

FOOD PYRAMIDS: What Should You Really Eat

INTRODUCTION

More than a decade and a half ago, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) created a powerful and enduring icon: the Food Guide Pyramid. This simple illustration conveyed in a flash what the USDA said were the elements of a healthy diet. The Pyramid was taught in schools, appeared in countless media articles and brochures, and was plastered on cereal boxes and food labels.

Tragically, the information embodied in this pyramid didn't point the way to healthy eating. Why not? Its blueprint was based on shaky scientific evidence, and it barely changed over the years to reflect major advances in our understanding of the connection between diet and health.

With much fanfare, in 2005, the USDA retired the old Food Guide Pyramid and replaced it with MyPyramid, a new symbol and "interactive food guidance system." The new symbol is basically the old Pyramid turned on its side.

The good news is that this dismantles and buries the flawed Pyramid. The bad news is that the new symbol doesn't convey enough information to help you make informed choices about your diet and long-term health. And it continues to recommend foods that aren't essential to good health, and may even be detrimental in the quantities included in MyPyramid.

As an alternative to the USDA's flawed pyramid, faculty members at the Harvard School of Public Health built the Healthy Eating Pyramid. It resembles the USDA's in shape only. The Healthy Eating Pyramid takes into consideration, and puts into perspective, the wealth of research conducted during the last 15 years that has reshaped the definition of healthy eating.

PYRAMID BUILDING

In the children's book [Who Built the Pyramid?](#)¹, different people take credit for building the once-grand pyramid of Senwosret. King Senwosret, of course, claims the honor. But so does his architect, the quarry master, the stonecutters, slaves, and the boys who carried water to the workers.

The USDA's MyPyramid also had many builders. Some are obvious—USDA scientists, nutrition experts, staff members, and consultants. Others aren't. Intense lobbying efforts from a variety of food industries also helped shape the pyramid.

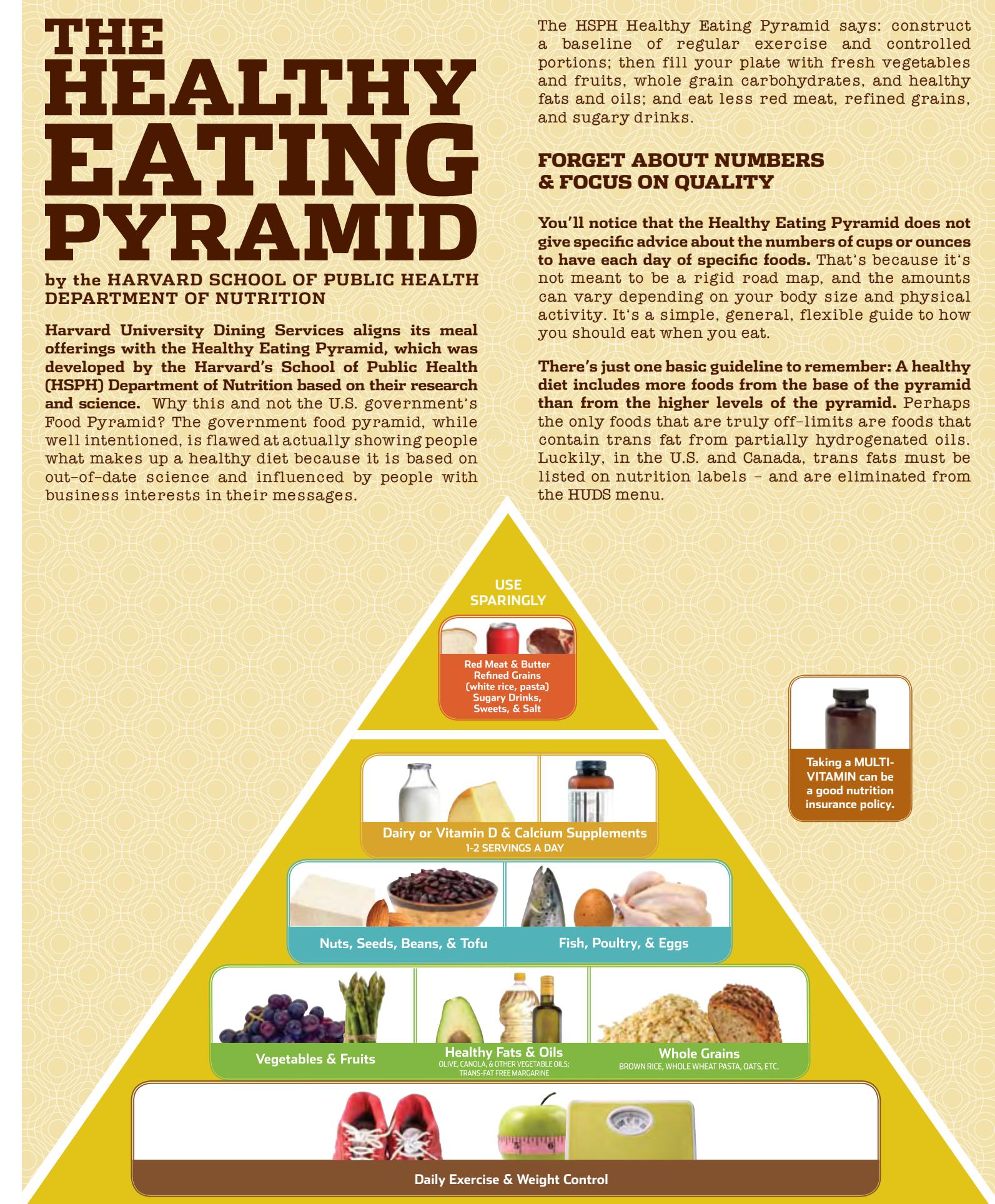
1. Hooper M, Heighway-Bury R. [Who Built the Pyramid?](#) Cambridge, Mass.: Candlewick Press, 2001.

HEALTHY EATING PYRAMID

If the only goal of MyPyramid is to give us the best possible advice for healthy eating, then it should be grounded in the evidence and be independent of business.

Instead of waiting for this to happen, nutrition experts from the Harvard School of Public Health created the Healthy Eating Pyramid, and updated it in 2008. The Healthy Eating Pyramid is based on the best available scientific evidence about the links between diet and health. This new pyramid fixes fundamental flaws in the USDA pyramid and offers sound information to help people make better choices about what to eat.

The Healthy Eating Pyramid sits on a foundation of daily exercise and weight control. Why? These two related elements strongly influence your chances of staying healthy. They also affect what you eat and how your food affects you.

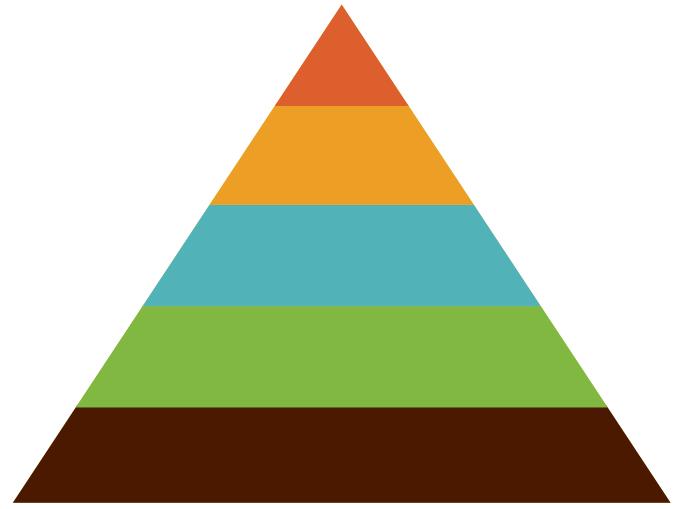


The HSPH Healthy Eating Pyramid says: construct a baseline of regular exercise and controlled portions; then fill your plate with fresh vegetables and fruits, whole grain carbohydrates, and healthy fats and oils; and eat less red meat, refined grains, and sugary drinks.

FORGET ABOUT NUMBERS & FOCUS ON QUALITY

You'll notice that the Healthy Eating Pyramid does not give specific advice about the numbers of cups or ounces to have each day of specific foods. That's because it's not meant to be a rigid road map, and the amounts can vary depending on your body size and physical activity. It's a simple, general, flexible guide to how you should eat when you eat.

There's just one basic guideline to remember: A healthy diet includes more foods from the base of the pyramid than from the higher levels of the pyramid. Perhaps the only foods that are truly off-limits are foods that contain trans fat from partially hydrogenated oils. Luckily, in the U.S. and Canada, trans fats must be listed on nutrition labels – and are eliminated from the HUDS menu.



THE HEALTHY EATING PYRAMID **BRICK BY BRICK**

START WITH EXERCISE

A healthy diet is built on a base of regular exercise, which keeps calories in balance and weight in check. Be physically active. Any activity is better than none. And more is usually better.



To learn more about the Healthy Eating Pyramid, explore the "bricks" at "The Nutrition Source" online: www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/index.html

WHOLE GRAINS Good Carbs Guide the Way

The body needs carbohydrates mainly for energy. The best sources of carbohydrates are whole grains such as oatmeal, whole wheat bread, and brown rice. They deliver the outer (bran) and inner (germ) layers along with energy-rich starch. The body can't digest whole grains as quickly as it can highly processed carbohydrates such as white flour. This keeps blood sugar and insulin levels from rising, then falling, too quickly. Better control of blood sugar and insulin can keep hunger at bay and may prevent the development of type 2 diabetes. Plus, a growing body of research suggests that eating a diet rich in whole grains may also protect against heart disease.

FATS & CHOLESTEROL Out with the Bad, In with the Good

Surprised that the Healthy Eating Pyramid puts some fats near the base, indicating they are okay to eat? Although this recommendation seems to go against conventional wisdom, it's exactly in line with the evidence and with common eating habits. The average American gets one-third or more of his or her daily calories from fats, so placing them near the foundation of the pyramid makes sense. Note, though, that it specifically mentions healthy fats and oils, not all types of fat. Good sources of healthy unsaturated fats include olive, canola, soy, corn, sunflower, peanut, and other vegetable oils, trans fat-free margarines, nuts, seeds, avocados, and fatty fish such as salmon. These healthy fats not only improve cholesterol levels (when eaten in place of highly processed carbo-hydrates) but can also protect the heart from sudden and potentially deadly rhythm problems.

VEGETABLES & FRUITS Get Plenty Every Day

A diet rich in vegetables and fruits has bountiful benefits. Among them: It can decrease the chances of having a heart attack or stroke; possibly protect against some types of cancers; lower blood pressure; help you avoid the painful intestinal ailment called diverticulitis; guard against cataract and macular degeneration, the major causes of vision loss among people over age 65; and add variety to your diet and wake up your palate.

NUTS, SEEDS, BEANS, & TOFU

These plant foods are excellent sources of protein, fiber, vitamins, and minerals. Beans include black beans, navy beans, garbanzos, lentils, and other beans that are usually sold dried. Many kinds of nuts contain healthy fats, and packages of some varieties (almonds, walnuts, pecans, peanuts, hazelnuts, and pistachios) can now even carry a label saying they're good for your heart.

FISH, POULTRY, & EGGS Moving Closer to Center Stage

These foods are also important sources of protein. A wealth of research suggests that eating fish can reduce the risk of heart disease, since fish is rich in heart-healthy omega-3 fats. Chicken and turkey are also good sources of protein and can be low in saturated fat. Eggs, which have long been demonized because they contain fairly high levels of cholesterol, aren't as bad as they've been cracked up to be. In fact, an egg is a much better breakfast than a doughnut cooked in an oil rich in trans fats or a bagel made from refined flour. People with diabetes or heart disease, however, should limit their egg yolk consumption to no more than 3 a week. But egg whites are very high in protein and are a fine substitute for whole eggs in omelets and baking.

DAIRY (1 to 2 servings per day) or VITAMIN D/CALCIUM SUPPLEMENTS

Building bone and keeping it strong takes calcium, vitamin D, exercise, and a whole lot more. Dairy products have traditionally been Americans' main source of calcium and, through fortification, vitamin D. But most people need at least 1,000 IU of vitamin D per day, far more than the 100 IU supplied by a glass of fortified milk. And there are other healthier ways to get calcium than from milk and cheese, which can contain a lot of saturated fat. Three glasses of whole milk, for example, contains as much saturated fat as 13 strips of cooked bacon. If you enjoy dairy foods, try to stick mainly with no-fat or low-fat products. If you don't like dairy products, taking a vitamin D and calcium supplement offers an easy and inexpensive way to meet your daily vitamin D and calcium needs.

MULTIVITAMIN WITH EXTRA VITAMIN D (For Most People)

A daily multivitamin, multimineral supplement offers a kind of nutritional backup, especially when it includes some extra vitamin D. While a multivitamin can't in any way replace healthy eating, or make up for unhealthy eating, it can fill in the nutrient holes that may sometimes affect even the most careful eaters. You don't need an expensive name-brand or designer vitamin. A standard, store-brand, RDA-level one is fine for most nutrients—except vitamin D. In addition to its bone-health benefits, there's growing evidence that getting some extra vitamin D can help lower the risk of colon and breast cancer. Aim for getting at least 1,000 IU of vitamin D per day; multiple vitamins are now available with this amount. (Many people, especially those who spend the winter in the northern U.S. or have darker skin, will need extra vitamin D, often a total of 3,000 to 4,000 IU per day, to bring their blood levels up to an adequate range. If you are unsure, ask your physician to check your blood level.) Look for a multivitamin that meets the requirements of the USP (U.S. Pharmacopeia), an organization that sets standards for drugs and supplements.

USE SPARINGLY: Red Meat & Butter

These sit at the top of the Healthy Eating Pyramid because they contain lots of saturated fat. Eating a lot of red meat may also increase your risk of colon cancer. If you eat red meat every day, switching to fish, chicken, or beans several times a week can improve cholesterol levels. So can switching from butter to olive oil. And eating fish has other benefits for the heart.

Refined Grains (White Bread, Rice, Pasta); Potatoes; Sugary Drinks & Sweets; Salt

Why are these all-American staples at the top, rather than the bottom, of the Healthy Eating Pyramid? White bread, white rice, white pasta, other refined grains, potatoes, sugary drinks, and sweets can cause fast and furious increases in blood sugar that can lead to weight gain, diabetes, heart disease, and other chronic disorders. Whole grain carbohydrates cause slower, steadier increases in blood sugar that don't overwhelm the body's ability to handle carbohydrates. The salt shaker is a new addition to the "Use Sparingly" tip of the Healthy Eating Pyramid, one that's based on extensive research linking high-sodium diets to increased risk of heart attack and stroke.

5 QUICK TIPS

THE HEALTHY EATING PYRAMID

by the Harvard School of Public Health, Department of Nutrition



- ▶ **Start with exercise.** A healthy diet is built on a base of regular exercise, which keeps calories in balance and weight in check.
- ▶ **Focus on food, not grams.** The Healthy Eating Pyramid doesn't worry about specific servings or grams of food, so neither should you. It's a simple, general guide to how you should eat when you eat.
- ▶ **Go with plants.** Eating a plant-based diet is healthiest. Choose plenty of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and healthy fats, like olive and canola oil.
- ▶ **Cut way back on American staples.** Red meat, refined grains, potatoes, sugary drinks, and salty snacks are part of American culture, but they're also really unhealthy. Go for a plant-based diet rich in non-starchy vegetables, fruits, and whole grains. And if you eat meat, fish and poultry are the best choices.
- ▶ **Take a multivitamin, and maybe have a drink.** Taking a multivitamin can be a good nutrition insurance policy. If you are of legal age, moderate drinking for many people can have real health benefits, but it's not for everyone. Those who don't drink shouldn't feel that they need to start. For more information, read "Alcohol: Balancing Risks and Benefits."

To learn more about THE HEALTHY EATING PYRAMID explore "The Nutrition Source" online at: www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/what-should-you-eat/pyramid-full-story/index.html

**SEE REVERSE FOR suggestions for
Young Adults from HUHS**

TIPS 4 YOUNG ADULTS

SUGGESTIONS FROM
HARVARD
UNIVERSITY
HEALTH SERVICES

- ▶ **Carbs** Optimal brain function requires carbohydrates. Include them at each meal or snack and make it a whole grain choice whenever possible. Whole grain options include: barley or quinoa salad, oats, 100% whole wheat wraps and brown rice.
- ▶ **Healthy Proteins** Including protein, even a small amount, with each meal helps you feel satisfied longer. This works for snacks intended to carry you several hours as well.
- ▶ **Fruits & Vegetables** Never been a big vegetable eater? Keep trying – it may take up to 10 tastings of a food to realize it's quite palatable after all. Try seasoning them with a drizzle of olive oil or balsamic vinegar or a sprinkle of dried spices or herbs. You might also discover that you like something raw that you don't enjoy in its cooked form.
- ▶ **Fiber** Unaccustomed to the texture and flavor of brown rice, whole wheat bread or multi-grain pasta? Over time, your palate may prefer their nutty, chewy flavor. Aim to make at least half of your grains whole.
- ▶ **Healthy Fats** Include some healthy fat in your diet every day. Your brain and your immune system will both thank you. Options include: nuts, peanut butter, olives and olive oil, avocado, fatty fish such as salmon, sunflower seeds, canola oil.
- ▶ **Healthy Drinks** Pay attention to the sugar content in what you drink. Also, remember calories are not the only consideration in choosing a beverage. Fat-free skim milk provides protein, potassium, calcium, B vitamins and vitamin D. Low-fat chocolate milk is an excellent post work-out beverage.
- ▶ **Build Strong Bones** Young adults are still building bones, up until about age 25. If you don't drink milk, you likely need a supplement to get enough calcium.

VEGETABLES & FRUITS



by the Harvard School of Public Health, Department of Nutrition

Choose more vegetables and fruits. Go for color and variety—dark green, yellow, orange, and red.

It's hard to argue with the health benefits of a diet rich in vegetables and fruits: lower blood pressure; reduced risk of heart disease, stroke, and probably some cancers; lower risk of eye and digestive problems; and a mellowing effect on blood sugar that can help keep appetite in check.

Most people should aim for at least nine servings (at least 4 cups) of vegetables and fruits a day, and potatoes don't count. Go for a variety of kinds and colors of produce, to give your body the mix of nutrients it needs. Best bets? Dark leafy greens, cooked tomatoes, and anything that's a rich yellow, orange, or red color.

To learn more about VEGETABLES & FRUIT and The Healthy Eating Pyramid, explore "The Nutrition Source" online at: www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/what-should-you-eat/vegetables-full-story/index.html

SEE REVERSE FOR 5 QUICK TIPS



5 QUICK TIPS

EATING MORE VEGETABLES & FRUITS



► **Keep fruit out where you can see it.**

That way you'll be more likely to eat it. Keep it out on your desk or in the front of the fridge.

► **Get some every meal, every day.**

Try filling half your plate with vegetables at each meal. Salads, stir fry, or other vegetable-rich fare makes it easier to reach this goal. Bonus points if you can get some fruits and vegetables at snack time, too.

► **Explore the produce options and choose something new.**

Variety is the key to a healthy diet. Get out of a rut and try some new fruits and vegetables.

► **Bag the potatoes.**

Choose other vegetables that are packed with more nutrients and more slowly digested carbs. Read the "Carbohydrates" section of The Nutrition Source to learn how to add good carbs to your diet.

► **Make it a meal.**

Try some new recipes where vegetables take center stage, such as Mollie Katzen's asparagus with warm tarragon-pecan vinaigrette, or Nina Simonds' spicy broccolini with red pepper.

CHOLESTEROL & FATS



by the Harvard School of Public Health, Department of Nutrition

Choose healthy fats, limit saturated fat, and avoid trans fat.

The total amount of fat you eat, whether high or low, isn't really linked with disease. What really matters is the type of fat you eat.

The "bad" fats—saturated and trans fats—increase the risk for certain diseases. The "good" fats—monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats—lower disease risk. The key to a healthy diet is to substitute good fats for bad fats—and to avoid trans fats.

Although it is still important to limit the amount of cholesterol you eat, especially if you have diabetes, dietary cholesterol isn't nearly the villain it's been portrayed to be. Cholesterol in the bloodstream is what's most important. And the biggest influence on blood cholesterol level is the mix of fats in your diet—not the amount of cholesterol you eat from food.

To learn more about CHOLESTEROL & FATS and The Healthy Eating Pyramid, explore "The Nutrition Source" online at: www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/what-should-you-eat/fats-full-story/index.html

SEE REVERSE FOR 5 QUICK TIPS

5 QUICK TIPS

CHOOSING HEALTHY FATS



► Use liquid plant oils for cooking and baking.

Olive, canola, and other plant-based oils are rich in heart-healthy unsaturated fats. Try dressing up a salad or spring vegetables with a delicious, olive oil-based vinaigrette.

► Ditch the trans fat.

HUDS has eliminated trans fats from its menu. In the store, read the label to find foods that are trans free. In restaurants, steer clear of fried foods, biscuits, and other baked goods, unless you know that the restaurant has eliminated trans fat. Read more about how to spot trans fats—and how to avoid them.

► Switch from butter to soft tub margarine.

Choose a product that has 0 grams of trans fat, and scan the ingredient list to make sure it does not contain partially hydrogenated oils.

► Eat at least one good source of omega-3 fats each day.

Fatty fish, walnuts, and canola oil all provide omega-3 fatty acids. Read more about omega-3 fatty acids and why they are so important to good health.

► Go lean on meat and milk.

Beef, pork, lamb, and dairy products are high in saturated fat. Choose low-fat milk, and savor full-fat cheeses in small amounts; also, choose lean cuts of meat.

FIBER



by the Harvard School of Public Health, Department of Nutrition

Choose a fiber-filled diet, rich in whole grains, vegetables, and fruits.

Confused by fiber? Well, you're not alone. Most people are. But you don't have to know all the ins and outs of fiber to get benefit from it. When you eat a healthy diet rich in whole grains, vegetables, and fruits, you usually get most of the fiber you'll need, which means you'll also be lowering your risk of diabetes, heart disease, diverticulitis, and constipation. Not a bad package deal.

Officially, fiber is a type of carbohydrate that the body can't digest. Most adult women should shoot for over 20 grams of fiber a day; men should shoot for over 30 grams. Great sources are whole fruits and vegetables, whole grain breads and breakfast cereals, and all manner of beans.

To learn more about FIBER and The Healthy Eating Pyramid, explore "The Nutrition Source" online at: www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/what-should-you-eat/fiber-full-story/index.html

SEE REVERSE FOR 5 QUICK TIPS

5 QUICK TIPS

CHOOSING HIGH FIBER FOODS



► Go with whole fruit instead of juice.

Whole apples and whole oranges are packed with a lot more fiber and a lot fewer calories than their liquid counterparts.

► Break the fast with fruit.

Get off to a great start by adding fruit, like berries or melon, to your breakfast every day.

► Check the label for fiber-filled whole grains.

Choose foods that list whole grains (like whole wheat or whole oats) as a first ingredient. Bread, cereal, crackers and other grain foods should have at least 3 grams of fiber per serving. Read "Health Gains from Whole Grains" for a list of whole grains and their benefits.

► Eat more beans.

It's easy to forget about beans, but they're a great tasting, cheap source of fiber, good carbs, protein, and other important nutrients.

► Try a new dish.

Test out international recipes that use whole grains, like tabouli or whole wheat wheat pasta, or beans, like Indian dals.

CARBO-HYDRATES



by the Harvard School of Public Health, Department of Nutrition

Choose good carbs, not no carbs. Whole grains are your best bet.

Don't be misled by fad diets that make blanket pronouncements on the dangers of carbohydrates. They provide the body with fuel it needs for physical activity and for proper organ function, and they are an important part of a healthy diet. But some kinds of carbohydrates are far better than others.

The best sources of carbohydrates—whole grains, vegetables, fruits and beans—promote good health by delivering vitamins, minerals, fiber, and a host of important phytonutrients. Easily digested carbohydrates from white bread, white rice, pastries, sugared sodas, and other highly processed foods may contribute to weight gain, interfere with weight loss, and promote diabetes and heart disease.

To learn more about CARBOHYDRATES and The Healthy Eating Pyramid, explore "The Nutrition Source" online at: www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/what-should-you-eat/carbohydrates-full-story/index.html

SEE REVERSE FOR 5 QUICK TIPS

5 QUICK TIPS

ADDING GOOD CARBS TO YOUR DIET



► Start the day with whole grains.

Try a hot cereal, like old-fashioned oats, or a cold cereal that lists a whole grain first on the ingredient list.

► Use whole grain breads for lunch or snacks.

Confused about how to find a whole-grain bread? Read "Separating the Whole Grain from the Chaff" to learn how to spot whole grains in the store.

► Bag the potatoes.

Instead, try brown rice, bulgur, wheat berries, whole wheat pasta, or another whole grain with your dinner. Read "Health Gains from Whole Grains" for a list of whole grains and their health benefits.

► Choose whole fruit instead of juice.

An orange has two times as much fiber and half as much sugar as a 12-ounce glass of orange juice.

► Bring on the beans.

Beans are an excellent source of slowly digested carbohydrates as well as a great source of protein.

PROTEINS



by the Harvard School of Public Health, Department of Nutrition

Pay attention to the protein package. Fish, poultry, and beans are your best bets.

Animal protein and vegetable protein probably have the same effects on health. It's the protein package that's likely to make a difference. A 6-ounce broiled porterhouse steak is a great source of protein—38 grams worth. But it also delivers 44 grams of fat, 16 of them saturated. That's almost three-fourths of the recommended daily intake for saturated fat. The same amount of salmon gives you 34 grams of protein and 18 grams of fat, 4 of them saturated. A cup of cooked lentils has 18 grams of protein, but under 1 gram of fat.

So when choosing protein-rich foods, pay attention to what comes along with the protein. Vegetable sources of protein, such as beans, nuts, and whole grains, are excellent choices, and they offer healthy fiber, vitamins and minerals. The best animal protein choices are fish and poultry. If you are partial to red meat, stick with the leanest cuts, choose moderate portion sizes, and make it only an occasional part of your diet.

To learn more about PROTEIN and The Healthy Eating Pyramid, explore "The Nutrition Source" online at: www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/what-should-you-eat/protein-full-story/index.html

SEE REVERSE FOR 5 QUICK TIPS



5 QUICK TIPS

CHOOSING HEALTHY PROTEIN FOODS



► **Mix it up.**

Most reasonable diets provide enough protein for healthy people. Eating a variety of foods will ensure that you get all of the amino acids you need.

► **Go low on saturated fat.**

Beans, fish and poultry provide plenty of protein, without much saturated fat. Steer clear of fatty meats and use whole-milk dairy products sparingly. For more information on saturated fat, read "Fats and Cholesterol: Out with the Bad, In with the Good."

► **Limit red meat—and avoid processed meat.**

Research suggests that people who eat more than 18 ounces a week of red meat have a higher risk of colon cancer. So make red meat—beef, pork, lamb—only an occasional part of your diet, if you eat it at all. And skip the processed stuff—bacon, hot dogs, and deli meats—since that's also been linked to higher cancer risk.

► **Eat soy in moderation.**

Tofu and other soy foods are an excellent red meat alternative. But don't go overboard; 2 to 4 servings a week is a good target. And stay away from supplements that contain concentrated soy protein or extracts, such as isoflavones, as we just don't know the long term effects.

► **Balance carbs and protein.**

Cutting back on highly processed carbohydrates and increasing protein improves levels of blood triglycerides and HDL, and so may reduce your chances of having a heart attack, stroke, or other form of cardiovascular disease. It may also make you feel full longer, and stave off hunger pangs.

CALCIUM & MILK



by the Harvard School of Public Health, Department of Nutrition

Calcium is important. But milk isn't the only, or even best, source.

It's not a news flash that calcium is key for healthy bones. Getting enough calcium from childhood through adulthood helps build bones up and then helps slow the loss of bone as we age. It's not clear, though, that we need as much calcium as is generally recommended, and it's also not clear that dairy products are really the best source of calcium for most people.

While calcium and dairy can lower the risk of osteoporosis and colon cancer, high intake can increase the risk of prostate cancer and possibly ovarian cancer.

Plus, dairy products can be high in saturated fat as well as retinol (vitamin A), which at high levels can paradoxically weaken bones.

Good, non-dairy sources of calcium include collards, bok choy, fortified soy milk, baked beans, and supplements.

To learn more about CALCIUM & MILK and The Healthy Eating Pyramid, explore "The Nutrition Source" online at: www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/what-should-you-eat/calcium-full-story/index.html

SEE REVERSE FOR 5 QUICK TIPS

5 QUICK TIPS

BUILDING STRONG BONES



► **Look beyond the dairy aisle.**

Limit milk and dairy foods to no more than one to two servings per day. More won't necessarily do your bones any good—and less is fine, as long as you get enough calcium from other sources. Calcium-rich non-dairy foods include leafy green vegetables and broccoli, both of which are also great sources of vitamin K, another key nutrient for bone health. Beans and tofu can also supply calcium.

► **Get your vitamin D.**

Vitamin D plays a key role along with calcium in boosting bone health. Look for a multivitamin that supplies 1,000 IU of vitamin D per day. If your multi only has 400 IU of vitamin D, consider taking an extra supplement to get you up to 1,000 IU or 2,000 IU per day. Some people may need 3,000 or 4,000 IU per day for adequate blood levels, particularly if they have darker skin, spend winters in the northern U.S., or have little exposure to direct sunlight. If you fall into these groups, ask your physician to order a blood test for vitamin D. Read more about vitamin D in the vitamins section of The Nutrition Source.

► **Get active.**

Regular exercise, especially weight-bearing exercise such as walking or jogging, is an essential part of building and maintaining strong bones.

► **Be careful about getting too much retinol (Vitamin A).**

Don't go overboard on fortified milk, energy bars, and breakfast cereals, all of which can be high in bone-weakening vitamin A. Many multivitamin makers have removed much or all retinol and replaced it with beta-carotene, which does not harm bones.

► **Help kids build strong bones.**

Youth and young adulthood is the period when bones build up to their peak strength. Helping youth lead a bone-healthy lifestyle—with exercise, adequate calcium, and adequate vitamin D—can help them keep strong bones through all their adult years.

CHOOSING HEALTHY DRINKS



by the Harvard School of Public Health, Department of Nutrition

Water is best to quench your thirst. Skip the sugary drinks, and go easy on the milk and juice.

There are many options for what to drink, but without a doubt, water is the best choice: It's calorie-free, and it's as easy to find as the nearest tap.

Drinks that are loaded with sugar are the worst choice: They provide lots of calories and virtually no other nutrients. Drinking them routinely can lead to weight gain and increase the risk of type 2 diabetes.

Other drinks have pros and cons, but in moderation, can fit into a healthy diet:

Coffee and tea: These are calorie-free, as long as you don't load up on the sugar and cream. They are safe for most people and may even have some health benefits.

Artificially sweetened drinks: These have no calories—a plus—but their long-term effects on weight and health are unknown, so it's best to limit them, if you drink them at all.

100% fruit juice: Fruit juice has vitamins, but it is high in calories, so stick to no more than a small glass (four to six ounces) a day.

Milk: Milk is also high in calories, so there's no need to drink more than a glass or two of low fat or skim milk a day, and less is fine, if you get your calcium from other sources.

Alcohol: Alcohol is both a tonic and a poison, and the difference lies in the dose and the person drinking it; moderation is key.

To learn more about **HEALTHIER DRINKS** and The Healthy Eating Pyramid, explore "The Nutrition Source" online at: www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/health-drinks/focus.html

SEE REVERSE FOR 5 QUICK TIPS

5 QUICK TIPS

CHOOSING HEALTHY DRINKS



► **Quit the sugar habit.**

The average can of sugar-sweetened soda or fruit punch provides about 150 calories. If you were to drink just one can of a sugar-sweetened soft drink every day, and not cut back on calories elsewhere, you could gain up to 15 pounds in a year. Cutting back on sugary drinks may help control your weight and may lower your risk of type 2 diabetes.

► **Go calorie-free naturally.**

"Diet" drinks with artificial sweeteners may condition our taste buds to crave super-sweet foods. Plain old water is the best calorie-free beverage—but if it's just too plain, try adding a squeeze of lemon or lime or a splash of 100% fruit juice. Plain coffee and tea are also healthy calorie-free choices, in moderation.

► **If you don't drink alcohol, there's no need to start.**

If you are of legal age, moderate alcohol consumption lowers the risk of heart disease and diabetes; it also slightly increases the risk of breast and colon cancer. For some people—especially pregnant women, people recovering from alcohol addiction, people with liver disease, and people taking one or more medications that interact with alcohol—the risks of drinking clearly outweigh the benefits.

► **Save sports drinks for athletes.**

Sports beverages are designed to give athletes carbs, electrolytes, and fluid during high-intensity workouts that last an hour or more. For sedentary folks, they're just another source of sugary calories.

► **Pull the plug on energy drinks.**

These pricey concoctions have as much sugar as soft drinks, enough caffeine to raise your blood pressure, and an unpronounceable list of herbs and additives whose long-term health effects are unknown. No one needs them.