

Creating A Healthy Eating Pattern

As a part of an active lifestyle, it is important to consider incorporating a healthy eating pattern. Adequate physical activity, proper nutrition, and mind-body awareness is the combination to a balanced wellness regimen. Read on to learn more about how you can incorporate a healthy eating pattern into your lifestyle.

Shifting our focus to healthy eating patterns

An eating pattern is an individual's habitual dietary intake and decisions regarding food and beverages over a continuous period of time. The *2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* emphasize that eating patterns may be a predictive marker of overall health status and disease risk. An individual's pattern of eating may change over life transition periods such as transitioning from adolescent to early adult. Cultural or personal preferences may shift and can be incorporated into an individual's pattern of eating. As long as the individual is following an overall healthy diet pattern during these transition periods, the health benefits sustain.

Benefits of a healthy eating pattern

Evidence shows that persons who consume a healthy, balanced diet over a continuous time period are at reduced risk of developing chronic diseases such as: type II diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, and high cholesterol.

An individual's pattern of eating should focus on including a variety of nutrient-dense foods while limiting empty calories. Nutrient dense foods are foods with a mix of high nutrient content and relatively low calories. Foods consisting of multiple vitamins, minerals, complex carbohydrates, healthy fats, and lean proteins are considered nutrient-dense. Empty calories offer minimal nutrients, but have relatively high calories providing little to no health benefit to the consumer. Solid fats and added sugars in both foods and beverages are primarily responsible for empty calories in the American diet.

How to create a healthy eating pattern:

- 1) Choose vegetables from different subgroups – dark green, red and orange, legumes (beans and peas), starchy, and other
- 2) Consume the whole fruit versus fruit juice
- 3) Half or more of grains should come from whole grains
- 4) Choose low-fat or fat-free dairy products



- 5) A variety of proteins should be consumed including lean meats and poultry, eggs, seafood, nuts, seeds, soy products and legumes
- 6) Healthy fats and oils should be substituted for those containing saturated fat and/or trans fat
- 7) Research shows that a healthy eating pattern limits saturated fats and trans fats, added sugars, and sodium.

It's recommended to consistently follow these guidelines in order to maintain an overall healthy eating pattern. This is especially important for when you change environments such as: work, school, or travel. Environment changes can be one of the most challenging obstacles to sustaining a healthy eating pattern due to food availability, time constraints, and other life stresses.

Special considerations for weight loss:

In order to promote weight loss, a caloric deficit must be created and maintained. In other words, a person must eat less than their body uses. To safely lose weight, it is important to remember the following:

- Include nutrient-dense foods at each meal or snack opportunity. Try fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, beans, eggs, nuts, seeds, lean protein, low-fat or fat-free dairy products.

- Pre-plan meals and snacks so a healthy option is always available.
- Drink plenty of fluids, especially water. Aim for at least 8-10 cups per day.
- Distinguish eating out of boredom versus when you're truly hungry.
- Don't skip meals. Instead aim for 5-6 small meals spread throughout the day.
- Be aware of what barriers you have on your weight loss journey. Plan in advance how to overcome these challenges.

Follow these key strategies while creating your “on the go” nutrition plan:

- Always prepare and plan in advance when possible
- Identify food access at your destination (supermarkets, restaurants)
- Familiarize yourself with your flight itinerary to identify appropriate options
- Bring supplemental food in your school, work, or travel bag (water bottle, fruit, non-perishable bars)
- Stay hydrated by drinking fluids regularly
- Be aware of food safety standards and practices if you are traveling international

Nutritional needs should be met primarily through whole food sources versus supplements. A sports bar, sports drink, or other supplemental food may be an appropriate option for an athlete or other person at times, but should not replace a meal itself. Whole foods in their most natural, unprocessed form provide the body with the greatest variety of nutrients. When possible, incorporate as many whole foods in your eating pattern to maximize your nutritional benefit.

Hormone's Role in Weight Maintenance

Research shows that those who consume an overall healthy eating pattern are likely to maintain a stable, healthy body weight. Nutritional deficiencies are less likely present when an individual is consuming a balanced, consistent diet. By optimizing nutritional status, the body is able to maintain homeostasis, or a balanced state. The following hormones play a key role in managing the body's homeostasis:

- Insulin levels increase rapidly after a meal and help transport glucose (energy) to be used in the cells. The pancreas releases insulin into the bloodstream.
- Leptin is released from the adipose (fat) cells. Leptin promotes the feeling of fullness and likely decreases with low caloric intake.
- Ghrelin is released mainly from the stomach. It is known as the “hunger hormone” and is released when the stomach is empty.
- Gastrin helps initiate the digestion process. It is released from the stomach when food enters.
- Peptide YY (or PYY) is secreted by the intestines and slows stomach motility, or the movement of food. It is released in the hours following a meal and may suppress appetite.
- Cholecystokinin (CCK) is secreted by the small intestine. It triggers feelings of fullness in the brain and is released when protein and fat enter the small intestine.

There are several components that make up a healthy lifestyle including adequate physical activity and healthy dietary intake. Incorporating a healthy pattern of eating along-side regular exercise should be something that is sustainable for you from day to day and even on-the-go. These components are often key indicators of success in the long-term.

Staying Active Pays Off!

Those who are physically active tend to live longer, healthier lives. Research shows that moderate physical activity—such as 30 minutes a day of brisk walking—significantly contributes to a longer life. Even a person with health risk factors like high blood pressure, depression, diabetes or a smoking habit can gain real benefits from incorporating regular physical activity into their daily life.

As many dieters have found, exercise can also help you achieve weight loss goals. What's more, regular exercise can help lower blood pressure, control blood sugar, improve cholesterol levels and build stronger, denser bones. Exercise helps improve your mental well-being too.

A Complete Physical Activity Program

Regular physical activity provides many health benefits. While it's not required, working with an exercise professional can help you reach your fitness goals, tailor exercises to your abilities and most importantly, minimize your risk of injury. You should expect the exercise professional to ask you to fill out an exercise pre-participation health screening. This form will ask if you exercise regularly and if you have any health concerns that should prompt you to see your healthcare provider before getting started. The following precautions will help you safely participate in exercise programs:

If you DO NOT exercise regularly:

[If you have not been diagnosed by a doctor with, AND do not have signs or symptoms of cardiovascular, metabolic or kidney disease, THEN you can start right away with light to moderate intensity exercise. You can gradually build up to vigorous exercise if you stay free of any symptoms of health problems.](#)

If you have ever been diagnosed by a doctor, with OR have signs/symptoms of cardiovascular, metabolic or kidney disease, THEN it is recommended to seek medical clearance before beginning an exercise program. Once you get medical clearance, you should start with light to moderate intensity. You can gradually build up to vigorous exercise if you stay free of any symptoms of health problems.

If you DO exercise regularly:

If you have not been diagnosed with, AND do not have signs or symptoms of cardiovascular, metabolic, or kidney disease, you can continue with moderate exercise or gradually build to vigorous exercise intensity.

If you have been diagnosed with cardiovascular, metabolic, or kidney disease AND do not have any sign/symptoms of health problems, then you can continue exercising at a moderate intensity. If you received medical clearance within the last 12 months AND your symptoms have not changed, then can continue with moderate exercise or gradually build to vigorous exercise intensity.

If at any time you develop a sign or symptom of cardiovascular, metabolic or kidney disease, discontinue exercise and seek a doctor's clearance right away. Then, after getting medical clearance, you may continue your moderate intensity exercise program and gradually progress your effort.

Getting Started with an Exercise Program

A well-rounded exercise program includes aerobic, strength training exercises, but not necessarily in the same session. This blend helps maintain or improve overall health and function. So, it is important to choose exercises you enjoy and can fit into your schedule.

Not all exercise programs are suitable for everyone. Activities should be carried out at an effort level that is comfortable for you. You should stop participation in any exercise activity that causes pain. In such event, you should consult with your health care professional immediately.

ACSM recommends you accumulate at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity (working hard enough to break a sweat, but still able to carry on a conversation) most days per week, or 20 minutes of more vigorous activity three days per week. Combinations of moderate- and vigorous-intensity activity can be performed to meet this recommendation.

Examples of typical aerobic exercises are: walking, running, stair climbing, cycling, rowing, cross country skiing and swimming. Examples of common strength training exercises are: weight machines, free weights and resistance bands. Flexibility exercises can include: stretches of muscles around different joints and yoga.

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