Obesity Association

A division of the **American Diabetes Association®**

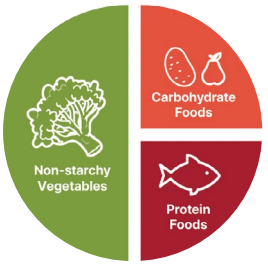
Nutrition Tips for Eating Well

Build Meals Around Foods You Enjoy

Eating to support a healthy lifestyle goes hand-in-hand with eating foods that taste good to you. Building your meals around foods you enjoy eating, while being mindful of cooking methods, portion size, and having a variety of foods, is key to feeling your best. Include foods that hold meaning for you, whether they come from your family history, your culture and background, or because they remind you of happy times. Remember, when you nourish your body, you also nourish your soul.

Keep It Simple

One way to start a healthier eating plan is to keep it simple—use the Diabetes Plate as your guide. To create a meal using the Diabetes Plate, fill 1/2 your plate with non-starchy vegetables, 1/4 with lean protein, and 1/4 with quality carbohydrate foods like starchy vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy, or fruit. Choosing lean meats, low-fat dairy foods, or plant-based proteins like beans supports your muscles and helps prevent muscle loss.



Drink Plenty of Fluids

Your body functions best when you hydrate with water and other low-calorie drinks like unsweetened hot or iced tea, black coffee, and sugar-free beverages. Everyone starts the day needing liquid after sleeping, so remember to drink plenty of water in the first few hours of waking and be sure to keep hydrating all day. If you don't like drinking plain water or herbal tea, try adding a slice of lemon, lime, cucumber, mint, or basil to add flavor.

Go to Your Pantry and Freezer First

It's a good idea to check what is in your pantry, refrigerator, and freezer to help you plan out your meals for the week. Using what you already have on hand can takes some stress off your weekly meal planning. You might find some hidden left-over meatballs in your freezer you could add to whole grain pasta and steamed green beans for a quick meal. Or, your salt-free canned black beans and slivered almonds from your pantry can be added to a salad for a fast lunch. By doing this, you'll also save money (it's already paid for!) and avoid wasting food.

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Keep Produce Add-Ins Handy

On our busiest days, it can be challengng to eat a balanced meal. If you don't have time to cook, you may want to just grab a meal at a fast food restaurant. But by keeping healthy items, like non-starchy vegetables, ready to use, you can make the healthier choice of building a balanced meal to take with you on the go. Try to keep non-starchy vegetables ready to go, but also think about:

- Canned fruits packed in water or their own juice
- Canned low-salt or no-added-salt vegetables
- Frozen fruit like berries, mangos, and cherries
- Frozen vegetables like broccoli, spinach, green beans, and squash
- Vegetable soups and stews
- 100% vegetable and fruit juices

Start by implementing this once a week and you will find it quickly becomes a habit!

Food and Nutrition Tips to Try

By trying new cooking techniques, finding ways to add extra fruits and vegetables to your meals, and exploring new ways to enjoy desserts, you can support your health. Try these food and nutrition tips to take you even further on your wellness journey:

- Try baking or air frying foods instead of frying them in oil. When making foods like meats or French fries in the oven or air fryer, you can use much less (or no) oil—which will lower the fat and calories.
- Stretch your main dishes by adding extra non-starchy vegetables. You can steam a bag of broccoli and add it to a chicken pasta meal, mix fresh or frozen chopped onions and peppers into scrambled eggs, or add frozen mixed vegetables into chicken noodle soup.
- Keep fresh or frozen greens (like kale, spinach, collards, bok choy, mustard greens, Swiss chard, turnip greens, or cabbage) at your fingertips. Grab a handful and add into soups, stews, pastas, and rice dishes—or sauté and add your main meal for a healthy option. You'll feel fuller and boost the nutrition of your meals.
- Craving a dessert? Try fruit for dessert when you want something sweet.

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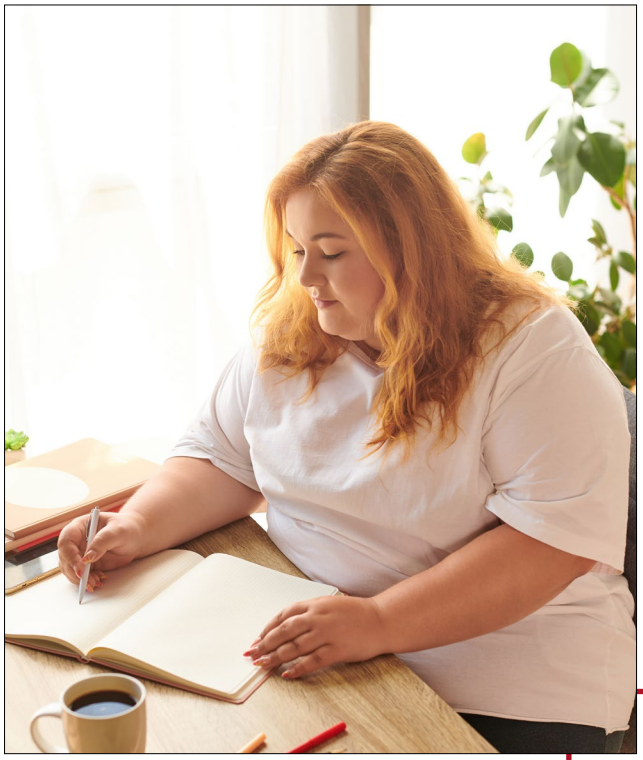

Keep a Wellness Journal

Every time you are mindful while meal planning, being physically active, or taking a moment to take a deep breath and lower your stress, you are moving forward on your weight-wellness journey. Make note of the positive ways you are caring for yourself in a journal. By being mindful of the positive steps you are taking to boost your health, you are helping to make these healthy lifestyle behaviors part of your routine.

Remember, It's a Journey

With life's ups and downs, challenges, changes, and surprises, things can be overwhelming. Know that you may have days or weeks—or even months—that are more difficult than others. Remember, every step you take on your wellness journey counts and you can always start fresh on a new day if things don't go as planned.

Help us improve the information and guidance we provide by sharing your feedback on this resource. Scan the QR code for the evaluation survey.