

Mastering Food Choices

Fitting Nutrition into Your Busy Lifestyle

Your overall nutrition picture depends on the foods and serving sizes you choose over a period of time. To make wise food choices you need to know a little about food and healthful cooking techniques. A balanced diet contains a wide variety of foods. Planning is the key to making good food choices.



Serving Savvy

Nutritional information on food packaging can be tricky to understand. What does an ounce of cheese look like? How do you know if you're going overboard on your ice cream intake without measuring every mouthful? To help make sense of these labels, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics has put together some simple ways of visualizing serving sizes (Table 1).

Planning Meals

Spend time each week planning and organizing your meals. Use cookbooks and grocery ads to make menus

and a shopping list. Organize the list by categories. Now you can do all your shopping at once. When shopping, read the nutrition facts label and ingredient list to assist you in serving amounts and nutrient intake. At first this approach may seem awkward and time-consuming, but it will become easier as you become more knowledgeable.

USDA's food recommendations are a good place to start when planning nutritious meals.

- Begin with a main dish that gives each family member one serving of meat.
- Add a complementary food from the bread, cereal, rice, and pasta group.

Food	Serving size	Looks Like
Meat, poultry, or fish	3 oz.	Deck of cards
Pasta or rice	1 cup	Baseball
Fruits or vegetables	½ cup	Tennis ball
Cheese	1 oz	Two saltines or pair of dice
Ice cream or yogurt	½ cup	Tennis ball

- Include a hot or cold vegetable.
- Choose a fruit or vegetable salad that complements the main dish.
- Finish with a dessert such as fresh fruit or a milk or yogurt-based pudding.
- Select a beverage, remembering to meet the daily milk requirement.

Serving nutritious meals will be useless if the food is bland or unattractive. A delicious meal depends on a blend of flavors, textures, and temperature and a variety of colors and shapes. Here's how easy it is: Serve a grilled pork chop with peach chutney. Add a rice pilaf, sautéed spinach, and cooked cinnamon apples. For dessert serve fresh strawberries over a low fat yogurt. Using the grill and the microwave, the meal can be prepared in less than thirty minutes, leaving you more time to spend with your family or friends at the dinner table or some time to take a walk.

Here's another idea. Put baby back ribs in the crock pot in the morning. When you get home, spread some barbecue sauce on top and place under the broiler. Add mashed potatoes, green beans, a carrot and raisin salad,

and leave off dessert because it's such a hearty meal. Look at the color. Think of the flavor and aroma in this healthy meal. See how easy and exciting nutrition can be? It didn't just happen. You spent a little time planning and organizing your meals.

How to Make Positive Changes

USDA has recommended these tips for rethinking and positively changing your eating and physical activity routines.

Be realistic. Make small changes over time in what you eat and the level of activity you do. Sprinkle shredded low-fat cheese on your salads, vegetables, or pasta to boost your calcium intake.

Be adventurous. Expand your tastes to enjoy a variety of foods. Try a new food or recipe once a month. You'll be amazed at all the great choices.

Be flexible. Balance what you eat and the physical activity you do over several days. Don't worry about just one meal or one day. To fit in a treat such as ice cream or pizza with all the works, choose lower fat foods to balance your fat intake and increase your physical activity over several days.

Be sensible. Enjoy all foods. If your favorite food is high in fat or calories, eat a smaller portion.

Be active. Climb the stairs instead of taking the elevator or escalator or park a little further away from your destination.

References

- Duyff, R. (2017). *Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, 5th edition*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2000). *It's All About You Nutrition Communicator Tool Kit*.

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