

NIH News in Health

National Institutes of Health · Department of Health and Human Services · newsinhealth.nih.gov

March 2007

What is Healthy Eating? How to Follow All that Advice You Hear

You want to live longer. You want to feel healthy, energetic and vigorous as you age. Your doctor says you should start eating better. You've heard that before, of course, but do you know what it really means?

Research is teaching us more about what a healthy diet is. And studies show that healthier eating habits may help lower your risk for type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, cancer and many other

health problems. The sooner you improve your eating, the better off you'll be. So start reaping the rewards of this research and learn how to eat healthier now.

"In general Americans are not eating enough fruits, vegetables and whole grains, and eating too much fat and salt," says Dr. Susan Z. Yanovski, director of NIH's Obesity and Eating Disorders Program. "There's a lot of room for improvement in the American diet."

Begin, Yanovski advises, by eating more fruits and vegetables. They naturally contain vitamins, minerals and fiber that help protect you from disease. Compared with people who eat only small amounts of fruits and vegetables, those who eat more have a reduced risk of cancers, stroke and other cardiovascular diseases.

Fruits and vegetables with different colors tend to have different levels of important nutrients, such as folate, potassium and vitamins A and C. So when you go to the grocery store, walk down the produce aisle and fill your cart or basket with a variety of colors.

Next, get into the habit of eating more whole grains. Foods with whole grains have fiber, which aids in digestion, and are rich in important nutrients. You can easily add whole

grains to your diet by choosing breads and cereals made with whole grains. But be careful of products with claims like, "now with whole grain." Some cereals marketed for children, for example, may contain whole grain, but not much—and they might have way too much sugar.

"You have to become a label reader," Yanovski says. "Look on the label, and one of the first few ingredients should say something like 'whole wheat' or 'whole grain.' It should be

one of the first ingredients, and it should have the word 'whole' in it."

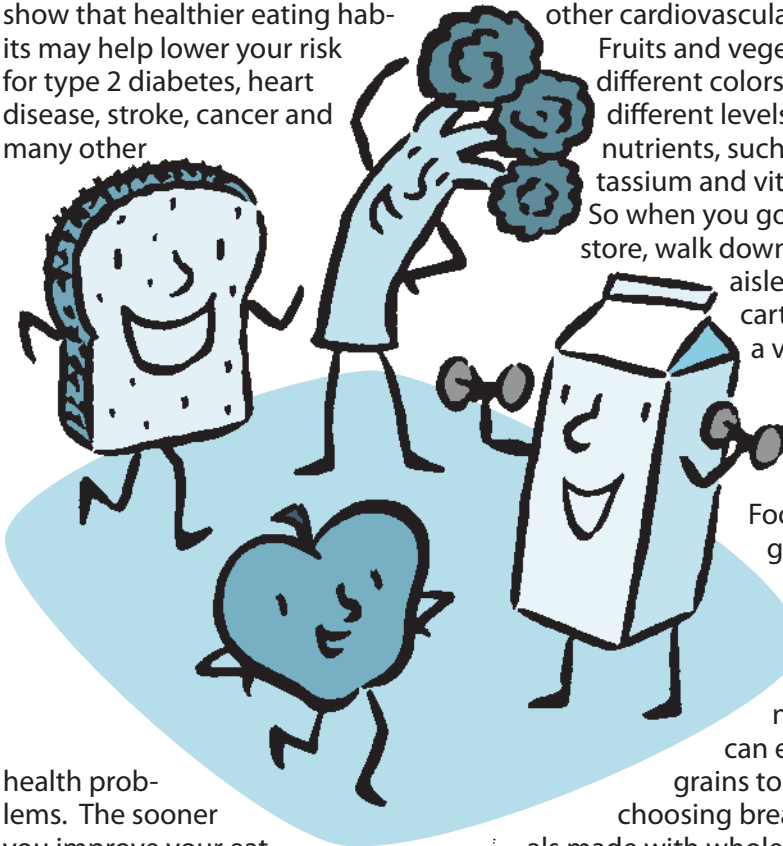
In fact, Nutrition Facts labels have lots of information to help you become a healthier eater. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has a website to teach you to use and understand labels at <http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/foodlab.html>.

One thing to look for on food labels is calcium, a particularly important nutrient for young people who are still growing and building their bones. Most Americans don't get enough calcium to grow or maintain strong bones. For instance, studies show that fewer than 1 in 10 girls and only 1 in 4 boys ages 9 to 13 are getting enough calcium.

To get more calcium into your diet, choose low-fat or nonfat dairy products like milk, cheese and yogurt. Other good sources of calcium are tofu (check the label for added calcium), calcium-fortified juices, soy- or rice-based beverages with added calcium (milk substitutes) and calcium-fortified cereals and breads.

Nutrition labels can also help you avoid the things we eat too much of. Too much saturated fat, trans fat and cholesterol can raise your blood cholesterol, a risk factor for heart disease. Too much salt (which appears on the label as "sodium") can contribute to

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Wise Choices Tips for Eating Right

Here are some simple things you can do to eat better:

- Start every day with a healthy breakfast.
- Eat more fruits and vegetables.
- Choose whole grains like 100% whole wheat bread, oatmeal or brown rice instead of refined grains like white bread and rice.
- Choose low-fat or nonfat milk, cheese and yogurt.
- Don't let sugary soda or other sweets crowd out healthy foods and beverages.
- Go easy on mayonnaise, creamy sauces and added butter.
- When you eat out, consider a salad with grilled chicken and fat-free or low-fat dressing. Even take-out and high-fat foods can be part of a balanced diet if you don't eat them every day and

don't eat too much of them. For example, eat only a child's order of french fries or one slice of pizza.

- Watch how much you eat. Even if you eat a healthy mix of foods, if you weigh too much you're at a higher risk for diabetes, heart disease and other health problems. Value-size servings aren't a bargain if you're eating more than your body needs.
- Remember that food with labels that say "low-fat," "reduced fat" or "light" aren't necessarily low in calories. Fat-free or low-fat muffins or desserts can have even more sugar than the full fat versions.
- Don't eat in front of the TV or in other situations out of habit. Instead of reaching for that cookie, do something else like call a friend or take a walk.
- Be aware of when, where and why you eat, and try to eat balanced meals throughout the day.



■ www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines/dga2005/document/html/brochure.htm

■ www.5aday.gov

■ www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/lose_wt/index.htm

■ win.niddk.nih.gov

■ wecan.nhlbi.nih.gov

been making it easier by making packages with smaller portions and healthier products for people who don't have a lot of time to prepare."

You can do the same in your home. Make healthy eating convenient, and your family will be more likely to choose healthier foods. Start with small changes, like giving your kids whole wheat bread, which has more whole grain than traditional white bread. Have more fruit sitting out on the table—and nuts, if weight control isn't a problem for your family. Make healthier foods easier to get to than less healthful foods.

For meals, add more vegetables to your favorite dishes. Choose lean meats, poultry and fish. Add more beans to the mix.

Don't wait any longer. Start your family eating healthier now. If you have children, set a good example. Help them learn healthy eating habits early to prevent health problems later in life. NIH has a wealth of information to help you and your family eat better and stay healthier, including recipe books, an online menu planner and many other tools and publications to help you choose the right foods and portions. Talk to your doctor about fine-tuning your diets to your bodies' needs.

Finally, don't forget that physical activity is the other key to healthier living. Eating a healthy diet and getting enough physical activity helps you feel well as you get older. Read the next story in this issue for tips on how to get more active. ■

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high blood pressure, another risk factor for heart disease and stroke. Too much sugar adds empty calories and helps contribute to obesity.

Sometimes, unfortunately, it's not easy to find healthy foods. Karen Donato, coordinator of NIH's Obesity Education Initiative, says, "Feeling pressed for time, many people turn to prepared food, which can be high in saturated fat, sodium and calories—and often come super-sized. But

you can have convenience and good health by making wise choices."

When you go to restaurants, ask for their healthier dishes. Many restaurants now highlight them in the menu. When you buy prepared foods at the store, check the labels for foods that are lower in sodium, saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol and calories.

Yanovski says, "The good news is that there are a lot of good choices out there. The food industry has

NIH News in Health (ISSN 1556-3898) newsinhealth.nih.gov

Editor: Harrison Wein, Ph.D.

wein@od.nih.gov

Tel: 301-435-7489 Fax: 301-496-0019

Assistant Editor:

Vicki Contie

Contributors: Vicki Contie, Margaret Georgiann (illustrations) and Harrison Wein

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National Institutes of Health

Office of Communications
& Public Liaison

Building 31, Room 5B38

Bethesda, MD 20892-2090

Do What Moves You

Push Past Your Obstacles and Get Active

People come up with lots of reasons to avoid physical activity. They feel too tired, too busy, too out of shape, too old... and the list goes on. But these obstacles pale in comparison to the many benefits of boosting your activity, even by a modest amount. Regardless of your age, gender or athletic ability, physical activity can enrich your health and well-being.

What can physical activity do for you? Coupled with a healthy diet, it can help you achieve and maintain a healthy weight. It can help prevent or delay the onset of chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure and some types of cancer. Your overall well-being may brighten as well, because physical activity can help you reduce stress, gain energy, sleep better, and fight depression and anxiety.

Some physical activities—such as weight-bearing exercises like jogging, tennis and weight lifting—can also

help you build and maintain healthy muscle and bone. That's important at any age, but especially critical for older adults.

Experts recommend that adults get at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity most days of the week. Moderate-intensity activities make you breathe harder and make it more difficult to talk, but you should still be able to carry on a conversation.

Children and adolescents need double what adults do. If weight loss is your goal, aim for at



least an hour of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity each day.

If you're reluctant to get physically active, think about the top 3 hurdles you face. Write them down, then list possible solutions. If expense is a concern, choose free activities like walking around parks or nature trails. If weather is an obstacle, consider walking around the mall or working out with fitness videos at home.

If the demands of family, friends and work leave you pressed for time, add physical activity to your daily routine. Try taking lunchtime walks, using the stairs instead of the elevator or enjoying an evening stroll around the neighborhood. Even everyday chores, like household cleaning and yard work, can get you moving.

Some people prefer structured exercise. No matter what kind of physical activities you choose, be sure to include some that are fun. Maybe you'd enjoy dancing, gardening or bike riding. Pick whatever activities fit your schedule, and set your plan in motion. ■



■ win.niddk.nih.gov/publications/tips.htm

■ www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation/Publications/ExerciseGuide

■ www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/heart/obesity/phy_active.htm



Wise Choices Ease Your Way Into a Physically Active Life

- First, ask your physician what type and amount of physical activity is right for you.
- Start slowly. Work up to daily physical activities of 30 minutes to improve health, 60 minutes to lose weight and 60-90 minutes to help maintain weight loss.
- Ask family and friends to join you, and make it fun. Form walking groups with co-workers, play with your children outside or take a dance class with friends.
- Choose a variety of activities to prevent boredom and keep your mind and body challenged.
- Listen to your body. Consult your physician if you experience chest discomfort, dizziness, severe headache or other unusual symptoms.
- Keep an activity log to track your progress. Note when and how long you worked out, what activity you did and how you felt during your workout.
- Set both short-term and long-term goals to keep motivated.
- Set rewards. Celebrate every success—you earned it!

Health Capsules

Talking About CAM Therapies

Nearly two-thirds of older Americans use some form of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM), but less than one-third of them discuss it with their doctors. That's according to a recent survey conducted by AARP and NIH. The news is disturbing, because doctors need to know about your CAM therapies so they have a full picture of everything you

are doing to manage your health.

CAM includes any health practices outside the realm of conventional medicine as practiced in the U.S., such as herbal supplements, meditation, homeopathy and acupuncture.

Researchers asked 1,559 people, age 50 or older, about conversations with their doctors about CAM. Although 63% of those surveyed

said they had used at least 1 CAM therapy, nearly 70% of them had not discussed it with a physician. Their top reasons: The physician never asked; they didn't know they should bring it up; or there wasn't enough time during the office visit. Some patients thought their doctors might react negatively or be unwilling to discuss CAM therapies.

Nearly three-fourths of those surveyed said they take one or more prescription medications, and nearly 60% said they take one or more over-the-counter medications. CAM therapies and conventional treatments can interact in unintended ways. This study underscores the need for patients and their doctors to discuss all therapies, including CAM, to ensure safe, integrated health care. ■



Wise Choices Talk to Your Doctor About CAM

- If you are considering a CAM therapy, ask your physician about its safety, effectiveness and possible interactions with your current medications.
- Tell your doctor about all therapies or treatments you're

now using, including over-the-counter and prescription medicines, as well as herbal and dietary supplements.

- When filling out patient history forms, be sure to include all therapies and treatments you use. Consider making a list before you go to the doctor's office.
- Don't wait for your doctor to ask about your use of CAM. Bring up the topic yourself.



[nccam.nih.gov/
timetotalk](http://nccam.nih.gov/timetotalk)

Treating Asthma in Kids

Several medications can help control children's **asthma**, but no clinical trials have directly compared them. A new study funded by NIH tested the effectiveness and safety of three common asthma medicines. It found that inhaled corticosteroids are the most effective initial daily therapy for children with mild to moderate persistent asthma.

The researchers divided 285 children, ages 6-14, into 3 groups, each receiving a different daily therapy for their asthma: a low dose inhaled

corticosteroid (Flovent); a combination of an even

lower dose inhaled corticosteroid along with a bronchodilator (Advair and Serevent); and an oral anti-leukotriene tablet (Singulair).

During the 48 weeks of treatment, the children taking inhaled corticosteroid alone showed better lung function than those in the other two groups. The inhaled corticosteroid alone and combination therapies were similarly effective at controlling symptoms, and both were more effective than the anti-leukotriene. None of the treatments significantly affected children's growth, a concern for many parents and doctors.

The study shows that inhaled corticosteroids are the most effective therapy for children of this age group with this type of asthma. ■



Featured Web Site
We Can!

wecan.nhlbi.nih.gov

We Can! is a national education program designed for families and communities to help children achieve a healthy weight. It focuses on 3 important behaviors: improved food choices, increased physical activity and reduced screen time. Find practical tips and resources that you can start using today.



Definition

Asthma

A chronic disease that causes your airways, the tubes that carry air to and from your lungs, to narrow so that less air flows through. Symptoms include wheezing (a whistling sound when you breathe), coughing, chest tightness and trouble breathing.



[www.nhlbi.nih.gov/
health/dci/Diseases/
Asthma/Asthma_
WhatIs.html](http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/dci/Diseases/Asthma/Asthma_WhatIs.html)

