

Go Whole Hog for Whole Grains, Colorful Fruits and Vegetables

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Today, we are inundated with information about healthy lifestyles, dieting and promotions for new health products. When doing an internet search for health-related information, the choices for information sources can be overwhelming. For example, 971,000,000 results were found when searching for “Health.” Another 377,000,000 results were found when searching for “Fitness.” The search for “Diet” returned 152,000,000 results.

With so much information available, how does one know what to do to be healthy? Which advice should be followed?

Results from research studies continue to provide information that healthy eating habits may help lower the risk for a variety of chronic diseases, including type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, cancer and many others. According to Dr. Susan Z. Yanovski, director of the National Institutes of Health’s Obesity and Eating Disorders Program, “In general Americans are not eating enough fruits, vegetables and whole grains, and eating too much fat and salt.”

The 2005 Dietary Guidelines describe a healthy diet as one that:

- Emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products;
- Includes lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs and nuts; and
- Is low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt (sodium) and added sugars.

([www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov))

According to the food guidance system, MyPyramid, the keys to a healthy diet include:

- Make half your grains whole
- Vary your veggies
- Focus on fruit
- Get your calcium-rich foods
- Go lean with protein.

Start by increasing your whole grains. Foods with whole grains have fiber, which aides in digestion, and are rich in important nutrients. Select breads and cereals made with whole grains. Read the nutrition label on foods to make certain your food is made with whole grain. The words “whole wheat” or “whole grain” should be one of the first ingredients listed. Also look for the whole grain stamp stating that foods are 100% whole grain. Remember, just because a food says it is *made with* whole grains, it does not mean it is made from whole grains entirely.

Fruits and vegetables contain essential vitamins, minerals and fiber that may help protect you from chronic diseases. Compared with people who consume a diet with only small amounts of fruits and vegetables, those who eat more generous amounts as part of a healthful diet are likely to have reduced risk of chronic diseases, including stroke and perhaps other cardiovascular diseases, and certain cancers (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, [www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov](http://www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov)). To get the most benefit from fruits and vegetables, think color. Eat a variety of different colored fruits and vegetables to give your body a wide range of nutrients.

Ninety-nine percent of the calcium in our bodies is found in our bones and teeth. Calcium also plays a role in heart and muscle contraction, nerve functions and cellular functions. Bones store the calcium we consume. When we do not consume enough calcium for our body's daily needs, the body draws upon these calcium stores found in our bones. Therefore, it is important to eat calcium-rich foods as part of a healthy diet. Choose low-fat or nonfat dairy products like milk, cheese and yogurt to keep your fat and cholesterol intake low. If you do not consume milk products because of lactose intolerance, MyPyramid recommends choosing lactose-free alternatives or consuming the enzyme lactase before consuming milk products.

Meat and poultry choices should be lean and low fat. Select a variety of fish, nuts and seeds more often to provide your body with healthy oils or "good fats." Trim all visible fat from meats before cooking. Broil, grill, roast, poach or boil meats, poultry and fish. Limit fried entrees to reduce the amount of fat you consume. Did you know that breading your meats adds fat and calories? It can also cause the food to soak up more oil during frying. Avoid high fat sauces or gravies to cut down on added fat. Include dry beans and peas either as a main dish or as part of a meal such as rice and beans, baked beans or black bean enchiladas.

Making healthier food choices and including a variety of foods in your eating plan can have positive benefits to your health. The information available is plentiful, but the key to healthy eating habits is quite simple: eat *more* fruits, vegetables and whole grains and eat *less* fat, salt and sugar.