



Eat Wisely

Healthy Living Message

What's Important to Know?

Eating wisely helps prevent chronic diseases like obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure, and Type 2 diabetes. It is one of the most powerful tools we have to reduce the onset of disease. The path to improving health through nutrition is to follow a healthy eating pattern that is right for you.

Healthy eating patterns include:

- A variety of vegetables—dark green, red and orange, and legumes (beans and peas)
- A variety of fruits, especially whole fresh fruits, but may be canned or frozen
- Food choices that are high in fiber (whole-grains)—eat 3 ounces or more of whole-grain cereals, breads, crackers, rice, or pasta per day
- Fat-free or low-fat dairy, including milk, yogurt, cheese, and/or fortified soy beverages
- An assortment of protein foods, including seafood, lean meats and poultry, eggs, legumes (beans and peas), soy products, and nuts and seeds

Healthy eating patterns limit saturated fats and *trans* fats, added sugars, and sodium.

Key recommendations include:

- Avoid *trans* fats. Consume less than 10% of your daily calories from saturated fats. Foods that are high in saturated fat include butter, whole milk, meats not labeled as lean, and tropical oils such as coconut and palm oil. Replace saturated fats with unsaturated fats, such as canola or olive oil. When selecting and preparing foods, choose lean (skinless), low-fat or fat-free varieties, and do not add fat when you cook.
- Consume less than 10% of your daily calories from added sugars, which include syrups and other caloric sweeteners. When sugars are added to foods and beverages, they add calories without contributing essential nutrients. Naturally occurring sugars, such as those in fruit or milk, are not added sugars.

- Consume less than 1 teaspoon of salt per day (approximately 2,300 mg of sodium). Choose foods with little added salt and prepare foods without salt when possible. Adults who have high blood pressure (pre-hypertension and hypertension) should limit intake to 1,500 mg of sodium per day.
- Maintain or aim for a healthy weight. Balance the calories you take in from what you eat and drink with the calories you burn through physical activity. To lose weight, most people need to reduce the number of calories they get from foods and beverages, and increase their physical activity. For a weight loss of 1-1½ pounds per week, daily intake should be reduced by 500-750 calories. Eating patterns that contain 1,200 to 1,500 calories each day can help most women lose weight safely. Eating patterns that contain 1,500 to 1,800 calories each day are suitable for most men for safe weight loss.

Want to Know More?

If you want to learn more about how to eat wisely, talk with your VA health care team. They can also help if you have questions about making a healthy living change. For more information go to: http://www.prevention.va.gov/Healthy_Living/Eat_Wisely.asp

Resources

- VHA National Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention (NCP): www.prevention.va.gov
- USDA *Choose My Plate*: <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/>
- Veterans Health Library: www.veteranshealthlibrary.va.gov