Choose Nutrient-Dense Food and Drink for a Lighter, Healthier Weight

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Maintaining a healthy weight is one way we can strive to control some risk factors for cardiovascular disease. The latest *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* have two over-arching concepts: to maintain calorie balance over time to achieve and sustain a healthy weight, and to focus on consuming foods rich in nutrients, when compared to their calorie content. A good example is strawberries. One cup of strawberries contains only 150 calories, but 3.5 grams of fiber, 68 milligrams of vitamin C and 26.9 micrograms of folate. Nutrient-dense foods are the opposite of empty-calorie foods, which are low in nutrition when compared to their calorie content. Here is a handy checklist.

- Choose a variety of protein sources, including lean meats and poultry, seafood, egg whites, beans and peas, and unsalted nuts and seeds. If you follow a Mediterranean diet, you are on a good course.
- Consume at least half of all grains as whole grains, replacing refined products. Keep telling yourself, “If it is white don’t bite!”
- Consume less than 10 percent of calories from saturated fatty acids by replacing them with monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fatty acids.
- Eat more vegetables and fruit, especially dark-green, red and orange vegetables, beans and peas. Remember, green is good.
- Keep trans fatty acids as low as possible by limiting solid fats.

**Balancing Calories**
- Enjoy your food, but eat less.
- Avoid oversized portions.

**Foods to Increase**
- Make half your plate fruits and vegetables.
- Make at least half your grains whole grains.
- Switch to fat-free or low-fat (1 percent) milk.

**Foods to Reduce**
- Compare sodium in foods like soup, bread and frozen meals – and choose the foods with lower numbers.
- Drink water instead of sugary drinks.

Source: USDA ChooseMyPlate.gov
fats and foods that contain synthetic sources of trans fats, such as partially hydrogenated vegetable oils.

♥ Use fat-free or low-fat (1 percent) milk, cheese and yogurt.

♥ Reduce calorie intake from solid fats and added sugars.

♥ Compare sodium content for foods such as canned soup and frozen meals, then select those with the least salt, limiting daily sodium intake to 2300 milligrams or less for healthy people.

♥ People with hypertension, diabetes or chronic kidney disease should cut their salt intake to 1,500 milligrams (a little more than half a teaspoon a day). High salt intake is linked to high blood pressure and heart disease and stroke.

♥ Limit cholesterol intake. Watch your portions of egg yolks and fatty meats, poultry and beef. Trim fat from meat and skin from poultry.

♥ Choose foods that provide more potassium, dietary fiber, calcium and vitamin D. These foods include vegetables and fruits, beans, whole grains and some dairy products.

♥ Eat nutritious food, instead of relying on supplements for beneficial nutrients.

♥ If you drink alcohol, consume it in moderation (one drink or less for women per day and two drinks or less for men).

♥ Drink water instead of sugary sodas or other sweetened drinks.

♥ Adults should engage in 150 minutes of physical activity a week. Walking is a great start, with a goal of walking two miles throughout the day. Children and adolescents age six and older should engage in at least 60 minutes of daily physical activity.

♥ Use smaller plates (these were common a generation ago) and think about your plate of food; divide it in quarters:
  • ½ should be filled with brightly colored foods such as vegetables
  • ¼ filled with a protein
  • ¼ with a complex carbohydrate