

Commonsense Nutrition for Women

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Getting Fit with Physical Activity and Nutrition

Being physically fit means being at a healthy body weight and being physically active. Physically unfit women at unhealthy weights have higher chronic disease risk. Take the following steps below to get on track with your health.

Assess Your Weight

People who carry more weight around their waistlines are at greater health risks than individuals who carry their excess fat in the hips and thighs. Check it out. If your waist is nearly the same size as or larger than your hips you could be at a higher health risk. It is important to work towards reducing your body fat.

Prevention is Best

If you are currently overweight and have high blood pressure, diabetes or coronary heart disease, you may already understand how excess weight affects your medical problem and are working to correct it. If you don't have a current weight problem but have a strong family history of weight-related diseases such as heart disease or Type 2 diabetes, keep your weight under control throughout your adult years. Don't wait until the problem strikes. It's easier to **prevent** than to **correct** a problem.

Be sensible when you are losing weight. A slow, steady weight loss of a half to one pound a week is better for you and more lasting. Focus on increasing the amount of time that you are physically active, controlling your food serving sizes, reducing fat and sugar in the foods you eat, and increasing

fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat milk and milk products.

Physical Activity is a Partner

Physical activity is an equal partner in developing a healthy lifestyle. Physical activity burns calories, increases muscle mass and usually leaves you feeling more positive about yourself. Ease into being more physically active. Set small goals at first and work up to the activity level that is right for you. For example, if you are very inactive now, begin with short walks of five to 10 minutes and then gradually increase your time to 30 to 60 minutes a day.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend adults have at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity, above usual activity, on most days of the week to reduce chronic disease risk. Greater health benefits and better weight management is possible when you exercise for longer periods.

If you have specific medical problems that limit your activity, check with your health care professional for ideas about appropriate activities.

Variety and Needed Nutrients

Eating a variety of nutritious foods is key in planning healthy diets. Formal meal planning may seem old fashioned but it is still a good idea to follow a daily food guide.

Using the Dietary Guidelines for Americans to guide you in your food selections gives you a better chance of getting the needed nutrients for health and well-being. In one of the

Use Food Variety to Tackle Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a bone disease that affects women in their later years, but the problem begins much earlier in life. Many females avoid milk products during their teen years and beyond. Calcium supplied by milk and other foods is needed to build strong bones during adolescence and young adulthood. During the middle and older adult years calcium continues to be used for maintaining bone structure and reducing bone loss.

What Causes Osteoporosis?

Low calcium in the diet at all life stages is a risk factor for osteoporosis. Other risk factors include:

- Family history of osteoporosis
- Small bone frame and lean build
- White or Asian
- Lack of weight-bearing exercise such as walking, jogging or running
- Excessive alcohol use or smoking
- Menopause — Estrogen replacement therapy may be advisable for some women. Check with your physician.

latest national surveys conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, American adults ate less than the recommended levels of potassium, fiber, vitamins A, C and E, magnesium and calcium. These nutrients are needed to maintain healthy bodies every day. Improved intakes of these nutrients are possible when you eat whole grains, nuts and oils, milk and milk products and a variety of fruits and vegetables.

Most women agree that it's important to eat a variety of foods but many women don't consume enough fruits, vegetables, whole grains and milk or a large variety of fruits or vegetables. The following sections provide important information about food choices for women. For a food guide plan that is appropriate for your age, sex and activity level, go to www.MyPyramid.gov.

Grain Products

Over the years, we've received mixed messages about breads, cereals and other grain products. Quick weight loss diets have wrongly advocated low bread, cereal and pasta intake. However, these foods are an important source of energy and nutrients that help our bodies work more efficiently. It is recommended that at least half the grains you eat should be whole grains. For most adults, this means eating at least three servings (equal to 3 ounces) of whole grain breads, cereals, rice and pasta each day. A sandwich made with two slices of bread equals two ounces of grains. To control calories pay close attention to what goes on the bread or pasta such as butter, margarine and rich cream sauces. Pasta in a rich cream sauce has 285 calories per serving. A serving of pasta by itself has a slim 105 calories.

Vegetables and Fruits

Vegetables and fruits add variety, texture, flavor and many different nutrients to your diet. They are rich in carbohydrate and fiber and low in fat. For a reference 2,000 calorie diet, you need to include 2 1/2 cups of vegetables and 2 cups of fruits each day. You also need to include vegetables from all five subgroups (dark green, orange, legumes, starchy and other vegetables) several times a week. These different vegetable groupings are rich in different nutrients.

Folic Acid

Green, leafy vegetables and many enriched grain products are good sources of folic acid. It is especially important that women of child-bearing years and older women eat foods rich in folic acid. Folic acid helps prevent birth defects and may reduce the risk of heart disease.

The Fiber Story

By adding fruits, vegetables and whole grains to your diet you will increase your intake of dietary fiber. The typical American diet provides about half the recommended fiber.

Daily fiber intakes of 20-35 grams from a variety of food sources is recommended. When you increase fiber-rich foods, also increase fluid intake. At first, focus on only one change that will give you more fiber each day. As your body adjusts you can make more changes.

Easy Ways to Add Fiber to Your Diet

Eat fruits with their skin.

Add cooked dry beans and peas to your salads and soups.

Substitute half or more of all-purpose flour with whole wheat flour when baking.

Use whole grain breads and pasta.

Use brown rice instead of white rice.

Eat a whole-grain or bran breakfast cereal.

Eat a bran muffin instead of a plain muffin.

Choose vegetables, fruits and whole grains for snacks.

Building Calcium into Your Diet

Select calcium-rich foods such as low fat or skim milk, low fat or nonfat yogurt, low fat cheese (cheeses labeled 3 grams or less of fat per serving), canned fish with bones, green and leafy vegetables, and dried beans and peas.

The current Dietary Guidelines recommend at least three cups of low-fat or fat-free milk or its equivalent each day. One cup of milk and yogurt, 1 1/2 ounces of natural cheese, or 2 ounces of processed cheese are counted as one cup from the milk group. Aim for daily intakes of 1,000-1,200 milligrams (mg) of calcium.

It is best to get calcium from foods rather than supplements. But, for some, supplements may be the only way to meet calcium needs. It is also best to consume your calcium throughout the day because your body can only absorb about 500 mg of calcium at one time, whether it be through supplements or food.

Calcium supplements come in various forms with the most popular forms being calcium citrate and calcium carbonate. Calcium carbonate needs to be taken at meals for best absorption. Calcium citrate doesn't need to be taken at meals but it is generally more costly than calcium carbonate. Your calcium supplements should also contain vitamin D, which is needed for the body to absorb calcium. Work with your doctor to decide the best supplement for you.

Making Wise Food Choices

Making wise food choices includes selecting foods that are low in fat, saturated fat, cholesterol and sugar, choosing and preparing foods with less salt, and drinking alcoholic beverages in moderation. Most people eat for pleasure as well as nutrition. If your favorite foods and beverages are high in fat, sugar, salt and alcohol, the key is how much and how often you eat them.

Fat

Fat is the most concentrated source of calories and is important for food flavor, improving food satisfaction, helping the body absorb fat soluble vitamins, and providing some essential nutrients. Moderate your fat intake, however, so that you will have room for the variety of foods you need to meet your other nutrient demands without exceeding your caloric needs.

There are goals for fat intake toward which women can work. The suggested goals for dietary fat for adults are:

Total fat. An amount that provides 35 percent or less of total calories is suggested. The upper limit on the fat grams in your diet depends on your calorie need. For example, if you eat 2,000 calories per day, your suggested upper limit is around 80 grams of fat, but if you eat 1,600 calories each day, your upper limit is around 60 grams of fat.

Saturated fatty acids. Less than 10 percent of calories should come from saturated fatty acids. The fats in animal products are the main sources of saturated fatty acids in most diets. Excess saturated fatty acids increase blood cholesterol levels in many people.

Trans fatty acids. Foods high in trans fatty acids such as solid margarine and shortenings, or commercial foods that are made with these products, tend to raise blood cholesterol and raise your risk of heart disease. Choose vegetable oils rather than solid fats.

Omega 3 fatty acids. This is a type of unsaturated fatty acid that may improve overall heart health and lower blood pressure. Two types of Omega 3 fatty acids (EPA and DHA) are found in fatty fish such as salmon, white tuna, mackerel, rainbow trout, herring, halibut and sardines. Another Omega 3 (ALA) is more commonly found in soybean or canola oil, walnuts and flaxseeds or flaxseed oil. The American Heart Association recommends eating 2 to 4 ounces of fish at least two times per week to boost Omega-3 fatty acid intake.

Sugar

As you grow older, you may need fewer calories but you will still need the same nutrients as in earlier years. Sweet foods satisfy a taste preference so it is easy to eat too many, which gives you more calories than you need and leaves little room for other nutrient-rich foods that will better satisfy your health needs. Look for sugar on the Nutrition Facts Panel of food labels. Remember that every 4 grams of sugar content equals 1 teaspoon of sugar. Ingredient labels on food packaging will also help you identify sugar sources. Look for the following identifiers: granulated sugar, brown sugar, sucrose, glucose, dextrose, fructose, maltose, lactose, honey, corn syrup, corn sweetener, high-fructose corn syrup or molasses.

Salt

In the United States, about one in four adults has elevated blood pressure. Blood pressure usually increases as a person ages. Though you can't "feel" it, even mildly high blood pressure exerts harmful wear and tear on the heart and arteries.

You cannot tell by looking at a person if he or she will develop high blood pressure from eating too much salt. Salt

is our primary source of sodium. We know that many Americans eat six to 10 times more sodium than is actually required. It is recommended by the Dietary Guidelines for Americans that adults should keep their sodium intake to no more than 2,400 milligrams per day — about the sodium in 1 teaspoon of salt.

Small amounts of sodium occur naturally in foods. About two-thirds of sodium intake is from processed foods and the remainder is from salt added during cooking or at the table. Read labels when trying to lower sodium intake.

How often do you:

Eat cured or processed meats, such as ham, bacon, sausage, wieners and other luncheon meats?

Use commercially prepared meals, main dishes or canned soups?

Add salt to cooking water for rice, pasta or vegetables?

Eat salted nuts, corn chips, potato chips or cheese?

Salt your food before tasting it?

If you answered that you do these habits quite often, your dietary sodium intake may be high.

Alcohol

Alcoholic beverages supply calories but little or no nutrients. Too much alcohol may cause cirrhosis of the liver, inflammation of the pancreas, damage to the brain and heart and increased risks for some cancers, injury, violence and death. Major birth defects have been attributed to heavy drinking by the mother while pregnant and may occur before she knows that she is pregnant. The defects, collectively called Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, affect two infants in every 1,000 births. Women who are breast feeding, pregnant or trying to conceive should not drink alcoholic beverages.

Moderate drinking for women is no more than one alcoholic beverage per day. One alcoholic beverage is equal to five ounces of wine, 10 ounces of wine cooler, 12 ounces of regular beer, or 1 ½ ounces of distilled spirits (80 proof).

Reference

United States Department of Health and Human Services and United States Department of Agriculture. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005*. Sixth edition. Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, January 2005.

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Issued March 2006

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