

Healthy Eating

What does eating healthy mean? Does healthy eating mean one can never eat a piece of bread again? Does eating healthy throughout the day translate as a sugar laden drink for breakfast, one for lunch and then eating a sensible meal for dinner? What is a sensible meal?

In 2005 the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) published the Dietary Guidelines for the general public over two years of age to define healthy eating. According to the Dietary Guidelines a healthy diet is one that has emphasis on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fat-free or low fat milk and milk products. A healthy diet also includes lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs and nuts. The Dietary Guidelines further describe a healthy diet as one that is low in saturated fats, trans fat, cholesterol, salt and added sugars.

The USDA created the food pyramid, a tool to help the general public know how to eat using the Dietary Guidelines on a daily basis. The food pyramid plan is based on a 2,000 calorie diet and can be adjusted for different calorie levels based on a person's weight, age, height and activity level. Eating by the food pyramid provides balance and variety, allowing all foods to fit in a healthy eating plan. The food pyramid is composed of 5 main food groups. These groups include grains, vegetables, fruits, milk and meats/beans.

The grain group includes foods such as bread, pasta, crackers and cereal. The food pyramid recommends a person to eat at least 6 servings of grains a day. It is recommended to have half of the grain servings come from whole grain products. A way to initially and gradually reach the whole grain recommendation is to substitute one whole grain product for a non-whole grain product. One way to make a switch for the day is to have whole grain toast in the morning instead of white toast.

The food pyramid recommendation for vegetables is eating 2 ½ cups each day. The Fruit and Veggies More Matters health initiative encourages the public to “think variety, think color” and to “eat your colors every day to stay healthy and fit”, referred to as by eating a rainbow of fruits and vegetables. These colors include blue/purple, green, white, yellow/orange, and red. Eating a rainbow of fruits and vegetables helps people get a variety of vitamins and minerals in their diet. Eating a variety of vegetables includes fresh, frozen and canned vegetables. Plan some meals around the vegetables and “season” with meats such as stir fry and stews.

The food pyramid recommends eating 2 cups of fruit each day. Again variety of colors is encouraged and includes canned, frozen and fresh fruits selections. Fruits are a good choice for desserts and snacks as well as part of a meal. Baked apples, baked pears, and berries with a sprinkling of sugar substitute are just a few examples of some fruit dessert ideas.

Eating or drinking 3 cups of the milk group each day is the food pyramid recommendation. If a person is unable to consume milk/milk products it is recommended

to choose lactose-free products or foods and beverages that are fortified with calcium such as some cereal choices or calcium fortified orange juice. Choosing low fat or fat free milk/powdered milk is recommended. Low fat yogurt made with a sugar substitute is an option for a healthy snack and another way to get a milk serving.

The recommendation for the meat and beans is to go lean with protein and to have 5 ½ ounce of this group per day. This group includes other foods besides meat such as nuts, eggs, and beans. Caribou and moose with the fat trimmed off are examples of lean meats. Salmon is a good source of omega-3 fatty acids which are heart healthy. Healthy ways to cook meats include broiling, grilling, roasting and boiling. Eating a variety of foods from this food group is encouraged such as small amounts of nuts or highlighting beans at a meal instead of meat. Some examples of bean entrees are chili, bean soups or bean burritos.

The food pyramid also recognizes the use of sweets and fats although it is recommended to eat and drink these sparingly. The American Heart Association recommends choosing fats and oils with 2 grams or less of saturated fat per tablespoon such as olive or canola oil. Fat is fat and while some fats are considered healthier than others they should all be used in small amounts. Many foods and beverages have sugars added to them such as cakes, cookies, pop and fruit drinks. These foods and beverages are often high in calories and low in vitamins and minerals. It is recommended to limit these types of foods and to make sure they are not replacing foods that are low in fat and high in fiber.

Healthy eating includes foods from all food groups. Some diet plans tend to exclude whole food groups which can lead to a deficit in vitamins and minerals that the body needs. It is good to spread the amount of food needed for the day into meals throughout the day. A balanced meal is one that includes foods from each food group.