

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

A Healthy Diet

Having a healthy diet is one of the most important things you can do to help your overall health. Along with physical activity, your diet is the key factor that affects your weight. Having a healthy weight for your height is important. Being overweight or obese increases your risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, stroke, breathing problems, arthritis, gallbladder disease, sleep apnea (breathing problems while sleeping), osteoarthritis, and some cancers. You can find out if you're overweight or obese by figuring out your body mass index (BMI). Women with a BMI of 25 to 29.9 are considered overweight, whereas women with a BMI of 30 or more are considered obese. All adults (aged 18 years or older) who have a BMI of 25 or more are considered at risk for premature death and disability from being overweight or obese. These health risks increase as the BMI rises. Your health care provider can help you figure out your body mass, or you can go to www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/calc-bmi.htm.

Taking time to buy the ingredients for and cooking a healthy meal sometimes falls last on your list. But you should know that it isn't hard to make simple changes to improve your diet. And you can make sense of the mounds of nutrition information out there. A little learning and planning can help you find a diet to fit your lifestyle, and maybe you can have some fun in the process!

How can I start planning a healthy diet for me and my family?

You can start planning a healthy diet by looking at the Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005 (http://www.healthierus.gov/dietaryguidelines) by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The best way to give your body the balanced nutrition it needs is by eating a variety of nutrient-packed foods every day. Just be sure to stay within your daily calorie needs.

What are the most important steps to a healthy diet?

The basic steps to good nutrition come from a diet that:

- Helps you either lose weight or keeps your BMI in the "healthy" range.
- Is balanced overall, with foods from all food groups, with lots of delicious fruits, vegetables, whole-grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products.
- Is low in saturated fat, trans fat, and cholesterol. Keep total fat intake between 20 to 35 percent of calories, with most fats coming from sources of polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fatty acids, such as fish, nuts, and vegetable oils.
- Includes a variety of grains daily, especially whole-grains, a good source of fiber.
- Includes a variety of fruits and vegetables (two cups of fruit and 2 1/2 cups of vegetables per day are recommended for a 2,000 calorie diet).
- Has a small number of calories from added sugars (like in candy, cookies, and cakes).
- Has foods prepared with less sodium or salt (aim for no more than 2,300 milligrams of sodium per day, or about one teaspoon of salt per day).
- Does not include more than one drink per day (two drinks per day for men) if you drink alcoholic beverages.

How can I follow a healthy diet if I eat out a lot?

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The American Heart Association gives these tips for a healthy diet, even when you aren't cooking at home:

- Ask the server to make substitutions, like having steamed vegetables instead of fries.
- Pick lean meat, fish, or skinless chicken.
- Make sure your entrée is broiled, baked, grilled, steamed, or poached instead of fried.
- Ask for baked, boiled, or roasted potatoes instead of fried.
- Order lots of vegetable side dishes and ask that any sauces or butter be left off.
- Ask for low-calorie salad dressing or a lemon to squeeze on your salad instead of dressing.
- Order fresh fruit or fruit sorbet in place of cake, pie, or ice cream desserts.

For More Information

You can find out more about having a healthy diet by contacting the National Women's Health Information Center at 1-800-994-9662 or the following organizations:

U.S. Federal Government Nutrition.gov Internet: www.nutrition.gov