

Good Nutrition All-Year Round

Good nutrition is a key player in helping to ensure a healthy life. You can improve your health by eating well. Nutrients you need include carbohydrates, fats, proteins, vitamins, minerals and water.

Eating well is important for many reasons, regardless of age. In addition to giving you energy and helping you control your weight, a good diet may help prevent chronic diseases such as heart disease,

BY LISA R. YOUNG TYPE 2 diabetes and certain cancers.

Now more than ever, during the Covid-19 pandemic, eating a nutritious diet is vitally important because it can contribute to a healthy immune system.

As a nutritionist, I regularly advise clients about healthy eating and provide them with smart tips and tools to put good nutrition into practice. Many people get confused with all the conflicting advice on diet and nutrition. Eating healthfully, however, does not have to be complicated. Here are some of my top tips to help you eat a nutritious diet.

CHOOSE A BALANCED DIET.

A healthy balanced diet includes all the food groups — fruits; vegetables; protein-rich foods; grains; dairy; and fats and oils. Rather than eliminate entire categories of foods, I suggest that you select the healthiest options from each food group. For example, rather than eliminate grains from your diet, choose whole grains such as oatmeal, whole wheat bread and brown rice instead of refined grains like white pasta and bagels. For healthy protein options, choose fish, chicken and beans instead of red meat. I suggest you fill half your plate with colorful non-starchy vegetables and fruit, one-quarter with healthy protein, and the remaining quarter with whole grains or a healthy starch such as sweet potato.

LISA R. YOUNG, PhD, RDN, CDN is an internationally recognized nutritionist, portion size expert and adjunct professor of nutrition at New York University and the author, most recently, of "Finally Full, Finally Slim: 30 Days to Permanent Weight Loss One Portion at Time" (Center Street/Hachette, 2019).



CHOOSE NUTRIENT-DENSE FOODS.

As you get older, you tend to need fewer calories while still needing enough nutrients for good health, so choosing nutrient-dense foods is key. When advising clients, I recommend eating larger portions of healthy lower-calorie nutrient-dense foods such as fruits and vegetables while enjoying smaller portions of higher calorie foods such as red meat and fried foods. But rather than deprive yourself, allow yourself to indulge in a small amount of your favorite treat every now and then.

EAT THE RAINBOW.

A diet rich in colorful fruits and vegetables has been associated with improved health. Fruits and vegetables contain vitamins and minerals, including Vitamin C, beta carotene, potassium and fiber. I recommend eating an array of fruits and vegetables from the different color spectrums to help you get a wide variety of nutrients. For example, many deep orange-colored foods that are in season in during the winter months, like carrots, sweet potatoes and butternut squash, contain the antioxidant beta carotene, while red-colored foods like tomatoes and watermelon are rich in the antioxidant lycopene. Eating a diet rich in antioxidants helps strengthen your immune system, which is vital to help protect against infection and other diseases.

ENJOY YOUR FRUITS AND VEGGIES IN ALL FORMS.

I suggest eating more fruits and vegetables, whether you eat them fresh or frozen. Sometimes frozen produce is healthier because it's picked at its peak of ripeness. I always keep a bag of frozen blueberries and mixed vegetables in my freezer. The key is to eat your fruits and veggies. If keeping them handy in your freezer during winter months will help you increase your consumption, go for it! Winter fruits like apples, pears, and oranges are readily available and affordable and they keep well.

Please note that this is general advice. Each person should seek and adhere to the advice of a medical professional. This is intended to stimulate thought and conversation around the topic of nutrition and is not meant to replace any medical advice specific to your medical conditions and needs.

ENJOY SEASONAL PRODUCE AND GET AMPLE VITAMIN C.

Although fewer fruits and vegetables are in season in the colder months than in summer, keep in mind healthy superstars such as oranges and grapefruits, leafy greens, apples, pears, winter squash and sweet potatoes. And to keep your immune system healthy, especially during the pandemic, include plenty of Vitamin C-rich foods such as red peppers, tomatoes, oranges, kiwifruit and potatoes. Warming up with healthy soup — vegetable soup, butternut squash soup and homemade chicken soup with vegetables — is a great way to boost your vitamin intake.

GRILL AND BAKE INSTEAD OF DEEP-FRY.

Choose healthy preparation methods for better health. Whether eating at home or ordering out, choose baked or grilled chicken or fish instead of deep-fried. Cooking methods like steaming, poaching and boiling are also great alternatives. Enjoy your vegetables steamed, roasted or lightly sautéed in olive oil. When ordering out, order a baked potato instead of French fries. And season your favorite foods with herbs and spices instead of salt and sugar.

ENJOY THE COMPANY YOU KEEP.

While what — and how much — you eat matters for good health, having strong relationships and social connections also contributes to longevity. Connecting with others, having close friendships and even being part of a community offer many benefits beyond good health. Connecting with others makes us feel like we belong and can also make us happier. So, this season, I invite you to stay connected with loved ones. While we may not be able to socialize in person beyond our immediate families, we can still make the effort to maintain our social ties and engage in pleasant conversation whether by phone or video calls. ▮