

Building Meals for Healthy Aging

Eating a balanced diet improves your sleep, gives you more energy, fights off certain cancers, and helps you prevent or better manage chronic conditions, like heart disease or diabetes. Healthy eating becomes even more important with age. Unfortunately, when it comes to meal planning, time and resources may be scarce. Below are some tips that may help you.



How to build a balanced meal

For a healthy, well-balanced meal, follow the U.S. Department of Agriculture's "MyPlate" guidelines.

50% fruits and vegetables. These foods are low in calories and provide many essential vitamins and minerals your body needs to function and fight disease. Be sure to "eat a rainbow" and mix up your intake of fruits and vegetables.

25% protein. These foods includes meat, poultry, fish and seafood, legumes, nuts, eggs, seeds, or soy products. Protein is vital for the body. Adults should try to eat between five and seven ounces of protein per day.

25% fiber-rich carbohydrates. These foods include whole grain breads, rice, and pasta. The fiber found in whole grains helps the body reduce cholesterol and lower the risk of heart disease while also supporting healthy digestion and proper bowel function.

Don't forget the dairy! In addition to your balanced plate, your body needs dairy to help improve your bone and heart health, while giving you important proteins, calcium, and vitamins. Adults should consume about 3 cups of dairy per day in the form of low-fat milk, cheese, or yogurt. For those who have an allergy, look for lactose-free options.

TIP!

Foods with fiber help us stay full for longer and are good for digestion.

Sample meals



BREAKFAST

You can try a slice of whole grain toast with some nut butter and fruit to give you energy.



LUNCH

A healthy option includes turkey slices on whole wheat bread with lettuce and tomato, some baby carrots and apple slices, and low-fat milk.



DINNER

End the day on a high note with four ounces of fish or salmon with a cup of brown rice and a side of green beans with tomatoes. You can also try a chicken breast with a cup of whole grain pasta and broccoli.

Learn more at myplate.gov/

Tips for making healthy meals

- 1. Add protein to give you more energy.** Try using peanut butter on toast instead of butter or jelly. Add some lentils or black beans to your sauce. This will add protein, vegetables, and extra flavor to your pasta dish.
- 2. Get creative with your meals.** For instance, tuna has many uses beyond that traditional tuna salad on toast—try adding some to a garden salad or a grilled cheese. Vegetables have many uses, too. Roast a batch for a side dish, and then you can use leftovers in a salad. You can also add some to scrambled eggs for extra flavor and nutrition, or to pasta with a little cheese for a balanced meal.
- 3. Plan for leftovers.** You can save time by making a large batch of food and planning additional meals with leftovers. For instance, enjoy a roasted chicken dinner with vegetables, and then toss leftovers on a salad for another tasty, balanced meal the next day. Plus, sliced chicken always makes for a great sandwich on some wheat or whole grain bread.
- 4. Don't throw away stale bread.** You can use it for croutons on a salad. Or crush the bread to use as breadcrumbs in a meatloaf or on top of a casserole. Stale bread is also great for dipping into soup.
- 5. Tap into the many uses for applesauce!** Applesauce is good on its own, but you could kick it up a notch by adding in some nuts to get extra protein and healthy fat. It's also the perfect ingredient to add a little sweetness to plain yogurt, cottage cheese, oatmeal, or cream of wheat.



READ THE LABELS

SALT: The American Heart Association (AHA) recommends no more than 1,500 milligrams of sodium per day for most adults, especially those with high blood pressure. Other names for salt: baking soda, sodium, nitrates, nitrites, monosodium glutamate.



FAT: Reducing saturated and trans fats can help reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke. The AHA recommends that no more than 5–6% of your daily calories should come from saturated fats (for a 2,000 calorie diet, that's less than 120 calories). The AHA recommends that adults who would benefit from lowering cholesterol should eliminate trans fat from their diet. Other names for fat: butter, carob, coconut oil, palm oil, tallow, hydrogenated oils, lard, margarine, milk solids, monoglycerides, shortening, vegetable fat, cream, ghee.

SUGAR: For most adults, the AHA recommends no more than 9 added teaspoons of sugar per day for men, and no more than 6 per day for women. Other names for sugar: brown sugar, cane sugar, concentrated fruit juice, corn syrup, dextrose, treacle, fructose, glucose, golden syrup, honey, lactose, malt, malt extract, maltose, isomaltose, maltodextrin, maple syrup, molasses, sucrose.

These are general guidelines. Be sure to talk to your doctor about your specific needs.