

HEALTHY EATING

MAINTAIN BALANCE WITH HEALTHIER FOOD CHOICES

Food is an important and fundamental aspect of life, essential for good health and wellness. The amount and type of food you eat has a major impact on your health. Eating a healthy, well-balanced diet can help reduce your risk of a range of diseases, improve your cholesterol and blood pressure levels, help you maintain a healthy weight and boost your mental health too.

BENEFITS OF A HEALTHY, BALANCED DIET

A healthy balanced diet involves getting all of the nutrients and fibre your body needs from a wide variety of foods. This includes vegetables, fruit, legumes and grainy foods (cereals) — preferably wholegrain. Apart from the usual cereals like bread, rice and pasta, why not try polenta, couscous, oats, quinoa or barley? It's also good to have protein such as fish, lean meat and/or meat alternatives, and fat-reduced dairy products.

KEY NUTRIENTS IN YOUR DIET ARE:

- Carbohydrates — provide you with energy (good examples include wholegrain bread and cereals, vegetables and fruit).
- Proteins — another source of energy and vital for the growth and repair of all cells in your body (found in lean meat, poultry, fish, low-fat dairy products, legumes and nuts).

- Fats — a very concentrated source of energy that helps to transport some vitamins around your body (often found in meat, dairy products, oils and nuts).
- Vitamins and minerals — there are many of these and each one is important to keep your body healthy.

Fibre is also an important part of a healthy diet. It isn't classed as a 'nutrient' because it doesn't enter the body's cells. Even so, it's essential to keep your digestive system healthy. Insoluble fibre is good for your bowel health and is found in wholegrains, fruits and vegetables. Soluble fibre helps lower cholesterol and is commonly found in oats, beans and legumes/lentils.

MANAGING RISK FACTORS WITH DIET

Most Australians are lucky enough to have access to many nutritious foods. However, many everyday foods can be high in salt, fat (including saturated fat) and added sugar. They can also be high in energy (kilojoules) thanks to increasingly large portion sizes.

All of these factors can contribute to health problems such as obesity, hypertension (high blood pressure), type 2 diabetes and high cholesterol levels. In turn, these can lead to an increase in the number of people who have heart attacks, strokes and cancer each year.

Making even small changes to our diets, such as consuming a little less salt and sugar, and eating less fat (particularly saturated fat) and energy (kilojoules) could prevent many of these health problems.

HELP IS AT HAND

Consumers are constantly bombarded with information about the benefits and hazards of different foods, which means making healthy food choices can often be confusing. If you're ready to make positive changes to your diet, take things slowly. Small, day-to-day changes will have a much bigger and longer-lasting effect.

If you're having trouble making changes, or you're worried that you're not getting all the nutrients you need, talk to your GP or see an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD). A dietitian can help you to develop an individualised healthy eating plan by reviewing your eating patterns and taking into account any health conditions you may have. You can find your one at the Dietitian's Association of Australia website (www.daa.asn.au).

It's important to eat a healthy diet throughout your life, so no matter what age you are, you can improve your eating habits for better health.

HEALTHY FOOD CHOICES

The free FoodSwitch app from Bupa and The George Institute for Global Health makes it easier to choose healthier foods. You can use it to scan the barcodes of packaged foods while you're shopping and receive colour-coded ratings for four key food components (fat, saturated fat, salt and sugar): red signals a less healthy choice, amber is an okay choice and green is a healthier choice. It also suggests some similar but healthier options.

Find out more at bupa.com.au/foodswitch

FURTHER INFORMATION

Bupa health information
www.bupa.com.au/health

Dietitians Association of Australia
www.daa.asn.au

Nutrition Australia
www.nutritionaustralia.org

Sources:

Dietitians' Association of Australia (DAA). (daa.asn.au)

Harvard School of Public Health. The Nutrition Source. (www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/)

National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC). Dietary Guidelines for all Australians. (www.nhmrc.gov.au)

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