

Extension

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Healthy Eating Patterns

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Are you getting the best nutrition from the foods you eat? Many of us are eating more, but getting less nutritional benefit. Make it a priority to reverse this trend by learning how to create a healthy eating pattern for you and your family. A healthy eating pattern aims to meet all your nutritional needs primarily from foods. It also helps you achieve and maintain a healthy body weight, which can reduce the risk of many chronic diseases.

Everything you eat and drink matters, whether it is a meal or just a snack. To build a healthy eating pattern, choose a variety of foods and beverages from each food group (fruits, vegetables, grains, protein, and dairy/calcium). Make sure these choices meet your calorie needs and limit saturated fat, added sugars and salt.

Include foods that are nutrient-dense. These foods are rich in essential vitamins, minerals, fiber and other naturally occurring substances that have positive health effects. Nutrient-dense foods are naturally lean, low in solid fats, have little or no added fats, sugars, refined starches or sodium.

For most individuals, following a healthy eating pattern would include the following:

- Increase the amount of fruits and vegetables you eat. Fill half of your plate with fruits and vegetables.
- Eat and drink mostly fat free or low-fat forms of calcium/dairy products.
- Make half of your grain products whole grain. Read labels to assure a whole grain is the first ingredient listed. Limit grain desserts and snacks such as cakes, cookies and pastries.
- Eat a variety of protein foods (eggs, legumes, nuts, seeds, poultry, seafood, meat). Choose seafood twice per week. Use legumes (dry beans, lentils) or nuts and seeds in mixed dishes instead of some meat or poultry at least once a week.
- Lower saturated fat by substituting vegetables for some of the fatty meat and/or regular cheese in a dish.
- Drink more water and fewer sugary beverages.
- Limit the amount of processed foods and foods high in sodium eaten at meals and snacks.

Make healthy choices you can enjoy, but limit food choices that are high in saturated fats, added sugars, sodium, and total calories. The right mix of nutrient-dense foods can help you be healthier now and establish a healthy eating pattern.

Added sugars add calories without needed nutrients, making it difficult to meet your nutrient needs while staying within your calorie limits. Added sugars do not include naturally occurring sugars such as those in fruit or milk.

Most of us get more sodium/salt per day than we need. Ready-to-eat packaged and prepared foods are generally higher in sodium. Some ways to lower sodium intake include using the Nutrition Facts label to compare sodium content of foods. Cooking foods from scratch also helps to control the sodium content.

Create a healthy eating pattern that can improve your and your families' health now and in the future. Get more nutrition from the foods and beverages you eat to fuel your healthy lifestyle.

See more at: <http://www.choosemyplate.gov>



Let's Talk:

Talk with your children about your families food choices. Have the family help plan meals and snacks each week. Discuss with them the importance of making small changes, so you can maintain a healthy eating pattern for a lifetime. Come up with ideas on how to include more whole fruits into your day. Can you add whole fruit to your cereal, pancakes or other breakfast foods? As a family, wash, slice and chop vegetables so they are ready to grab and eat for a snack. For added protein, try a yogurt, hummus, or peanut butter dip with your vegetables. Drink less sugar sweetened beverages such as sodas, juice drinks or sports drinks. Keep water on hand. Fill a pitcher of water and keep it in the fridge. Add fresh lemon, lime, orange wedges or other fruit or vegetables to it for some natural flavor.

Recipe for Health: Chicken Soup with Kale

Recipe found at: <http://www.whatscooking.fns.usda.gov/>

Ingredients:

- 2 teaspoons vegetable oil
- 1/2 cup onion (chopped)
- 1/2 cup carrot (chopped) or add frozen vegetables as a healthy substitute
- 1 teaspoon thyme (ground)
- 2 garlic cloves (minced)
- 2 cups water (or chicken broth)
- 3/4 cup tomatoes (diced)
- 1 cup chicken, cooked, skinned and cubed
- 1/2 cup brown rice, cooked (or white rice)
- 1 cup kale (chopped, about one large leaf)



Instructions:

1. Heat oil in a medium sauce pan. Add onion and carrot. Sauté until vegetables are tender, about 5-8 minutes.
2. Add thyme and garlic. Sauté for one more minute.
3. Add water or broth, tomatoes, cooked rice, chicken and kale.
4. Simmer for 5-10 minutes.
5. Makes 3 servings