

Healthy Eating for You

Healthy eating means eating a variety of foods that provide the nutrients you need to maintain your health, feel good and enjoy life.

Some foods can be eaten at any time and help maintain your health, whilst other foods should only be eaten occasionally. Maintaining your health with a nutritious and well balanced diet may assist in preventing the following health issues and conditions:

- weight gain
- gall bladder disease
- high blood cholesterol
- high blood pressure
- some cancers
- impaired fertility
- heart disease
- osteoporosis
- musculoskeletal disorders related to being overweight, e.g. osteoarthritis, lower back pain

Even healthy foods eaten in large quantities can contribute to weight gain and associated health problems so be careful with the amount you eat generally, for example, be aware of your serving sizes and snacking between meals.

Healthy eating tips

Foods/drinks to have more of:

- **Vegetables and fruit** – include two serves of fruit and five serves of vegetables each day to obtain fibre, vitamins, minerals and important antioxidants.
- **Fish** – include fish, wholegrains and green leafy vegetables regularly each week to obtain important omega-3 fatty acids, which are powerful protectors of the heart and blood vessels. Seek advice from your health practitioner regarding eating fish if you are pregnant.
- **Calcium rich foods** – include three to four serves of low-fat dairy foods or substitutes (e.g. calcium fortified soy milks). If you are unable to consume these foods talk to your health practitioner about bone strength.
- **Wholegrain foods** – such as wholemeal breads, oats, wheat or rice grains and cereals.
- **Water** – have six to eight glasses (1.5 – 2 litres) per day.

Foods/drinks to have less of:

- **Saturated fat** – limit butter and animal fat intake. Choose oils such as olive, canola, sunflower or safflower oils.
- **Alcohol** – limit intake, no more than one to two standard drinks per day and aim for a couple of alcohol free days per week.
- **Take away or pre-prepared convenience foods** – such as frozen pies and desserts high in fat, salt and sugar should be eaten only occasionally.
- **Snack foods** – such as potato crisps, corn chips, biscuits, cakes and chocolate. Make them occasional treats not everyday foods.
- **Sweetened soft drinks, cordials and sports drinks** – avoid these types of drinks, including those with nutrients added as they provide a lot of kilojoules and little nutritional value.

How do I start a healthy eating plan?

1. Step one – planning

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What are the three most important changes I can make right now to the way I eat? Think about the things you do daily. Should you change what you drink? Maybe eat more low-fat dairy foods, or eat more fruit and vegetables?
- Can I maintain these changes for a week, a month or a year? Whilst it is good to make changes even for a little while (e.g. a month with no take-away food), the changes you make for a year will be more important. Try some changes for a week or two then re-assess how you are going with them. Ask yourself if it is realistic for you to make these changes.
- How will those changes affect the people around me? Sometimes you may have good intentions but the rest of the family don't share your enthusiasm for extensive changes to their usual meals. Introduce new foods, cooking styles or ideas gradually without too much fuss and you may be surprised how they all enjoy the variety.

2. Step two – getting started

- Try some new foods and recipes and set some small goals. Write out a plan, put it up on view, e.g. put a note on your fridge such as 'my goal for this week is to eat fresh fruit every day'.
- When starting your healthy eating plan, start small and cook what you know is healthy and you will enjoy. There are many healthy and delicious recipes out there to try, however start with what you know and build upon this week by week.
- Be prepared for some challenges when changing and maintaining a healthy diet. Consider how you can overcome these.

Tips for overcoming challenges might include:

- Making your lunch the night before work or using leftovers from dinner for lunch the next day.
- Planning your meals in advance. Shop for the ingredients and plan what you want to cook for the week so you don't have to stop for takeaway food on the way home.

3. Step three – reflect

- Look at the changes you have made, as small as they may be. It is important to be realistic about your action plan.
- Reflect on the small things you have done rather than what you have not.
- Reward yourself if you have achieved your goals, e.g. read your favourite magazine, get a manicure.
- Look ahead at what you can do for the following day or week and set yourself a new plan.

Is there an important meal for the day?

Skipping meals is one of the biggest mistakes women make, particularly if you are trying to manage your weight. Regular meals maintain your energy and provide the nutrients you need each day, so you will feel more like being active and less likely to snack. Breakfast is important for improving mood and memory, boosting your metabolism and for weight management. A cereal containing oats, such as porridge, muesli or other wholegrain, high-fibre cereal is ideal with low-fat milk or yogurt, fruit and wholegrain toast. These will provide a substantial amount of your requirements of calcium, fibre, B vitamins, zinc and many other nutrients. Those cereals that are labelled low GI will give a slow release of energy and keep you satisfied longer. As a result, you may find you snack less, which can help with your weight.

Is it unhealthy to follow some of the current fad diets?

It's tempting to look at some of the strict diets that promise quick weight loss. These fad diets are difficult to follow and provide only short-term results. Frequent fad dieting, with weight gain between episodes, can cause dehydration, lack of adequate vitamins and minerals, weakness, fatigue, nausea, headaches and constipation. Carbohydrate foods, particularly the carbohydrates from wholegrain wheat, oats, rye, rice, fruit and vegetables, provide important nutrients and fibre, are essential to your health and energy and should not be eliminated from your diet. You may however reduce the intake of carbohydrates, particularly sugar in foods like biscuits, cakes and confectionery without harm.

What about alcohol?

Alcohol consumption has many potential health risks and is also high in kilojoules. Try to avoid drinking more than two standard drinks per day. A standard drink is 100mL of wine, 30mL of spirits or 285mL of full-strength beer. Aim for at least 1 to 2 alcohol free days a week.

What else will keep my health on track?

If you are physically active, manage your stress, have good quality sleep and avoid smoking and excess alcohol consumption, you'll feel even better – a great recipe for getting the most out of life.

Where can I get more information?

www.jeanhailes.org.au

www.healthforwomen.org.au

www.nutritionaustralia.org – Nutrition Australia

www.foodwatch.com.au

www.bonehealthforlife.org.au

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This fact sheet is designed to be informative and educational. It is not intended to provide specific medical advice or replace advice from your health practitioner.

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