

Aim for a Healthy Weight

# Maintaining a Healthy Weight On the Go

A Pocket Guide



**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**  
National Institutes of Health  
National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

Here's the secret to weight loss: It's all about crowding out, not cutting out.

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# Introduction

## Importance of Making Healthier Choices While Eating On the Go

According to the National Restaurant Association, American adults buy a meal or snack from a restaurant 5.8 times a week on average. If you are watching your weight, it's hard to always know what calories, fats, and nutrients are in the dishes you order. The information in this booklet provides tips on how to help you select healthier options while eating “on the go” (i.e., dining out or bringing food in). Using the information provided on healthy choices will help you maintain a healthy weight.

## Why Is a Healthy Weight Important?

Reaching and maintaining a healthy weight is good for your overall health. It also may help reduce your risk for developing several diseases and conditions. Maintaining a healthy weight has many other benefits, including feeling good about yourself and having more energy to enjoy life.

A person's weight is the result of many things: height, genes,

metabolism, behavior, and environment. Maintaining a healthy weight requires keeping a balance. You must balance the calories you get from food and beverages (energy IN) with the calories you use to keep your body going and being physically active (energy OUT).

The same amount of  
energy IN and energy OUT  
over time = weight stays the same

More IN than OUT  
over time = weight gain

More OUT than IN  
over time = weight loss

Your energy IN and energy OUT don't have to balance exactly every day. It's the balance over time that will help you maintain a healthy weight in the long run.

For many people, this balance means eating fewer calories and increasing their physical activity. Cutting back on calories is a matter of choice. Making healthy food choices that are lower in fats, especially saturated and *trans* fats, as well as cholesterol, sodium (salt), and added sugar, can help you cut back on calories, as can paying attention to portion size. This pocket guide will provide you with

information to make informed food choices, particularly when eating on the go, to help you maintain a healthy weight.

## How To Lose Weight and Maintain It

We have all heard the facts . . . to lose weight, you must eat less and move more. But this is often easier said than done. Many people make repeated attempts, often using different fad diets and weight loss gimmicks, and are unsuccessful.

To be successful at weight loss, you need to adopt a new lifestyle. This means making changes such as adopting healthy eating habits, being more physically active, and learning how to change behaviors.

## Healthy Eating Plan

A healthy eating plan includes foods from all the basic food groups. It is low in saturated fat, *trans* fat, cholesterol, sodium (salt), and added sugar. It contains enough calories for good health, but not so many that you gain weight. (For more information on the basic food groups, go to [www.MyPyramid.gov](http://www.MyPyramid.gov).)

### ***A healthy eating plan:***

- Emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products
- Includes lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, and nuts
- Is low in saturated fat, *trans* fat, cholesterol, sodium (salt), and added sugar
- Controls portion size





# Choosing Healthier Foods

## Foods That Make a Healthy Eating Plan

A healthy eating plan is one that gives your body the nutrients it needs every day while staying within your daily calorie limits. This eating plan also may lower your risk for heart disease and conditions such as high blood pressure or high blood cholesterol.

Foods that can be eaten more often include those that are lower in calories, total fat, saturated and *trans* fats, cholesterol, and sodium (salt). Examples of these foods include fat-free and low-fat milk products; lean meats, fish, and poultry; high-fiber foods such as whole grains, breads, and cereals; fruits; and vegetables. Canola or olive oils and soft margarines made from these oils are heart healthy and can be used in moderate amounts. Unsalted nuts also can be included in a healthy diet, as long as you watch the amount.

Foods higher in fat are typically higher in calories. Foods that should be limited include those with higher amounts of saturated fat, *trans* fat, and cholesterol. These particular fats may raise blood cholesterol levels,

which increases the risk of heart disease.

- Saturated fat is found mainly in fresh and processed meats, high-fat milk products (such as cheese, whole milk, cream, butter, and ice cream), lard, and the coconut and palm oils that can be found in many processed foods.
- *Trans* fat is found in foods with partially hydrogenated oils, such as many hard margarines and shortening, commercially fried foods, and some bakery goods.
- Cholesterol is found in foods of animal origin. Major dietary sources include egg yolks, organ meats, cheese, beef, pork, and shrimp. It also may be present in foods that contain an animal-based ingredient, such as eggs, whole milk, or lard.

It's also important to limit foods and beverages with added fat and sugar, such as many desserts, canned fruit packed in syrup, fruit drinks, and sugar-sweetened beverages. These foods and beverages will add calories to your diet while providing limited nutritional benefit.

## Fat Matters, But Calories Count

A calorie is a calorie is a calorie, whether it comes from fat or carbohydrate. Any calories eaten in excess can lead to weight gain. You can lose weight by eating fewer calories and by increasing your physical activity.

Reducing the amount of total fat and saturated fat that you eat is one way to limit your overall calorie intake. In fact, 1 gram of fat equals 9 calories, whereas 1 gram of protein or carbohydrate equals less than half the number of calories (4 calories each). By reducing total fat intake, you help reduce your calorie intake.

However, eating fat-free or reduced-fat foods isn't always the answer to reducing your calories. This is especially true when you eat more of the reduced-fat food than you would of the regular item. Many food companies produce fat-free versions of foods that have more calories than the regular versions. For example, if you eat twice as many fat-free cookies, you have increased your overall calorie intake. The following list of foods and their reduced-fat varieties will show you that just because a product is fat free, that doesn't mean it is "calorie free." And calories do count!





Fat-Free or Reduced Fat	Calories	Regular	Calories
Reduced fat peanut butter, 2 Tbsp	187	Regular peanut butter, 2 Tbsp	191
<i>Cookies:</i> Reduced fat chocolate chip cookies, 3 cookies (30 g)	118	<i>Cookies:</i> Regular chocolate chip cookies, 3 cookies (30 g)	142
Fat-free fig cookies, 2 cookies (30 g)	102	Regular fig cookies, 2 cookies (30 g)	111
<i>Ice cream:</i> Fat-free vanilla frozen yogurt (<1% fat), ½ cup	100	<i>Ice cream:</i> Regular whole milk vanilla frozen yogurt (3–4% fat), ½ cup	104
Light vanilla ice cream (7% fat), ½ cup	111	Regular vanilla ice cream (11% fat), ½ cup	133
Fat-free caramel topping, 2 Tbsp	103	Caramel topping, homemade with butter, 2 Tbsp	103
Low-fat granola cereal, approx. ½ cup (55 g)	213	Regular granola cereal, approx. ½ cup (55 g)	257
Low-fat blueberry muffin, 1 small (2½ inch)	131	Regular blueberry muffin, 1 small (2½ inch)	138
Baked tortilla chips, 1 oz	113	Regular tortilla chips, 1 oz	143
Low-fat cereal bar, 1 bar (1.3 oz)	130	Regular cereal bar, 1 bar (1.3 oz)	140

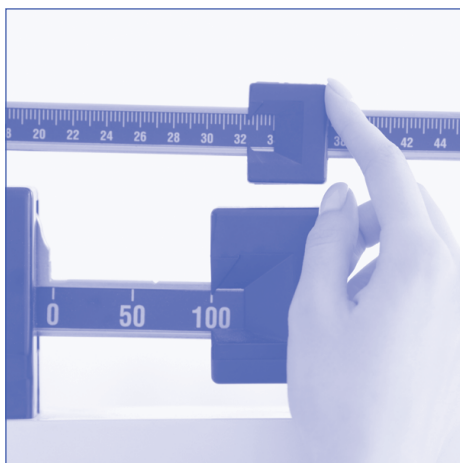
Source: National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. (2005). *Aim for a Healthy Weight* (NIH Publication No. 05-5213), p. 9. Bethesda, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

## Lower Calorie, Lower Fat Alternatives

The table that follows provides some examples of healthier alternatives for old favorites. When making a food choice, remember to consider vitamins and minerals. Some foods provide most of their calories from sugar and fat, but give you few, if any, vitamins and minerals.

The suggested alternatives are not meant to be an exhaustive list. If a product's package has a Nutrition Facts Panel, we encourage you to read it to find out just how many calories, vitamins, and minerals are in the specific products you decide to buy.

Once you are comfortable identifying foods that are lower in fat and calories, you will be able to make healthier choices when eating on the go.



	Instead of . . .	Replace with . . .
<b>Dairy Products</b>	Evaporated whole milk	Evaporated fat-free (skim) or reduced fat (2%) milk
	Whole milk	Low-fat (1%), reduced fat (2%), or fat-free (skim) milk
	Ice cream	Sorbet, sherbet, low-fat or fat-free frozen yogurt, or ice milk (choose lowest calorie variety)
	Whipping cream	Imitation whipped cream (made with fat-free (skim) milk) or low-fat vanilla yogurt
	Sour cream	Plain low-fat yogurt
	Cream cheese	Neufchatel or "light" cream cheese or fat-free cream cheese
	Cheese (cheddar, American, Swiss, jack)	Reduced calorie cheese, low calorie processed cheeses, etc.; fat-free cheese
	Regular (4%) cottage cheese	Low-fat (1%) or reduced fat (2%) cottage cheese
	Whole milk mozzarella cheese	Part skim milk, low moisture mozzarella cheese
	Whole milk ricotta cheese	Part skim milk ricotta cheese
	Coffee cream (half and half) or nondairy creamer (liquid, powder)	Low-fat (1%) or reduced fat (2%) milk or fat-free dry milk powder
<b>Cereals, Grains, and Pasta</b>	Ramen noodles	Rice or noodles (spaghetti, macaroni, etc.)
	Pasta with white sauce (alfredo)	Pasta with red sauce (marinara)
	Pasta with cheese sauce	Pasta with vegetables (primavera)
	Granola	Bran flakes, crispy rice, etc. Cooked grits or oatmeal Whole grains (couscous, barley, bulgar, etc.) Reduced fat granola (choose lowest calorie variety)
	<b>Meat, Fish, and Poultry</b>	Cold cuts or lunch meats (bologna, salami, liverwurst, etc.)
Hot dogs (regular)		Lower fat hot dogs
Bacon or sausage		Canadian bacon or lean ham
Regular ground beef		Extra lean ground beef such as ground round or ground turkey (read labels)
Chicken or turkey with skin, duck, or goose		Chicken or turkey without skin (white meat)
Oil-packed tuna		Water-packed tuna (rinse to reduce sodium content)
Beef (chuck, rib, brisket)		Beef (round, loin) trimmed of external fat (choose select grades)
Pork (spareribs, untrimmed loin)		Pork tenderloin or trimmed, lean smoked ham

	Instead of . . .	Replace with . . .
<b>Baked Goods</b>	Frozen breaded fish or fried fish (homemade or commercial)	Fish or shellfish, unbreaded (fresh, frozen, canned in water)
	Whole eggs	Egg whites or egg substitutes
	Frozen TV dinners (containing more than 13 grams of fat per serving)	Frozen TV dinners (containing less than 13 grams of fat per serving and lowest in sodium)
	Chorizo sausage	Turkey sausage, drained well (read label) Vegetarian sausage (made with tofu)
	Croissants, brioches, etc.	Hard french rolls or soft “brown ‘n serve” rolls
	Donuts, sweet rolls, muffins, scones, or pastries	English muffins, bagels, reduced fat or fat-free muffins or scones
<b>Snacks and Sweets</b>	Party crackers	Low-fat crackers (choose lower in sodium) Saltine or soda crackers (choose lowest in sodium)
	Cake (pound, chocolate, yellow)	Cake (angel food, white, gingerbread)
	Cookies	Reduced fat or fat-free cookies (graham crackers, ginger snaps, fig bars) (choose lowest calorie variety)
	Nuts	Popcorn (air-popped or light microwave), fruits, vegetables
	Ice cream, e.g., cones or bars	Frozen yogurt, frozen fruit, or chocolate pudding bars
<b>Fats, Oils, and Salad Dressings</b>	Custards or puddings (made with whole milk)	Puddings (made with skim milk)
	Regular margarine or butter	Light-spread margarines, diet margarine, or whipped butter, tub or squeeze bottle
	Regular mayonnaise	Light or diet mayonnaise or mustard
	Regular salad dressings	Reduced calorie or fat-free salad dressings, lemon juice, or plain, herb-flavored, or wine vinegar
	Butter or margarine on toast or bread	Jelly, jam, or honey on bread or toast
<b>Miscellaneous</b>	Oils, shortening, or lard	Nonstick cooking spray for stir-frying or sautéing As a substitute for oil or butter, use applesauce or prune puree in baked goods
	Canned cream soups	Canned broth-based soups
	Canned beans and franks	Canned baked beans in tomato sauce
	Gravy (homemade with fat and/or milk)	Gravy mixes made with water or homemade with the fat skimmed off and fat-free milk included
	Fudge sauce	Chocolate syrup
	Avocado on sandwiches	Cucumber slices or lettuce leaves
	Guacamole dip or refried beans with lard	Salsa

Source: Adapted from National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute. (2005). *Aim for a Healthy Weight* (NIH Publication No. 05-5213), pp. 10–11. Bethesda, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

## Keeping an Eye on Portion Size

Eating fewer calories is not just about choosing healthier foods. It is also about eating less food and paying attention to portion size.

*What's the difference between a regular portion and a serving size?*

**Portion:** A “portion” is the amount of food that you choose to eat for a meal or snack. It can be big or small—you decide.

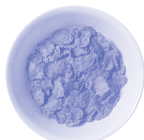
**Serving:** A “serving” is a measured amount of food or drink, such as one slice of bread or 1 cup of milk. Some foods that most people consume as a single portion actually contain multiple servings (e.g., a 20-ounce soda or a 3-ounce bag of chips).

To see typical portions for various foods, refer to the images below. Also, check out the U.S. Department of Agriculture's MyPyramid at <http://www.myPyramid.gov> to find out how these food portions fit into a daily eating plan for your recommended calorie level.



**Strawberries**

½ cup  
(½ cup equivalent of fruit)



**Whole-wheat cereal flakes**

1 cup  
(1-ounce equivalent of whole grains)



**Milk**

8 fluid ounces  
(counts as 1 cup milk)



**Baked sweet potato**

1 large  
(1-cup equivalent of orange vegetables)

Source: Adapted from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's MyPyramid, online at <http://mypyramid.gov>.

A young man and woman are smiling and eating a meal together at a restaurant. The woman is on the left, holding a fork with a piece of food. The man is on the right, also smiling. They are both looking towards the camera. The background is slightly blurred, showing other diners and restaurant decor. The overall tone is positive and healthy.

**Fitness ought to be the enthusiasm, wellness ought to be the form.**

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# Dining Out/Take-Out: How To Choose

## General Tips for Healthy Dining Out and Take-Out

Whether you're trying to maintain weight or lose weight, you can eat healthfully when dining out or bringing food in, if you know how. The following tips will help you move toward healthier eating as you limit your calories, as well as total fat, saturated and *trans* fats, cholesterol, and sodium (salt) when eating prepared foods.

## You Are the Customer

- Ask for what you want. Most restaurants will honor your requests.
- Ask questions. Don't be intimidated by the menu—your server will be able to tell you how foods are prepared or suggest substitutions on the menu.
- To reduce portion sizes, try ordering a low-fat appetizer as your main meal, or share an entree with a friend or family member.
- Avoid all-you-can-eat buffets.
- Review the menu online, if possible, and choose the healthiest option before you go to the restaurant.

■ General tips: Limiting your calories and fat can be easy as long as you know what to order. Try asking these questions when you call ahead or before you order. Ask the restaurant whether they would, upon request, do the following:

- Serve fat-free (skim) milk rather than whole milk or cream
- Reveal the type of cooking oil used
- Trim visible fat off poultry or meat
- Leave butter, gravy, or cream sauces off the side dish or entree
- Serve salad dressing on the side
- Accommodate special requests if made in advance by telephone or in person

Above all, don't get discouraged. Most restaurants usually have several healthy options to choose from.

## Reading the Menu

Choose lower calorie, low-fat cooking methods. Look for terms such as:

- Baked
- Boiled (in wine or lemon juice)
- Broiled
- Grilled
- Lightly sauteed
- Poached
- Roasted
- Steamed in its own juice (au jus)

Be aware of foods high in calories, total fat, and saturated fat. Watch out for terms such as:

- Alfredo
- Au fromage
- Au gratin
- Basted
- Béarnaise
- Breaded
- Butter sauce
- Casserole
- Cheese sauce
- Creamed
- In cream or cream sauce
- Crispy
- Deep fried
- Escaloped

- Fried
- Gravy
- Hollandaise
- Marinated (in oil)
- Pastry crust
- Pot pie

## Specific Tips for Healthy Choices

### *Breakfasts*

- Decaf tea or coffee with fat-free or low-fat (1 percent) milk
- Fresh fruit or small glass of 100 percent fruit juice
- Whole-grain bread, bagel, or English muffin with jelly or honey
- Whole-grain cereal with fat-free or low-fat (1 percent) milk
- Oatmeal with fat-free milk topped with fruit
- Omelet made with egg whites or egg substitute
- Multigrain pancakes with fresh fruit or apple butter
- Fat-free yogurt (try adding cereal or fresh fruit)

### *Beverages*

- Water with lemon
- Flavored sparkling water (noncaloric)



- Juice spritzer (half fruit juice and half sparkling water)
- Unsweetened iced tea
- Tomato juice (reduced sodium)
- Fat-free or low-fat (1 percent) milk

### **Breads**

While many yeast breads and breadsticks are low in calories and low in fat, the calories add up when you add butter, margarine, or olive oil to the bread. Also, eating a lot of bread in addition to your meal will fill you up with unwanted calories and not leave enough room for fruits and vegetables.

### **Appetizers**

- Broth-based soups
- Steamed seafood
- Shrimp\* cocktail (limit cocktail sauce—it's high in sodium)
- Melons or fresh fruit
- Bean soups
- Salad with reduced-fat dressing (or add lemon juice or vinegar)

### **Entrees**

- Poultry, fish, shellfish, and vegetable dishes
- Pasta with red sauce or with vegetables (primavera)

- Look for terms such as “baked,” “broiled,” “steamed,” “poached,” “lightly sauteed,” or “lightly stir-fried”
- Ask for sauces and dressings on the side
- Limit the amount of butter, margarine, and salt you use at the table

### **Salads/Salad Bars**

- Lettuce, spinach, and other fresh greens
- Fresh vegetables—tomatoes, mushrooms, carrots, cucumbers, peppers, onions, radishes, and broccoli
- Chickpeas, kidney beans, and other beans
- Skip the nonvegetable choices: deli meats, bacon, egg, cheese, and croutons
- Choose lower calorie, reduced-fat, or fat-free dressing; lemon juice; or vinegar

### **Side Dishes**

- Vegetables and whole-grain side dishes (brown rice, whole wheat pasta, etc.) make good additions to meals and also can be combined for a lower calorie alternative to higher calorie entrees

\* If you are on a cholesterol-lowering diet, eat shrimp in moderation.

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