

# Read What You Eat!

A meal always begins with a plate, which can lead to healthy or unhealthy eating habits depending on the portion sizes you choose. Having a basic knowledge of which foods are good and which are not so good is a great starting point, but it's not enough to help you make significant progress toward losing weight, getting fat, sugar, and cholesterol under control, or becoming healthier overall. There are plenty of people out there who think they are eating well, but misconceptions and hidden nutrition dangers are actually still preventing them from meeting their goals. What should you know about portion size and food group balance that will help you make the most of meal times?

## What is a Balanced Diet?

A balanced diet doesn't just mean that you eat fewer desserts and more vegetables. Nutritionists have developed an easy-to-remember system of dividing all food items into five essential "food groups," plus a sixth group for items like desserts and sugary drinks that your body doesn't need at all. A daily diet that contains all five essential food groups in the correct proportions to each other is balanced and provides all the nutrients your body needs to function properly.



## LEARN MORE

*Make smart decisions about your health and visit a physician or health specialist for advice and questions.*

### FDA MyPlate

[www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov)

### American Society for Nutrition


[www.nutrition.org](http://www.nutrition.org)


# YOUR PLATE & PORTION





## HELPFUL TIPS FOR MEETING NUTRITION GOALS

It helps to have some practical tips that can help you begin and keep up with your nutritional goals:

 **START WITH SMALLER SERVINGS.** Filling a large plate with food practically ensures that you will overeat. If you use a small plate, you will most likely feel satisfied after eating what is on it.

 **KEEP A RECORD OF WHAT YOU EAT.** Studies have shown that the physical act of writing down what you eat encourages you to think harder about your choices.

 **DON'T GIVE UP!** If you occasionally neglect your vegetables and fill up on junk food, your journey to better health is not over— you've just taken a short detour. Long-term efforts will result in slow but lasting changes.

 **HAVE REALISTIC GOALS.** Take small steps toward a healthier diet. Restrict desserts to one or two times per week, and allow yourself to enjoy your favorite junk food on rare occasions.

**HEALTHY  
DIRECTIONS**

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**HEALTHY  
DIRECTIONS**



Within each food group, there are additional guidelines that will help you get the most out of your balanced diet:



**Grains**

You should get between five and eight ounces of whole grains per day. The most important thing to remember when choosing grains is that whole grains are always better than refined grains. The refining process removes some important nutrients, most notably fiber, from the grain. White bread, buns, pasta, and baked goods made from white flour have a softer texture, but they don't do as much good for your body as whole grain does.

**Fruits**

The recommended daily amount of fruit is about two cups. It is actually easy to get into the habit of eating enough fruit each day—bananas, apples, and oranges are convenient snacks. In most cases, a single piece of fruit is roughly equal to one cup. For example, a banana at breakfast and an apple later in the day completes your daily fruit needs.



**Vegetables**

This group is probably the easiest to neglect—the USDA recommends three cups daily for most people. Because vegetables vary widely in terms of their nutritional content, you should try to get a mixture of different colored vegetables in the course of a week: leafy green; red/orange; yellow/white; and beans. Cooking vegetables can remove nutrients, so it is best to eat raw vegetables as much as possible. In addition to having vegetables at each meal, consider using vegetables for snacking during the day.



**Proteins**

The body needs five to six ounces of protein-rich foods each day. These include meats, fish, eggs, nuts, and cooked beans. Some protein sources are higher in fat than others, so it is a good idea to emphasize lean meats like poultry and seafood.

**Dairy**

The USDA suggests three cups of dairy for a healthy daily diet. Milk, yogurt, and cheese are the most common dairy sources, providing fat, calcium, and vitamin D. To control fat intake, choose low-fat or fat-free dairy products whenever possible. Note that butter is not included in this category, since processing removes most of the original milk's nutritional benefits.

When dining out, don't assume that your side dish equals a single serving – don't feel bad about leaving food on your plate.

**Oils**

Oils are not a food group, but they provide essential nutrients. While the body needs oils, most people don't need to make an effort to include them—they are in plenty of the foods we normally eat. Five to seven teaspoons make up the recommended daily allowance.

**Extras**

Unfortunately, there are quite a few foods that don't provide enough nutrition to qualify to be included in an essential food group. Soft drinks, butter, and artificial preservatives and flavors are very common, but do not provide important benefits for the body.

**Portion Size**

Many of us are not very good at estimating portion sizes. Restaurants regularly provide far more than a serving of each menu item, and at home we tend to serve ourselves large portions of the foods we enjoy. As you begin managing your diet, keep a set of measuring cups, spoons, and even a kitchen scale nearby to measure portions accurately. When dining out, don't assume that your side dish equals a single serving—be realistic about how much you are eating, and don't feel bad about leaving some food on your plate if there is too much there.



**Snacking**

The food you eat between meals counts toward your daily diet just as much as what you eat during meals! This can be a problem—cookies, salty chips, and sodas, even when used sparingly, raise your fat and sugar intake for the day. However, snack time can become your diet's best friend if you use it correctly. A cup of fruit or vegetable juice can help you meet your daily requirements, and a serving of low-fat yogurt can be just as satisfying as a candy bar.

**Start Today!**

Today's busy lifestyles make cooking at home difficult and eating fast and easy seem necessary, so it is difficult to control how much you eat and ensure that you are consuming the nutrients you need. Becoming aware of your portion size and the types of food you eat is the first step to starting healthier eating habits.

Portion Control Tip:  
Start your meal with a tall glass of H<sub>2</sub>O. By filling your belly with a 16 oz. glass of water before you eat, you will be less likely to overeat.