

31 Days to a Healthier Diet

You've probably heard the phrase "you are what you eat." While it's true that food is fuel, it's also true that food is broken down and transformed into cells, hormones, muscles and YOU! When you think of food in this light, it can make it easier to make healthy and nutritious choices for your body. March is National Nutrition Month®—a time to focus on making informed food choices for a balanced and healthy diet.



March

<p>1 Keep a food diary. Before you can improve your diet, you have to know where you stand. Record everything you eat and drink for five days and use these tips to improve your diet a little bit each day.</p>	<p>2 Eat breakfast. It boosts your energy, metabolism and mental focus. Plus, breakfast eaters consume fewer calories throughout the day than people who skip this meal.</p>	<p>3 Enjoy 2-4 servings of fruit each day. Fruits are rich in nutrients, fiber, phytochemicals and antioxidants, which all help prevent disease. One serving is equal to 1/2 cup.</p>	<p>4 Know your "red flag" menu words. Avoid restaurant items described as: battered, bottomless, breaded, buttery, cheesy, country, creamy, crispy, fried, giant, loaded, smothered and stuffed.</p> 	
<p>5 Drink water. It's the only beverage your body really needs and craves. Gradually replace soda, flavored coffees, sugary drinks and other high-cal liquids with water. Aim for 8-12 cups each day.</p>	<p>6 Too busy to cook healthfully? To save time, use your Crockpot, cook and freeze large batches of food, buy pre cut or pre cooked ingredients, and keep an organized grocery list.</p> 		<p>7 Avoid trans fats. They increase your risk of heart disease. Foods with "partially hydrogenated oil" as an ingredient contain trans fat (even if the label says 0 grams) and should be left on the grocery shelf.</p>	<p>8 Slow down. Savoring your food in a calm environment helps you tune-in to your body's signals. You're less likely to overeat and experience problems like acid reflux when you take your time to really enjoy the moment.</p>
<p>9 Start at the perimeter of the grocery store. Fruits, veggies, dairy and grains, which should make up the bulk of your diet, are located here. Eating these unprocessed foods boosts your nutritional intake and promotes health.</p> 	<p>10 Eat 4-6 servings of vegetables daily. High in nutrients and low in calories, veggies can help prevent diabetes, stroke, heart disease and more. One serving is equal to 1/2 cup.</p>	<p>11 Chew on schedule. Too much time between meals can drop your energy levels, decrease your metabolism and result in overeating. Space your meals evenly throughout the day and eat a healthy snack between each meal.</p>	<p>12 Go nuts! Almonds, cashews, hazelnuts, pecans, peanuts, pistachios all contain healthy monounsaturated fats that lower your risk of several diseases. Grab a small handful 3-5 times per week.</p>	<p>13 Monitor your sodium intake. Less than 2,300 mg each day is ideal—that's about 1 teaspoon of salt. Look for salt-free and reduced-sodium versions of canned and frozen foods.</p> <p>14 Be a brown bagger. Packing your lunch ensures that you are eating better and saving money. Try lean proteins, whole grain bread, fruit, vegetables with dip, and broth-based soups for a filling meal.</p>
<p>15 Eat a snack before bed. It's a myth that eating late causes weight gain. As long as you don't overeat, you can enjoy a snack close to bedtime without worry.</p>	<p>16 Aim for 3-6 servings of grains each day. Rich in energy-boosting carbohydrates, vitamins and fiber, they're important for overall health. One serving is equal to 1/2-cup cooked (rice, pasta, oats) or 1 oz. (1 slice bread).</p>	<p>17 Happy St. Patrick's Day! Research shows that moderate drinking can prevent certain diseases, but occasional binge drinking has negative effects. Limit it to 1 drink daily for women and 2 drinks daily for men.</p>	<p>18 Get the nutrition facts. The front of a package won't tell you the whole story. Read labels and compare key nutrients calories, serving size, fat, fiber, calcium, and ingredients to make the best choice.</p>  <p>19 Look for "green flag" menu words. Healthy restaurant foods are usually described as baked, boiled, broiled, fresh, grilled, light, multi-grain, poached, reduced, roasted, seasoned, steamed, or stir-fried.</p> <p>20 Fish for Omega-3's. Two to three servings per week are good for your heart, brain and body. You'll find it in fatty fish (like salmon and albacore tuna), ground flaxseed, soybean oil and walnuts.</p>	
<p>21 It's spring! Enjoy this season's freshest picks: asparagus, bananas, beets, berries, figs, green beans, kiwi, mangos, peas, peppers, and pineapple.</p> 	<p>22 Consume 5 to 6.5 ounces of protein daily. Examples include: half a chicken breast (3 oz), 1 can tuna (3.5 oz), 1 Tbsp peanut butter (1 oz), 1 egg (1 oz) and 1/2 cup cooked beans (2 oz).</p>	<p>23 Cut the fat. Reduced-fat varieties of your favorite foods (skim milk, low-fat yogurt, etc.) will help you consume fewer calories and watch your waistline. Only 30% of your calories should come from fat—that's 45-65 grams daily.</p>	<p>24 Fill up on fiber. Found in fruits, veggies, whole grains and beans, fiber will keep you fuller longer and reduce your risk of a variety of diseases. Gradually increase your daily intake to 25-35 grams.</p>	<p>25 Modify your recipes. Keep the tradition and boost the nutrition by making substitutions: whole grain flour, less salt, heart-healthy fats, half the sugar, and beans instead of meat. Your taste buds won't know the difference!</p> <p>26 Swap whole for white--grains that is. White flours, breads, rice and pasta are highly processed and low in nutrients. Whole grain varieties are packed with nutrients, fiber and staying power.</p>
<p>27 Sweeten without sugar. Sugar and corn syrup add calories to foods, but have no nutritional value. Buy syrup- and sugar-free varieties of fruit spread, applesauce, juice, and canned fruits. After all, fruit is naturally sweet!</p>	<p>28 Protect your bones with calcium. Aim for 3 servings of calcium-rich foods daily, such as 1 cup milk, 1 cup yogurt and 1-2 oz of cheese. Non-dairy alternatives that are fortified with calcium also make good choices.</p>	<p>29 Shop seasonally. When you eat produce that's in season, you're getting the highest quality and freshest flavor while saving money. Change your diet with the seasons and try a variety of colorful foods.</p>  <p>30 Watch your portions. While big portions might keep your wallet full, they'll also add to your waistline. Split large entrees with a friend and just say no to supersizing!</p> <p>31 Live by the 80/20 rule. Eating nutritious foods 80% of the time and fun foods 20% of the time is a healthy goal. Like all things in life, a healthy diet is about balance and moderation.</p> 		