Healthy Meals: Plan, Shop & Prepare

Teach your kid how to plan, shop for and prepare healthy meals on a budget once a week.

A healthy meal starts with more vegetables and fruits and smaller portions of proteins and grains. Think about how you can adjust the portions on your plate to get more of what you need without too many calories. And don’t forget the dairy! Make it the beverage you drink with your meal or add fat-free or low-fat dairy products to your plate.

Exploring MyPlate

10 tips for healthy eating

Learning about the nutrients that your foods contain allows you to make the best choices for healthy eating. There are many foods to choose from, but some of them are better choices than others. Making food choices for a healthy lifestyle can be as simple as using these 10 tips:

1. Balance your calories. To balance your calories you need to know how much food you eat and how much exercise you do each day. Find out how many calories you need in a day as a first step in managing your weight. Go to www.ChooseMyPlate.gov to find your calorie level.

2. Enjoy your food, but eat less. Take the time to fully enjoy your food as you eat it. Eating too fast or when your attention is elsewhere may lead to eating too many calories.

3. Avoid oversized portions. Use a smaller plate, bowl, and glass. Portion out foods before you eat.

4. Eat more vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and fat-free or 1% milk and dairy products. Make these foods the basis for meals and snacks.

5. Make half your plate fruits and vegetables. Choose red, orange, and dark-green vegetables like tomatoes, sweet potatoes, and broccoli along with other vegetables. Add fruit to meals as part of the main meal or as side dishes or dessert.

6. Switch to fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk. They have the same amount of calcium and other essential nutrients as whole milk but fewer calories and less saturated fat.

7. Make half your grains whole grains. Eat a whole-grain product instead of a refined product. For example, eat whole-wheat bread instead of white bread and brown rice instead of white rice.

8. Cut back on foods high in solid fats, added sugars, and salt. They include cakes, cookies, ice cream, candies, sweetened drinks, pizza, and fatty meats like ribs, sausages, bacon, and hot dogs. Use these foods as occasional treats, not as everyday foods.

9. Compare sodium in foods. Use the Nutrition Facts Label to choose lower-sodium versions of foods like soup, bread, and frozen meals. Select canned foods labeled “low sodium,” “reduced sodium,” or “no salt added.”

10. Drink water instead of sugary drinks. Cut calories by drinking water or unsweetened beverages. Soda, energy drinks, and sports drinks are a major source of added sugar and calories in American diets.

Adapted from Drying Project Manual © 2013 University of Idaho.
Food groups

A healthy meal starts with more vegetables and fruits and smaller portions of proteins and grains. Think about how you can adjust the portions on your plate to get more of what you need without too many calories. And don’t forget the dairy. Make it the beverage you drink with your meal or add fat-free or low-fat dairy products to your plate.

**Grains.** Grains like wheat, rye, oats, and rice are used to make bread, cereal, and pasta. Foods from the grains group have carbohydrates. Carbohydrates are fuel your body needs. Whole grains are higher in fiber than refined grains. Look for whole wheat or other whole grains on the ingredient label. Half of the foods you eat from the grains group should be whole grains.

**Vegetables.** Vegetables provide several vitamins and minerals your body needs. Eat a variety of vegetables every day, including cooked dry beans and peas. Vegetables can be dried, canned, frozen, or fresh. Vitamin A is found in dark-green vegetables such as broccoli and spinach and in dark-yellow and orange vegetables such as carrots and sweet potatoes. Vitamin A keeps the cells in your body healthy to protect you against infections. Vitamin A also aids in the growth of healthy skin, bones, and teeth.

**Fruits.** Fruits provide vitamins and minerals. Fruits can be dried, canned, frozen, or fresh. Choose whole fruits or pieces of fruit. Oranges, grapefruit, strawberries, and melons have vitamin C, which helps your body to heal and resist infections and helps your body to absorb the iron in the food you eat. It is also needed for healthy teeth, gums, and blood vessels. Deep-yellow fruits like apricots and cantaloupe have vitamin A.

**Oils.** We do need some oils for good health. Get your oils from fish, nuts, and liquid oils such as corn oil, canola oil, or olive oil. Foods that are high in fat include chips, fries, snack cakes, cookies, and candy.

**Dairy products.** Milk provides calcium to keep your bones and teeth strong. Milk and foods made from milk are the best sources of calcium.

**Protein foods.** Meats and beans provide iron and protein for your body. Iron moves oxygen throughout your body in your red blood cells. Protein promotes the growth and repair of body tissues. Foods in this group include meats, poultry, fish, eggs, beans, nuts, and peanut butter. Meats can be frozen, home canned, or dried as jerky.

When you eat a food from the protein group, it should be lean. That means it doesn’t have much fat in it. Baking, broiling, or grilling are the best choices for cooking protein foods, rather than frying, because they do not add fat to the meat.

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**MyPlate Worksheet for Kids**

For 1 day keep track of all the foods you eat and how much of them you eat on the MyPlate Worksheet for Kids (next page). First, write all your food choices in the left-hand column. Then, list each food choice in its food group. For example, if you had a banana for breakfast, list it in the fruits group. If you drank milk, list it in the dairy products group, and so on. Now, add up your total for each food group. Compare your totals to the goals for your age and gender. (See Dietary Guidelines for Youth on the last page of this activity.)

Remember to record how many minutes of physical activity you completed. Physical activity helps you to maintain a healthy weight and prevent excess weight gain. Try to get 60 minutes each day.

You can use this worksheet as a selected activity for more than 1 year. It is a good idea to track the foods you eat on a regular basis to check and see how you are doing.

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**Answer the following questions:**

What food groups were lacking?

Do you need to eat less of any food group?

What changes could you have made on this day to eat better?

List two goals for yourself to improve your eating.
MyPlate Worksheet for Kids

Check how you did yesterday and set a goal for tomorrow. Some foods don’t fit in any group. These “extras” may be mainly fat or sugar. Limit your intake of these foods. Star all the home-preserved foods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Write in your choices from yesterday</th>
<th>Food and activity</th>
<th>Goal (based on 1,800-calorie pattern)</th>
<th>List each food choice in its food group. Star the home-preserved foods</th>
<th>Estimate your total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breakfast:</td>
<td>GRANIS</td>
<td>6 ounce equivalents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 ounce equivalent is about 1 slice bread; 1 cup dry cereal; or ½ cup cooked rice, pasta, or cereal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch:</td>
<td>VEGETABLES</td>
<td>2½ cups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Choose from dark-green, orange, starchy, or other veggies, including dry beans and peas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snack:</td>
<td>FRUITS</td>
<td>1½ cups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Choose from fresh, frozen, canned, or dried. 1½ cups fresh is equal to ¾ cup dried</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinner:</td>
<td>DAIRY PRODUCTS</td>
<td>3 cups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 cup yogurt or 1½ ounces cheese = 1 cup milk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical activity:</td>
<td>PROTEIN FOODS</td>
<td>5 ounce equivalents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 ounce equivalent is 1 ounce meat, chicken, turkey, or fish; 1 egg; 1 tbsp peanut butter; ½ ounce nuts; or ¼ cup dry beans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PHYSICAL ACTIVITY</td>
<td>At least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity a day or most days</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How did you do yesterday?  ○ Great  ○ So-so  ○ Not so great

My food goal for tomorrow is: ________________________________

My activity goal for tomorrow is: ________________________________

To discover a wide selection of 4-H activities and experiences, visit 4-H.org/4HatHome
Reading Food Labels

When you completed your Choose MyPlate Worksheet, did you find that you were not eating enough of the right foods?

It is not always easy to know the amount of food in a serving. For example, how many crackers are in a serving? How much cereal do you pour in a bowl for a serving from the grains group? The answers are easy if you know where to look.

Most foods in the grocery store must have a nutrition label and list of ingredients. Look for the Nutrition Facts Label on the food package or container. This label shows the serving size, the number of servings in the package or container, and other nutritional information. The list of ingredients is on the label elsewhere.

Serving size. The place to start when you look at the Nutrition Facts Label is with the serving size. Just below that is the number of servings in the package or container. The Nutrition Facts Label at left shows that a serving size is 1/6 of the recipe. A recipe in this case would include the entire can plus additional water added as directed. This can of chili contains 4–6 servings.

Calories. Calories provide a measure of how much energy you get from a serving. In this can of chili there are 269 calories in one serving.

% daily value. The % daily value (% DV) is the amount of a nutrient in one serving compared with dietary recommendations.

What is the % DV for total fat in the can of chili?

We should limit our intake of total fat, cholesterol, and sodium. Look for foods low in saturated fats, trans fats, and cholesterol (5% DV or less is low, 20% DV or more is high). Most of the fats you eat should be polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats. Keep total fat intake between 20% and 35% of calories.

Is the % DV for saturated fat in the can of chili high, moderate or low?

Sodium. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans suggest that we need to lower our sodium intake to less than 2,300 milligrams per day to reduce the risk of high blood pressure. One teaspoon of salt equals about 2,300 milligrams of sodium. Most of the sodium we eat comes from processed foods, not from the saltshaker. When you preserve foods at home, you can control the amount of sodium you add to your product.
Ask yourself the following questions:

How much sodium would you consume if you ate the whole can of chili? Figure that there are four servings in the can. ___________________

How much sodium is in one serving? ________

Is the % DV for sodium in one serving high, moderate or low? ________________________

Sugars. Sugars are found naturally in fruits (fructose) and in fluid milk and milk products (lactose). The majority of sugars in typical American diets are added to foods during processing, preparation, or at the table. Dietary Guidelines for Americans suggest that we need to reduce the intake of calories from added sugars. In home food preservation, you can control the amount of added sugar in fruits and other products.

Fiber, vitamins, and minerals. Be sure to get enough potassium, dietary fiber, and vitamins and minerals. Remember that 5% DV is low and 20% DV or more is high.

Is the calcium listed on the chili label high, moderate or low? ________________________

How much should you eat?

ChooseMyPlate.gov or nutrition.gov gives you amounts of different foods that you should eat to stay healthy. It depends on your age, whether you are a girl or boy, and how active you are. Kids who are more active burn more calories, so they need more calories. The Dietary Guidelines for Youth table on the next page gives estimates.

The following tips and measurements will help you use the table.

Grains. Grains are measured in ounce equivalents. Eat 4–7 ounce equivalents every day, and remember that at least half of these should be whole grains.

An ounce equivalent equals:
- 1 slice of bread
- 1/2 cup of cooked cereal, such as oatmeal
- 1/2 cup of rice or pasta
- 1 cup of cold cereal

Vegetables. Vegetable servings are measured in cups. Vegetables can be canned, dried, frozen, or fresh.

Fruits. Fruit is part of a healthy diet. Fruit can be canned, dried, frozen, or fresh. One-fourth cup of dried fruit is equal to 1/2 cup fresh fruit.

Dairy products. Calcium builds strong bones to last a lifetime, so you need to get these foods in your diet. Dairy products include milk, yogurt, and cheese.

Protein foods. These foods contain iron and lots of other important nutrients. These foods, like grains, are measured in ounce equivalents. An ounce equivalent equals:
- 1 ounce of meat, poultry, or fish
- 1/4 cup cooked dry beans
- 1 egg
- 1 tablespoon of peanut butter
- A small handful of nuts or seeds

Going Further

You might want to collect your own label and answer the following questions:

What is the food item? ________________

What is the serving size? ________________

How many calories are in the item per serving? ________________

You may also want to collect several brands of the same food and compare the labels. Compare cartons of fruit juice and fruit drink, or several boxes of dry cereal or energy bars.
Menu Planning

Dietary guidelines for youth: Amount to eat each day

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Grains (ounce equivalents)</th>
<th>Vegetables (cups)</th>
<th>Fruits (cups)</th>
<th>Dairy products (cups)</th>
<th>Protein foods (ounce equivalents)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4–8</td>
<td>4–5</td>
<td>1½</td>
<td>1–1½</td>
<td>1–2</td>
<td>3–4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9–13 (girls)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1½</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9–13 (boys)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2½</td>
<td>1½</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14–18 (girls)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2½</td>
<td>1½</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14–18 (boys)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Let's plan a menu

Planning a menu can be fun when you base it on MyPlate. Using the MyPlate guidelines we have talked about, determine how much food you should eat daily from each of the food groups. Then divide the total amount of food you should eat each day among three meals and one or two snacks.

Make your meals fun and interesting. Try to include a variety of foods to make the meal interesting and healthy; different colors and shapes of food that make the meal appealing to look at; different textures such as crunchy, soft, chewy, and liquid; different flavors such as spicy and mild; and both hot and cold foods.

Include foods from at least three or four of the five food groups at each meal.

Remember to include foods that you have made in your project. You might choose dried or canned fruits, frozen vegetables, salsa, or other canned products. You might want to include a snack of trail mix that you made in the drying manual.

If you want another challenge, plan all the meals for a week, including snacks. You might choose to rate the meals for texture, color, and taste. You might also want to compare the meals to MyPlate to see if you have provided the recommended number of servings for each food group.

To go deeper, find the full curriculum at Shop4-H.org/Food