk or a visit to a gym or yoga class instead.
- Invite friends over for a healthy dinner, or cook together after shopping at a farmers’ market.
- Start a competition with your friends or co-workers to log steps every day and see who can walk the most.
- Consider seeking out people with similar goals. Getting support from local groups or even online through social media can help you succeed at your health and diet goals. Be aware, however, that social media sites can also promote misinformation about health and can perpetuate negative feelings about body image, so look for people and groups who are reliable and helpful.

that I've never cooked with before at least once a month."

- "I will use part of my lunch hour to walk at least twice a week."
- "I will have fresh fruit for dessert—and limit ice cream, pie, and cake to special occasions."
- "I will not eat while watching TV or looking at an electronic device."

No matter what your food rules are, they should be realistic and repeatable, and they should take into account what's most important to you. If you really love dessert, one of your personal food goals should address your dessert-eating habits (for instance: "I will limit myself to one special dessert a week and savor every bite"). To increase the chances you'll remember and stick with your new guidelines, review them from time to time. For example, if one or more of your rules involve restaurant meals, then it would be good to review them before going out to eat.

Take the time to record your food rules here or on another piece of paper. Remember, writing them down makes them real.

Example: From now on, I will substitute an apple or other fruit for chips at lunch.

Keep up the good work

Now that you're really creating a new way of eating, here are steps to help you reinforce your new habits.

Reward yourself. Be sure to reinforce your motivation by rewarding yourself frequently—but not with food or beverages. For example, if cooking at home more often is saving you money, you could put that money toward a movie or concert, or even set it aside for a vacation, and then watch your rewards mount. Behavior change is hard work because habits are so ingrained. By the time you're 40, you've eaten some 40,000 meals—and probably lots of snacks. The people who are most successful at changing their diets reward themselves for following their food rules, especially in

the first six months they're implementing them.

Find a workaround. Try to control your environment so old behaviors don't tempt you. If you're trying to break the fast-food habit, try driving a different route that doesn't take you through the fast-food district. If you want to eat a healthy breakfast, put an apple on the kitchen table before you go to bed. Pack a healthy lunch the night before. Find a healthy substitute for any behaviors you're trying to eliminate. That might be, for example, taking swigs from your water bottle instead of opting for your usual 3 p.m. cola or sugar fix.

Don't give up when you slip up. Realize that there will be times when you lapse into old behaviors. You're human. It will happen, and when it does, don't fall prey to thinking, "Well, I ate out every night this week, I might as well give up on the idea of cooking. It's just not happening." That's demotivating and counterproductive. Remember, you're aiming for a healthy eating pattern over time; one slip-up doesn't undo the other good choices you're making.

Instead, use the setback as a learning opportunity so you can avoid it in the future. Ask yourself: What caused it? Was it something practical—such as having an especially busy week? Or was it something emotional, such as feeling stressed about work? Once you think you know what caused the slip, let it go and forgive yourself. Then get right back to your new routine. On the days you do follow through, pat yourself on the back. Just one day of making healthful food and physical activity choices—such as passing on the doughnuts that someone brought to the office and taking a brisk walk at lunch—can boost your enthusiasm and self-esteem.

Recruit friends to help. You can strengthen your resolve by turning to a support group, an online community, or a network of friends and family (see "Enlist your friends and family," page 44). If you have people watching your progress, you'll be less ready to break that commitment. They can help motivate you and make you feel accountable to someone. If you feel you need the support of a professional, consider working with a registered dietitian. To find one in your area, visit the website of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (www.eatright.org). ♥

Cooking kickoff: Recipes for success

The simple act of preparing your own meals automatically starts you on the road to healthy eating. Because you're the chef, you can incorporate many of the principles set forth in this report, such as eating more fruits and vegetables and whole grains and consuming less salt and added sugar.

With some planning, it's surprising how little time cooking actually takes. Ideally, you'll want to have ideas about what you'll be eating for several days ahead, and then have the ingredients on hand from which to work. As you begin to cook more, it gets easier. You can streamline the process by making recipes in large batches and setting part of the food aside for future meals, so you'll have your own ready supply of frozen dinners.

These simple and delicious recipes, which come



from nutrition experts at Harvard-affiliated Brigham and Women's Hospital, will help you hone your cooking skills and build a repertoire of healthful meals you can turn to again and again. As you try them, feel free to modify the steps or ingredients to suit your tastes and cooking habits. *Bon appétit!*

Appetizers

Crostini with Goat Cheese and Fresh Tomato

Crostini—thin slices of whole-wheat toasted baguette topped with cheese and vegetables—tastes complex, yet it's simple to make and a good use of in-season tomatoes, if they're available.

INGREDIENTS

1 whole-wheat baguette, sliced thin	2 teaspoons minced fresh thyme (or 1 teaspoon dried)
2 tablespoons olive oil, divided	6 ounces goat cheese (chèvre)
2 garlic cloves, minced	about 3 plum tomatoes, finely chopped
1 tablespoon minced fresh rosemary (or 2 teaspoons dried)	

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 375° F. Brush baguette slices lightly with about 1 tablespoon of the olive oil and toast in the oven until lightly browned, about 10 minutes.

In a medium skillet, heat the remaining 1 tablespoon olive oil and sauté the garlic, rosemary, and thyme for 1 minute. Remove from heat and transfer to a medium bowl. Add goat cheese and mix well. Spread the mixture lightly on the toasted baguette slices; garnish with the chopped tomatoes.

Nutritional analysis

Servings: 15
Serving size: 1 piece

Calories	90
Total fat (g)	5
Saturated fat (g)	2
Cholesterol (mg)	5
Sodium (mg)	105
Total carbohydrate (g)	8
Fiber (g)	1
Total sugars (g) Includes 0 g added sugars	2
Protein (g)	4

Tasty Tzatziki with Pita Bread

Tzatziki, a refreshing Mediterranean yogurt-cucumber sauce, is delicious on pita bread, as a dip for fresh vegetables, or as a sauce for grilled vegetables, fish, or chicken. In addition to being versatile, it's low in calories and a flavorful source of calcium.

INGREDIENTS

2 medium cucumbers, peeled and seeded	2 teaspoons snipped chives or dill
¼ teaspoon salt	2 tablespoons olive oil, divided
¼ teaspoon pepper	1 piece whole-wheat pita bread, cut in wedges
2 cups plain, nonfat Greek-style yogurt	
2 garlic cloves, minced	

DIRECTIONS

Grate the cucumber and place in a sieve over a bowl in the refrigerator for 30 minutes. Discard any liquid that drains from the cucumber. Preheat oven to 375° F. In a small bowl, mix the cucumbers, salt, pepper, yogurt, garlic, herbs, and 1 tablespoon of the olive oil. Taste for seasoning. Set aside.

Lay the pita on a baking sheet and drizzle with the remaining 1 tablespoon olive oil. Bake until golden, about 20 minutes. Serve the baked pita chips with the dip.

Nutritional analysis

Servings: 8

Serving size: about ¼ cup dip and ⅛ pita

Calories	100
Total fat (g)	3.5
Saturated fat (g)	0.5
Cholesterol (mg)	2
Sodium (mg)	140
Total carbohydrate (g)	9
Fiber (g)	1
Total sugars (g) Includes 0 g added sugars	3
Protein (g)	8

Classic Caponata

Serve this Sicilian-inspired sweet-and-sour eggplant salad as an appetizer with whole-grain bread (as described here), or as a side dish, warm or at room temperature.

INGREDIENTS

2 tablespoons olive oil, divided	1 tablespoon sugar
1 medium onion, chopped	pepper to taste
2 celery stalks, sliced	6 Japanese eggplants
8 ripe red tomatoes, chopped	2 small (8-ounce) whole-wheat baguettes, each sliced into 8 pieces
1 tablespoon capers, rinsed	¼ cup chopped or slivered almonds
¼ cup green olives, pitted	about ¼ cup chopped fresh parsley
3 tablespoons red wine vinegar	

DIRECTIONS

Heat 1 tablespoon of the olive oil in a saucepan; add the onion and celery. Cook for 5 minutes until soft but not brown. Add the tomatoes and cook for 15 more minutes until pulpy. Add the capers, olives, vinegar, sugar, and pepper and cook for another 15 minutes.

Slice, rinse, and pat the eggplant dry. In a large pan, sauté the eggplant in the remaining 1 tablespoon olive oil over medium heat until softened and light brown. Stir the eggplant into the sauce. Let stand for at least 30 minutes to allow the flavors to develop before serving.

Assemble by dividing the mixture evenly on the baguette slices. Top with the almonds and parsley.

Nutritional analysis

Servings: 16

Serving size: 1 baguette piece with caponata mixture

Calories	160
Total fat (g)	5
Saturated fat (g)	0.5
Cholesterol (mg)	0
Sodium (mg)	200
Total carbohydrate (g)	27
Fiber (g)	7
Total sugars (g) Includes 1 g added sugars	9
Protein (g)	5

Lunch and dinner entrees

Tuna Salad with Curry and Apples

Apples and curry sweeten and spice up this traditional sandwich filler. Prepare tuna salad at the beginning of the week and refrigerate it until you're ready to use it.

INGREDIENTS

- | | |
|---|----------------------------|
| 1 (5-ounce) can solid white tuna (packed in water, low-sodium), drained | ½ teaspoon curry powder |
| 1 tablespoon low-fat mayonnaise | ½ cup chopped apple |
| 1 teaspoon mustard | 1 tablespoon chopped onion |

DIRECTIONS

Combine ingredients in a bowl and mix.

Nutritional analysis

Servings: 2
Serving size: ¾ cup

Calories	140
Total fat (g)	3
Saturated fat (g)	0.5
Cholesterol (mg)	25
Sodium (mg)	140
Total carbohydrate (g)	8
Fiber (g)	1
Total sugars (g) Includes 0 g added sugars	5
Protein (g)	18

Cheesy Chili Mac

A hearty, satisfying chili that fills you up with vegetables and fiber instead of meat.

INGREDIENTS

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 yellow onion, chopped | 1 (15-ounce) can diced tomatoes (no salt added) |
| 2 garlic cloves, minced | 1 (6-ounce) can tomato paste (no salt added) |
| 1 tablespoon olive oil | 1 cup frozen corn |
| 2 tablespoons whole-wheat flour | 1 cup frozen broccoli |
| 1½ tablespoons chili powder | 2 cups vegetable broth (low-sodium) |
| 1 (15-ounce) can black beans (low-sodium) | 1½ cups dry whole-wheat macaroni or other small pasta |
| 1 (15-ounce) can kidney beans (low-sodium) | 1 cup low-fat shredded cheddar cheese, divided |
| 1 (15-ounce) can garbanzo beans (low-sodium) | ½ cup minced fresh cilantro (optional) |

DIRECTIONS

Sauté onion and garlic with olive oil in a large pot over medium heat until onions are soft and transparent. Add flour and chili powder and stir to coat the pan.

Drain and rinse all the beans. Add them to the pot along with tomatoes and their juice, tomato paste, corn, broccoli, and broth. Stir to combine. Add the dry pasta and cover. Heat until mixture reaches a boil, then reduce heat and simmer until pasta is tender, stirring frequently (about 12 to 15 minutes).

Just before serving, add ¾ cup cheese to the pot and stir. To serve, divide into 8 bowls and sprinkle each with ½ tablespoon cheese and 1 tablespoon cilantro.

Nutritional analysis

Servings: 8
Serving size: 1½ cups

Calories	340
Total fat (g)	6
Saturated fat (g)	1.5
Cholesterol (mg)	5
Sodium (mg)	430
Total carbohydrate (g)	51
Fiber (g)	11
Total sugars (g) Includes 0 g added sugars	7
Protein (g)	20

Zesty Vegetarian Baked Ziti

A healthful take on a family favorite boosts your vegetable intake with spinach, mushrooms, and onions.

INGREDIENTS

1 cup chopped mushrooms	½ teaspoon black pepper
½ cup chopped onion	3 cups fresh baby spinach
1 tablespoon olive oil	2 tablespoons beaten egg (about half an egg)
1¾ cups tomato sauce (low-sodium)	7 ounces plain nonfat Greek yogurt
1 teaspoon garlic powder	1 cup shredded part-skim mozzarella cheese, divided
1 teaspoon Italian seasoning	8 ounces whole-wheat ziti or penne pasta
½ teaspoon red pepper flakes	
¼ teaspoon salt	

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350° F.

Sauté mushrooms and onions in olive oil. In a large saucepan, combine tomato sauce, garlic powder, Italian seasoning, red pepper flakes, salt, black pepper, and the mushroom and onion mixture, and simmer for 30 minutes. Add spinach and steam until wilted.

In a separate bowl, beat the egg into the Greek yogurt and stir in ½ cup of the shredded cheese.

Boil water and cook pasta for half of the recommended time (about 5 minutes). Drain pasta and combine with Greek yogurt mixture, and then stir in the tomato sauce. Spread the pasta mixture in a baking dish and top with the remaining ½ cup cheese. Cover and bake for 15 minutes. Uncover and bake for another 15 minutes.

Nutritional analysis

Servings: 4

Serving size: 1½ cups

Calories	420
Total fat (g)	12
Saturated fat (g)	4.5
Cholesterol (mg)	70
Sodium (mg)	280
Total carbohydrate (g)	57
Fiber (g)	8
Total sugars (g) Includes 0 g added sugars	11
Protein (g)	25

Orange Cranberry Chicken

Tangy citrus, tart cranberries, and spices liven up a simple chicken dish. Pair this chicken with a whole grain like quinoa and your favorite vegetable.

INGREDIENTS

1 tablespoon olive oil	6 (3-ounce) chicken breasts
¼ cup chopped celery	½ teaspoon salt
¼ cup chopped onion	1 tablespoon garlic powder
2 cups fresh cranberries	1 teaspoon mustard powder
1 tablespoon orange zest	2 teaspoons black pepper
1½ tablespoons white sugar	

DIRECTIONS

To prepare cranberry sauce, place 1 tablespoon of oil in a saucepan on medium heat. Add in chopped celery and onion and sauté until glossy. Add cranberries, orange zest, sugar, and ¼ cup of water. Bring to a boil. Reduce to a simmer, stirring until sauce reduces by at least half and thickens. Remove from heat.

Preheat oven to 350° F. Season the chicken with salt, garlic, mustard, and pepper. Pour ¼ of the sauce into a baking pan and spread evenly, placing the chicken breasts on top. Pour the remainder of the sauce over the chicken. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes.

Nutritional analysis

Servings: 6

Serving size: 3-ounce portion of chicken breast

Calories	170
Total fat (g)	4.5
Saturated fat (g)	1
Cholesterol (mg)	60
Sodium (mg)	250
Total carbohydrate (g)	10
Fiber (g)	1
Total sugars (g) Includes 3 g added sugars	5
Protein (g)	20

Carrot and Squash Sauté

This colorful side dish is loaded with nutrients. Feel free to use acorn squash if butternut isn't available at your local supermarket or farmers' market.

INGREDIENTS

3 fresh carrots, peeled	2 large garlic cloves, minced
¼ cup chopped green onion	1 teaspoon fresh thyme
2 tablespoons olive oil	1 pinch salt (1/16 teaspoon)
1½ pounds fresh butternut squash, peeled and cut into julienne strips (roughly the size of matchsticks)	1 pinch pepper
	2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice

DIRECTIONS

Blanch carrots in boiling water for 3 minutes. Drain and refresh under running cold water. Cut carrots into julienne strips.

In a large pan, sauté green onion in olive oil until soft. Add carrots, squash, garlic, and thyme. Cook, stirring frequently, until vegetables are crisp-tender, about 10 minutes. Season with salt, pepper, and lemon juice. Serve immediately.

Nutritional analysis

Servings: 6
Serving size: ¾ cup

Calories	80
Total fat (g)	5
Saturated fat (g)	0.5
Cholesterol (mg)	0
Sodium (mg)	75
Total carbohydrate (g)	9
Fiber (g)	3
Total sugars (g) Includes 0 g added sugars	4
Protein (g)	1

Tabbouleh Salad

If you've never tried bulgur (whole-grain wheat kernels), this refreshing salad offers a nice introduction. Unlike most prepackaged tabbouleh salads, which are heavy on grains and oil, this has lots of fresh, fragrant parsley and mint.

INGREDIENTS

1 cup bulgur wheat, rinsed and drained	1/3 cup chopped fresh mint
¼ teaspoon salt	3 stalks celery, finely diced
1½ cups chopped fresh Italian (flat-leaf) parsley	3 tablespoons olive oil
4 ripe tomatoes, chopped	6 tablespoons lemon juice
1 bunch scallions (about 6), minced	¼ teaspoon pepper

DIRECTIONS

Combine the bulgur and 1½ cups cold water in a small saucepan and season with salt. Bring to a boil, cover, and remove from heat and let sit for 15 minutes. Uncover and allow to cool. Combine the remaining ingredients in a large serving bowl and toss well. Add bulgur and toss.

Nutritional analysis

Servings: 4
Serving size: ¾ cup

Calories	270
Total fat (g)	12
Saturated fat (g)	1
Cholesterol (mg)	0
Sodium (mg)	200
Total carbohydrate (g)	39
Fiber (g)	9
Total sugars (g) Includes 0 g added sugars	7
Protein (g)	7

Rainbow Rocket (Arugula) Salad

A creamy orange yogurt dressing, beets, and zesty arugula (called rocket in Britain) fill this salad with flavor. This makes a large salad that would work as an entree.

INGREDIENTS

¾ cup dry quinoa	½ teaspoon black pepper
4 ounces (about 1 cup) slivered almonds	2 (5.3-ounce) containers plain nonfat Greek yogurt
½ teaspoon salt	1 teaspoon dill
1 teaspoon olive oil	8 cups (15 ounces) fresh arugula
4 cups diced fresh beets	1½ cups mandarin oranges (packed in juice, no sugar added)
3 tablespoons balsamic vinegar, divided	
¼ cup orange juice, divided	

DIRECTIONS

Prepare quinoa according to package directions (yield: about 2 cups cooked). Chill.

Preheat oven to 350° F. Mix slivered almonds with salt and olive oil and spread on a baking sheet in a single layer. Toast almonds in the oven for 4 minutes or until golden brown.

Increase oven temperature to 400° F. In a bowl, mix beets with 1½ tablespoons balsamic vinegar, 2 tablespoons orange juice, and black pepper. Spread beet mixture on a baking sheet in a single layer. Roast beets in the oven for 20 minutes or until soft.

To make the dressing, combine remaining 1½ tablespoons balsamic vinegar and 2 tablespoons orange juice with Greek yogurt and dill. Assemble salad with arugula, quinoa, mandarin oranges, roasted beets, toasted almonds, and dressing.

Nutritional analysis

Servings: 4

Serving size: 2 cups

Calories	360
Total fat (g)	13
Saturated fat (g)	1
Cholesterol (mg)	5
Sodium (mg)	440
Total carbohydrate (g)	44
Fiber (g)	8
Total sugars (g) Includes 0 g added sugars	13
Protein (g)	20

Lemon Spinach

It's amazing how a little lemon and garlic can zest up vegetables. We use baby spinach here, but feel free to substitute broccoli rabe or another favorite leafy green.

INGREDIENTS

1 tablespoon olive oil	juice of 1 lemon
1 tablespoon minced garlic	¼ teaspoon salt
6 ounces (about 3 large handfuls) baby spinach	pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS

Put olive oil in a wok or 10-inch sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add minced garlic and cook for 20 seconds. Add baby spinach to garlic and oil. Cook 2 to 3 minutes. Squeeze the lemon juice over the spinach while cooking. Add salt and pepper.

Nutritional analysis

Servings: 4

Serving size: ½ cup

Calories	60
Total fat (g)	14
Saturated fat (g)	0.5
Cholesterol (mg)	0
Sodium (mg)	180
Total carbohydrate (g)	4
Fiber (g)	1
Total sugars (g) Includes 0 g added sugars	1
Protein (g)	1

Simple Fruit Smoothie

If you've got fruit around that needs to be eaten, by all means, whip up a smoothie for a nutritious dessert or snack.

INGREDIENTS

1 cup plain nonfat Greek yogurt	½ cup fresh or frozen blueberries
¼ cup orange juice	½ cup ice
½ banana, cut into pieces	

DIRECTIONS

Combine all ingredients in a blender or food processor and blend until smooth. Pour into a glass and serve.

Nutritional analysis

Servings: 1
Serving size: 12 ounces

Calories	260
Total fat (g)	0.5
Saturated fat (g)	0
Cholesterol (mg)	0
Sodium (mg)	110
Total carbohydrate (g)	42
Fiber (g)	3
Total sugars (g) Includes 0 g added sugars	26
Protein (g)	24

Pumpkin Muffins

These are much more healthful than the muffins you'll find at a cafe or even at the grocery store. Still, note that they're a dessert, not a breakfast food.

INGREDIENTS

3 small ripe bananas (or 2 medium-large bananas)	2 teaspoons pumpkin pie spice
1 (15-ounce) can pumpkin puree	1 cup whole-wheat flour
2 egg whites	1¾ cups oat bran
1 whole egg	1½ teaspoons baking soda
½ cup unsweetened applesauce	⅔ cup (4.7 ounces) raisins
1 cup nonfat dry milk	cooking spray

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350° F. Puree bananas and pumpkin in a blender or food processor. Add egg whites, whole egg, and applesauce, and puree until smooth. Add dry milk and pulse until blended. Add pumpkin pie spice to mixture and blend.

In a separate bowl, combine flour, oat bran, baking soda, and raisins. Mix to combine. Add banana-pumpkin mixture to flour mixture and mix well.

Spray a muffin pan with cooking spray and spoon mixture into cups, distributing batter evenly. Bake for 30 minutes or until a toothpick inserted into a muffin comes out clean. ♥

Nutritional analysis

Servings: 12
Serving size: 1 muffin

Calories	180
Total fat (g)	2
Saturated fat (g)	0
Cholesterol (mg)	18
Sodium (mg)	209
Total carbohydrate (g)	37
Fiber (g)	5
Total sugars (g) Includes 0 g added sugars	16
Protein (g)	9

Resources

Organizations

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

120 S. Riverside Plaza, Suite 2000
Chicago, IL 60606
800-877-1600 (toll-free)
www.eatright.org

This large organization of food and nutrition professionals provides information and advice to the general public through its website, outreach efforts, and publications.

The Nutrition Source—Knowledge for Healthy Eating

Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health
Department of Nutrition
www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource

This website provides free public access to the latest information on nutrition and health.

Books and publications

Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020–2025

U.S. Department of Agriculture and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
www.dietaryguidelines.gov

This report sets out practical guidelines for healthy eating based on the latest nutritional science. It is available online and in print.

Eat, Drink, and Be Healthy: The Harvard Medical School Guide to Healthy Eating (Updated and Expanded)

Walter C. Willett, M.D., with Patrick J. Skerrett
(Free Press, 2017)

This updated edition of the national bestseller from Dr. Willett, professor of epidemiology and nutrition at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, debunks dietary myths and presents a plan for healthy eating based on a balance among the healthiest sources of carbohydrate, fat, and protein—and a diet that's sustainable for the planet.

Lose Weight and Keep It Off: Smart approaches to achieving and maintaining a healthy weight

Florencia Halperin, M.D., Medical Editor, and Carrie Dennett, M.S., R.D.N., L.D., Nutrition Editor
(Harvard Medical School, 2020)

If diets have failed you in the past, this Special Health Report from Harvard Medical School will help. It gives you strategies for reducing calories while boosting nutrition, making snacks healthier, and adopting lifestyle changes that help shed pounds. Equally important, it addresses emotional issues like comfort eating and cravings. You'll get the facts about popular weight-loss medications, the dangers of weight-loss supplements, and bariatric surgery. In a special section, Harvard's experts share 10 techniques that will reinforce and reward your progress. To order, call 877-649-9457 or go online to www.health.harvard.edu.

Savor: Mindful Eating, Mindful Life

Thich Nhat Hanh and Lilian Cheung
(HarperOne, 2010)

This book resulted from a collaboration between the late Zen master and a nutritionist who is editorial director of the Nutrition Source website of the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. It combines Buddhist teachings with nutrition science to help you integrate mindfulness into your daily eating and exercise habits to achieve well-being and a healthy weight.

Glossary

added sugars: Sugars and syrups that are added to foods during processing, as opposed to sugars naturally found in foods (such as the fructose in fruits and lactose in milk).

dietary fiber: The edible, nondigestible component of carbohydrates naturally found in plant food.

omega-3 fats: Beneficial polyunsaturated fats that are found in fatty fish and, to a lesser extent, in other foods such as walnuts and flaxseed.

polyunsaturated fats: Beneficial fats found primarily in vegetable oils such as corn oil and soybean oil.

saturated fats: Unhealthy fats found primarily in animal products such as meat, butter, and dairy. Also found in palm and coconut oil.

visceral fat: Belly fat that lies beneath the abdominal wall, in the spaces surrounding the liver, intestines, and other organs.



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Cardio Exercise	High Blood Pressure	Skin Care
Caregiving	Incontinence	Sleep
Change Made Easy	Inflammation	Starting to Exercise
Cholesterol	Joint Pain Relief	Strength Training
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COPD	Leg Pain	Stretching
Core Workout	Life After Cancer	Stroke
Depression	Living Longer	Tai Chi
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