Allina Health

First Steps in Eating Right

Dietary Guidelines

Good nutrition is essential for a healthy body. Eating well-balanced meals will help you feel your best.

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, a healthful diet is one that:

■ focuses on fruit, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk

■ includes lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs and nuts

■ is low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt and added sugars.

For complete information, go to choosemyplate.gov. The website contains tips and resources, foods to eat more and less of, and nutrition information for women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, children, and people who want to lose weight.

In general, you should:

■ Drink plenty of water instead of sugary drinks.

■ Make at least half of your grain foods whole grain.

■ Plan satisfying meals and snacks.

■ Prepare more foods at home instead of eating out at fast food or other restaurants.

■ Do not skip meals. Eat at least 3 meals a day. You may find that eating smaller meals and snacks more often works better for you.
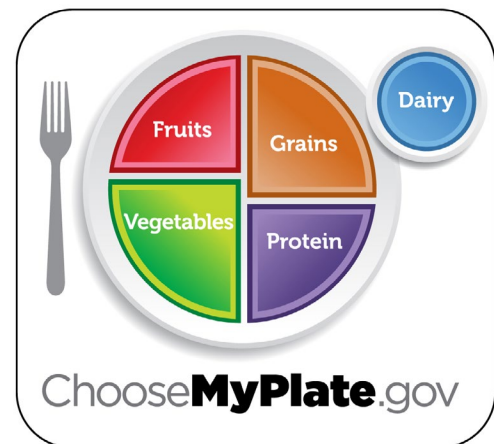
■ Eat slowly. Take your time and enjoy your food.

■ Pay attention to when you are hungry and when you are full.

How to Build a Healthful Meal

■ Eat smaller portion sizes. Try using smaller plates to help you do this.

■ Make half of your plate vegetables and fruits.

■ Include lean protein and whole grains.

■ Choose fat-free or low-fat dairy products such as milk and yogurt.

■ Avoid adding foods high in salt, sugar or fat to your meals. This could include gravies, potato chips or soda.

■ Try new, good-for-you foods (like kale or quinoa).

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Safe Food Handling and Storage

- Wash your hands, counter tops, utensils and cutting boards with warm, soapy water. Wash anything that comes in contact with raw meat, poultry, seafood, eggs or unwashed fresh produce.

- Wash your hands before and after handling foods and after using the bathroom, changing diapers or handling pets.

- Wash fruits and vegetables under running water before eating.

- Clean up spills in your refrigerator right away. Throw away expired foods and leftovers that are not going to be eaten.

- Keep raw meat, poultry and seafood separate from other items in your shopping cart and refrigerator.

- Use one cutting board for raw meats and another one for fresh fruits and vegetables.

- Put uncooked meat, poultry or seafood in sealed containers or plastic bags when storing in the refrigerator. Place on separate plates when raw and when cooked.

- Cook all foods well and use a clean thermometer to ensure proper temperatures. Cook foods to the following temperatures:
  - **Chicken and turkey:** 165 F
  - **Casseroles and leftovers:** 165 F
  - **Ground meats:** 160 F
  - **Eggs:** 160 F (or until yolks and whites are firm)
  - **Beef, pork, veal and lamb:** 145 F
  - **Fish and shellfish:** 145 F
  - **Ham (uncooked):** 145 F
  - **Ham (fully cooked):** 140 F

- Use a refrigerator thermometer to make sure the refrigerator always stays at 40 F or colder. This will help prevent food-borne illness.

- Refrigerate food quickly. Cold temperatures keep most harmful bacteria from multiplying.

Visit befoodsafe.org for more information about safe food handling and storage.

- Never thaw foods at room temperature.

Label Reading

Read food labels to become aware of what's in the foods you eat. Be sure to look at:

- serving size (The number of calories and nutrients are in one serving.)

- nutrients (This shows how much sodium, fiber, sugars, fat, etc., is in one serving.)

- percent of daily value (This is based on a 2,000-calorie diet. Most people follow either a lower or higher level so these percentages will change.)

- daily values chart (This shows the recommended limits on total fat, carbohydrates and dietary fiber for your diet each day. There are sets of numbers for diets of 2,000 and 2,500 calories.)

- ingredients. (This shows the order of ingredients from greatest to least.)

For More Information

For more information about nutrition, ask your primary care provider for a referral to meet with a dietitian.

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