

Diet and Exercise Part 1: Diet

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Calories are a measure of the energy contained in food. We need this energy to work and play. We even use these calories while we are sleeping just to maintain our body heat and vital metabolic functions.

The concept of weight loss (or weight maintenance) is relatively simple.

- Calories eaten < calories burned = weight loss
- Calories eaten > calories burned = weight gain
- Calories eaten = calories burned = no weight change

To decrease the calories eaten:

- 1) Decrease portions.
- 2) Eat lower calorie foods.
- 3) Change your dressings, sauces and toppings.
- 4) Decrease the amount of fast sugars.
- 5) Decrease snacks or eat healthy snacks in-between meals.

Decreasing portions is a relatively simple concept that many people overlook. Eat until you are full without stuffing yourself. Having you or your children finish everything on their plate so they “don’t waste food” is a bad precedent to set and will lead to overeating habits. Finishing the last bit of food on the table so you don’t have to put it away in the refrigerator is another bad habit.

Eat lower calorie foods. The easiest and healthiest way to do this is to decrease the amount of fat in your diet. Carbohydrates and proteins contain 4 calories per gram while fat contains 9 calories per gram (More than twice as many calories!!!). Even though the unsaturated fats found in olive oil, sunflower oil, and nuts decrease your blood cholesterol, they still have 9 calories per gram and should be used in moderation. **Fried foods should be avoided even if they are fried in unsaturated oils.** Bake, boil, microwave or barbecue the foods instead.

Saturated fats such as those found in meat, dark-meat chicken, dairy products and coconut/palm seed oil (found in movie popcorn and microwave popcorn) should be eliminated or limited. Eat skinless chicken breast, fish, pork tenderloin, and beans as your source of protein. Buffalo (bison) tastes similar to beef and is a great low-fat alternative to steak.

Cholesterol containing food such as egg yolks and liver should also be limited. Pizza is another food that is a big contributor to obesity. Remember that whole milk is a food. Once a child turns 3 years old, switch to skim milk (a 12 oz glass of whole milk has 240 calories)!!

Get into the habit of reading the nutritional information on packaged foods. This will inform you of the total number of calories, the number of calories from fat, the dietary fiber and the simple sugars. **Carefully look at the serving size** to get an accurate estimate since many companies will give unreasonably small serving sizes to make their foods appear healthier.

Multiply: # of servings x # of calories per serving = Total calories per package

Change your dressings, sauces, and toppings. This is the source of many of the calories we consume. Mayonnaise and salad dressing are loaded with fat and calories. Use small amounts of low-fat dressing on your salads and use brown mustard instead of mayonnaise on sandwiches. You can use salt or salt substitutes instead of calorie-laden spaghetti sauce. Lemon and pepper also add flavor without adding a lot of calories.

The worst culprit is probably dairy products. Cheese, butter and margarine are common toppings which can double the amount of calories of a food. You can use low-fat cheese, but limiting cheese is the best option. Again, butter substitutes (e.g. Country Crock) are less fattening than butter but should be limited as well since they contain *trans*-fatty acids (partially hydrogenated vegetable oils).

Decrease the amount of fast sugars. Current medical thought is that insulin may be a hormonal contributor to obesity and that too much insulin leads to the production of fat cells by the body. Insulin is a vital hormone for survival in small quantities. When we eat a simple carbohydrate that is quickly absorbed into the blood, it temporarily raises our blood sugar and our body responds by releasing extra insulin. The insulin can take the fats we have ingested and turn them into body fat. This is the theory behind fad diets such as Atkins™ and Sugar busters™.

Starches are **complex carbohydrates** and are broken down slowly. They are healthy and non-fattening if eaten in moderate quantity. It is a very inefficient process for the body to turn carbohydrates (complex or simple) into body fat. In general, complex carbohydrates have no taste (pasta, rice, beans, breads) where simple carbohydrates taste sweet (soda, juice, candy and syrup). While brown rice, whole wheat pasta, and whole wheat bread are healthier since they are higher in fiber and other nutrients, the regular starches such as white rice, regular pasta and bread are not bad for you.

Many beverages are loaded with sugar. Try to encourage water or seltzer instead of juice, soda or milk. Diet soda is fine for kids to drink and is a much healthier alternative to regular soda. Many snacks and desserts are full of both fat and sugar, multiplying their effect.

Eat healthy snacks in-between meals. While eating 6 small meals is healthier than eating 3 regular meals, most people that eat snacks do not cut down on their meal size. Therefore, they are just adding calories. If you are hungry in between meals, try eating fruits and vegetables as snacks This may help you eat less at meals. **No juice, milk or soda in-between meals.** Ice cream should be saved for special occasions. You can use low fat frozen yogurt as an alternative in small quantities. Since many people eat in front of the TV, limiting TV will also decrease snacking.

Preferred	Moderate Quantity	Limit	Eliminate or special occasion
Vegetables	Fish, chicken breast, beans	Juice, skim milk, soda	Whole milk
Fiber	Pork tenderloin, buffalo	Red meat (use low-fat cut)	Egg yolks, bacon, ribs,
Water, diet beverages	Cereals (e.g. Raisin Bran)	Butter, mayonnaise, sauces	Ice Cream, donuts
Fruit	Pasta, rice, oatmeal	Frozen Yogurt, sweets	Gravy
		Pizza, muffins	

A guide to nutrition: We realize that changing your eating habits can be hard. If you are miserable with a new diet, you probably won't follow it. Just remember that this is a guide to better health. Following half of the diet is better than following a quarter of the diet or not following a diet at all. You can still eat the foods you enjoy as long as you eat them less often and in smaller quantities.

Increasing the calories burned: **Increasing your daily activity and your exercise will help you lose weight and feel better.** (Please see Diet and Exercise: Part 2: Exercise)

Good nutrition is a family affair: Eating healthier is not a punishment for obesity. Even family members that are the ideal weight should eat healthier (although they may need to increase the quantity of food to match their caloric needs).