



Women's Wellness Center
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Healthy Eating for Life

One of the most important ways we can stay (or become) healthy is to pay close attention to what we put into our bodies as fuel. We have the choice. We can choose to fuel our bodies with nutritious foods that help to keep our bodies functioning optimally, or we can fuel our bodies with junk food and processed foods that taste good and fill us up, but do little to contribute to good health, and can in fact cause harm. The way diet can cause harm is not only in the problem of obesity but also that certain foods contribute to a condition of chronic inflammation in our bodies. Please see our handout *Chronic Inflammation* to learn more about this condition that affects so many Americans today. The good news is that if you eat to avoid inflammation, you are likely to lose unwanted excess weight as well.

The ideal diet for reducing chronic inflammation would balance protein, vegetables, fruits, and healthy fats while minimizing starchy carbohydrates. Several books have described variations on this dietary plan: *The South Beach Diet*, *The Zone: A Dietary Road Map*, and *Sugar Busters* are some examples. These eating plans are designed to keep blood sugar levels stable, leading to more stable insulin levels, a favorable condition that can decrease the likelihood of chronic inflammation.

Another factor that is important for decreasing inflammation is optimizing your intake of fats. Americans have been conditioned to avoid all fats because they “make you fat.” However, a more important message about fats is to consume *healthy* fats and avoid *unhealthy* fats. Contrary to what you might have been led to believe, dietary fat and cholesterol is not the major contributor to elevated levels of cholesterol in the blood. In fact, a low fat diet can raise cholesterol levels because of the increased carbohydrate intake associated with a low-fat diet.

We describe here what we consider the ideal diet plan. It combines the best aspects of a low-carb and Mediterranean diet. This diet promotes stabilization of blood sugars and optimizing ratios of healthy fats, thus tilting the balance towards decreasing inflammation in the body. We recommend this plan for pregnant and non-pregnant women, and their families.

Overview

We are not meticulously counting calories, fat grams, or carbs, but instead encouraging a healthy balance of nutrients. It sounds simple because it is. Eat three meals per day, and at least two snacks. Please, please...do not skip breakfast! Also, we strongly advise you to *plan* a snack mid-morning and mid-afternoon. It's best if you always have a planned healthy snack available, and to eat the snack before you actually *feel* hungry. If you have that gnawing hungry feeling, you have waited too long. This condition makes it harder for you to maintain control in your food choices and amounts. If you feel “starved” you are more likely to grab at anything and everything. When you eat snacks, try to include some protein, rather than consuming pure carbohydrates. It will help to satisfy your hunger more favorably, and for longer. For meals, ideally your plate should contain $\frac{1}{3}$ protein, $\frac{1}{3}$ vegetable, and $\frac{1}{3}$ fruit (the fruit portion may be replaced with a second vegetable portion). In general, construct your daily diet around the following balance of nutrients:

- Protein, 3-5 servings per day
- Vegetables and fruits, 8-10 servings per day (heavy on the veggies)
- Healthy fats in moderation
- Little to none of bread, pasta, starch

Proteins—Try to include in all meals

Your protein choice may be eggs, soy, or lean meats such as chicken, turkey, lean pork or beef, fish, or a plant source such as soy. Some fatty fishes are healthy even though high in fat. These include salmon, tuna, mackerel, trout, and sardines, which all contain healthy omega-3 essential fatty acids that can decrease inflammation in the body. An appropriate serving size for the meat portion of your meal is the size of a deck of cards. For vegetable protein, the size of a tennis ball is one serving.

Vegetables—Consume liberally

Veggies and fruits will supply most of the carbohydrates in this diet plan. For your vegetable portion, avoid starchy vegetables such as potatoes and corn. These quickly convert to sugar in the body, causing insulin levels to surge. See the attached list for good choices of vegetables. Note: Do not consider the potato a vegetable; consider it a starch, metabolized more like bread or pasta. One portion of vegetable is about the size of a tennis ball.

Fruits—Don't overdo it on these natural "sweets"

Fresh fruits have healthy vitamins and minerals, but they also contain a lot of natural sugars. Choose fruits that contain lots of fiber. Fiber causes the natural sugars to be absorbed more slowly, thereby dampening the increase in insulin, which has the effect of satisfying your hunger more favorably, so you are not hungry soon after eating. Likewise, if you consume a little fat with your fruit, that also slows down the sugar rush (and insulin surge) and so has a more stabilizing effect on sugar metabolism (and your appetite). See the attached list for good choices of fruit. One portion of fruit is about the size of a tennis ball.

Fats—The good, the bad, and the ugly

Optimal functioning of your cardiovascular system, nervous system, and immune system depends on having the right balance of fats in your diet. Without going into the biochemistry, if you follow two simple rules, you will be on your way to achieving the optimal balance of fats.

1. Minimize intake of animal fats and maximize intake of monounsaturated fats. Olive and canola oil contain mostly healthy monounsaturated fatty acids and do *not* have any adverse affect on blood cholesterol levels. Use only olive and canola oils for cooking.
2. Get the right balance of omega-6 and omega-3 fats. Most polyunsaturated vegetable oils, like safflower, sunflower, corn, and soy oils are high in omega-6 fatty acids, which the body converts to *pro*-inflammatory substances. We need these for our immune system to produce an acute inflammatory response to fight infection. The body also needs omega-3 fats (found in fish, walnuts, flaxseed), which have an *anti*-inflammatory effect. Experts suggest that an ideal ratio of omega-6 to omega-3 fats is between 1:1 and 2:1. The typical American consumes a ratio of between 10:1 and 25:1, shifting the ratio far into the pro-inflammatory zone. This is due to the large amount of soybean oil found in processed and fast foods. If you don't like eating fish, take a fish oil supplement. This can help to keep the balance of pro-inflammatory fats and anti-inflammatory fats more favorable, and this translates to a lower risk of cardiac disease and other inflammatory conditions.

A particularly unhealthy inflammation-promoting fat deserves special mention; that's trans fat (this is the ugly!) Food manufacturers use this type of fat for its preservative properties because it increases the shelf life of packaged foods. When a label states "no trans fats" in the nutrition information, it is actually legally allowed to have up to 0.5 gram of trans fats per serving! Read the *ingredients list*. There, you may find listed *hydrogenated* or *partially hydrogenated* oils, which are actually trans fats. The amount may be low enough that it's not required to be listed in the easy-to-see nutrition information chart, but it's in the food nonetheless. So, read the small print on labels carefully and put that product back on the shelf.

Remember, dietary cholesterol is not the primary factor leading to elevated cholesterol in the blood. So healthy nutritious foods rich in cholesterol such as eggs and shellfish may be consumed liberally, while foods containing cholesterol plus unhealthy fats (such as fatty beef) should be avoided.

Starches

When considering starches, minimal is best. Avoid almost all "white" starches: sugars, flours, pastas, breads, and potatoes. Whole grain bread, whole grain pasta, and brown rice are higher in fiber and nutrients than over processed "white" foods, but even whole grain foods contain starches that quickly convert to sugar in your bloodstream.

Read labels when you shop for breads. Realize that brown color in bread does not equal whole grain. Low-carb bread is a good choice if you must have bread. If it's not specifically a low-carb bread, be sure it's what we call a bread with plenty of "twigs and seeds," very dense and fiber-rich, not fluffy white.

Regarding starch portion size, a portion of whole grain bread or pasta or brown rice could be an accompaniment to a meal, not the basis of the meal. This means sandwiches are "history"— unless you find a suitable low-carb bread product, and spaghetti with meat sauce could feature *spaghetti squash* instead of noodles— try it, you'll like it! It is neither necessary nor recommended that you consume starches with all meals.

Beverages

Beverages play a large role in your nutritional health, but are often overlooked. They can add a lot of sugar to your diet if you're not careful. First and foremost, drink lots of water! Eight 8-ounce glasses per day is ideal. Don't like plain water? Add lemon or lime, or explore a fruit-flavored water – just be sure to read labels and avoid those with added sugar.

If you want to consume one of the healthiest drinks on the planet, learn to love green tea. Green tea contains a potent anti-oxidant, which helps to prevent conditions favorable for inflammation in the body. Black tea (the usual "Lipton" iced tea) also has anti-oxidant benefits, though not as potent as green tea. Green or black tea comes in many flavored varieties; so if you do not enjoy the taste of plain tea, try a fruity or spiced version. Teas sold in tea bags usually are not sweetened, but look at labels to be sure. Tea counts toward your water portion, as long as it is not caffeinated. Caffeine should be limited to no more than 2 drinks per day during pregnancy. Many herbal teas are non-caffeinated.

Wine (particularly red wine) contains plant substances called flavonoids, shown by researchers to have anti-inflammatory and anti-cancer activity. Alcohol increases beneficial HDL cholesterol, improves insulin sensitivity, and reduces inflammation in the body. Moderate drinking (defined as one drink per day for women) has been associated with reduced risk for heart disease and death from all causes. If you are pregnant or at risk for alcohol problems, the risks outweigh the benefits and you should avoid drinking alcohol.

A word about fruit juices: sugar is the main ingredient, whether pure fruit juice or sweetened. Drinking fruit juice results in rapid swings in glucose and insulin levels, an unfavorable condition, leading to rebound low blood glucose and hunger. You are better off consuming the entire fruit along with the fiber, rather than the concentrated sugar of the juice.

Sweets and Sweeteners

Avoid high fructose corn syrup (HFCS), a highly concentrated type of sugar used as an inexpensive sweetener that also acts as a preservative. It is present in many packaged foods; particularly baked goods, breads, cookies, and soft drinks (even some brands of so called "healthy" bottled green tea contain HFCS, rendering it quite the opposite of healthy). Also, realize that even though honey is natural, it is just as damaging as pure sugar when it comes to glucose and insulin metabolism.

Sucralose (Splenda), aspartame (Equal), and stevia (a natural plant-derived product) are acceptable sweeteners. Aspartame and sucralose have been maligned by some, citing a theoretical risk caused by breakdown products in the body, but there is no actual evidence that consumption of these sweeteners causes or will cause any harm to humans. (We consider all three of these sweeteners to be safe in pregnancy.)

Time to Clean Out Your Pantry!

If you are like most Americans, your pantry contains at least some of the following: sugary drinks, chips, popcorn, instant oatmeal, boxed cereal, honey, jams and jellies, maple syrup, ketchup, jarred spaghetti sauce, canned pork and beans, pancake mix, white rice, refined flour, and pasta. These and similar food items should now be discarded or given away. Your new way of eating will require a new and different shopping list. Having these snack foods around the house will only lead to trouble. For recipes, check out the books listed above in the introduction or find a good low-carb cookbook.

Prepare the Week's Meals in Advance

Many of us are busy with career and family activities. Finding time to cook and prepare healthy meals can be a challenge. We get that! However, think about this: if you will spend an hour or so on the weekend preparing food for the busy work week, you will save time in your weekday mornings and not be tempted to go out to lunch or stop at McDonald's for breakfast. On Sunday, prepare a breakfast egg and vegetable quiche (minus the crust) and then you can grab a slice on your way out the door Monday through Friday. Or forget about traditional breakfast food and make a big pot of hearty vegetable soup that you can eat for breakfast every day. Prepare single-serving snacks

(deviled eggs, lunchmeat, almonds, etc.) to have handy at the workplace to curb your appetite at 10am and 2pm, preferably before those hunger pangs hit you. Take your healthy snacks and lunch to work every single day. Do not give in to the temptation of the birthday cakes or other sugar celebrations that seem to make an appearance so frequently at work.

Eating Out

It is possible, but may be difficult to stay within our healthy guidelines when eating in restaurants. Let's face it, the temptation for cheating is too great, and the experience ends up being no fun. When you prepare meals at home you are in control of ingredients and can construct the ratio of carb to protein appropriately and with ease. To give you an example of the magnitude of increase in calorie consumption in typical restaurants, take note: a complete lunch prepared at home should amount to 300-500 calories. An average sandwich at *Panera Bread* is 700-900 calories, not including the chips, drink, and dessert! Eating this way on a daily basis would have disastrous effects on your efforts to keep healthy. Obviously, the same applies to fast food restaurants. Did you know that some of the McDonald's salads have more calories than a Big Mac? Not only is restaurant food much higher in calories than need be, but the mix of carbohydrate to protein is way off balance, and many foods are laden with unfavorable fats, rather than the healthy variety. Bagels, bread, and deep-fried foods are not the mainstays of the anti-inflammatory way of eating!

For some individuals, this may require a significant change in lifestyle, but there is really no way to eat in typical restaurants several times per week and expect to maintain optimal health (nor optimal weight). Restaurant eating should be limited to no more than once or twice per week, and then go ahead and eat what you like. As long as you stick to your healthy pantry while at home (and take healthy lunches to work), you can treat yourself to an indulgent restaurant meal (within reason) once or twice per week.

If You Are Pregnant...

Our dietary plan is perfect for those who are pregnant or those who are planning pregnancy. Chronic inflammation has been implicated in poor pregnancy outcome such as preterm birth and miscarriage. If you are overweight or obese, it is not necessary to gain weight in pregnancy. Obese individuals who adopt the eating plan described here may actually lose a few pounds during pregnancy. Don't worry, your baby is getting the nutrients he or she needs. Of course, weight loss would not be recommended for pregnant women of ideal weight or those who are underweight.

Here Is a Tip

Add ground golden flaxseed to any snack or meal to increase fiber while also helping to slow absorption of sugars and stabilize blood sugars. Ground flaxseeds contain healthy fats of the variety that can decrease inflammation, and the fiber helps keep you regular. Add 1-3 tbsp of ground golden flaxseed to yogurt, cottage cheese, tuna salad, soup, oatmeal, eggs, omelets, quiches, smoothies – any food that can mix with it. If you tend to have trouble with constipation, use 2-4 tbsp of ground golden flaxseed every single day, (plus consume lots of water) and you will not have that problem again!

Odds and Ends

- Use spices and herbs liberally. Many possess anti-inflammatory compounds. Examples are garlic, ginger, rosemary, turmeric, oregano, cayenne, clove, cinnamon, and nutmeg.
- A good rule of thumb is to shop the perimeter of the grocery store where fresh foods are found: produce, meats, dairy foods. Skip on past the middle isles where packaged products are found; these are likely to contain high fructose corn syrup, trans fats, and other unhealthy fats, besides being devoid of any real nutritional value.
- Remember, portion size is important! For meals, using a plate no larger than 8-9" in diameter may help you to avoid going overboard on portions. For snacks, note that studies have shown people who stand in the kitchen and snack will consume more calories than those who prepare a limited quantity snack, place it on a dish, then sit down at the table to eat. Eat slowly and enjoy the experience!
- Exercise is a wonderful way of naturally lowering your blood sugar. Daily exercise (such as brisk walking, biking, swimming, running, or aerobics) should be worked into your schedule for at least 30 minutes per day. Try this: get yourself a set of dumbbells and a book that explains the correct way to use them for a complete body workout that will increase your muscle mass. *Smart Girls Do Dumbbells* is a great book on the subject. Adding muscle to your body will increase your rate of metabolism so you'll burn more calories, even at rest!

Quick Guide: What to Eat... More or Less

Good Choices:	Limited Amounts:	Avoid:
<p>MEATS/PROTEINS Lean meats – turkey, chicken, lean pork, wild game Seafood – all fish, shellfish Eggs, tofu, soy products</p> <p>VEGETABLES Mushrooms, all peppers, celery, lettuce, cabbage, cauliflower, carrot, cucumber, artichoke, rhubarb, asparagus, eggplant, spinach, broccoli, string or wax beans, green beans, zucchini, snow peas, spaghetti squash, summer squash, avocado</p> <p>FRUITS Blueberries, blackberries, strawberries, cherries, raspberries, kiwi, grapefruit, pears, apples, plums</p> <p>BEANS/LEGUMES Soybeans, edamame</p> <p>DAIRY Low-fat cheese, eggs</p> <p>BEVERAGES Water (may add lemon or lime), club soda, coffee, any tea (no sugar)</p> <p>NUTS/ SEEDS Almonds, walnuts, pine nuts, pecans, sesame seeds, pumpkin seeds, pistachios, cashews, peanuts, ground flaxseed.</p> <p>CONDIMENTS Mustard, red wine vinegar, salad dressings made with olive or canola oil</p> <p>SWEETENERS Sucralose, aspartame, stevia</p>	<p>MEATS Lean beef</p> <p>VEGETABLES Corn, beets, green peas, acorn squash, butternut squash, sweet potatoes, waxy red or yellow potatoes, tomatoes, onions</p> <p>FRUITS Oranges, peaches, grapes, bananas, melon, mangos, cranberries, figs</p> <p>BEANS/LEGUMES Lentils, kidney beans, chickpeas, Navy beans, black beans, lima beans, pinto beans</p> <p>GRAINS Old-fashioned slow-cooked oatmeal (steel cut oats), barley, brown rice, wild rice, quinoa</p> <p>DAIRY Butter, sour cream, cream cheese, hard cheeses, skim or 2% milk, unsweetened yogurt</p> <p>BEVERAGES Red wine</p> <p>CONDIMENTS Mayonnaise, balsamic vinegar, natural peanut butter, almond butter</p>	<p>MEATS Processed meats, meatloaf or meatballs (most contain bread fillers), sausage with added sugars</p> <p>VEGETABLES Russet, or baking potatoes</p> <p>FRUITS Raisins and other dried fruits, canned fruits, fruit cocktail</p> <p>BEANS Canned pork and beans, refried beans</p> <p>GRAINS Instant oatmeal, white rice, refined wheat</p> <p>STARCHES Pasta, white rice, bread, baked sweets, bagels, flour or corn tortillas, pita bread</p> <p>DAIRY Sweetened yogurt, ice cream, whipped topping</p> <p>BEVERAGES Soda, fruit juices, fruit drinks, sports drinks, sweetened lemonade</p> <p>SNACKS Potato chips, tortilla chips, corn chips, crackers, saltines, pretzels, sweets</p> <p>CONDIMENTS Ketchup, BBQ sauce, salad dressings containing sugar, jams and jellies, sugared peanut butter, maple syrup</p> <p>SWEETENERS Sugar, honey, molasses</p> <p>GENERAL Breaded foods Deep fried foods Processed foods</p>

Snack Ideas

Here are a few simple suggestions for snacks that help maintain control over your hunger and cravings, by promoting stabilization of blood glucose and insulin levels. Notice that each snack listed contains some protein or fat. This helps to satisfy hunger for a longer period of time than a pure carbohydrate snack. We have included a fat with most fruits, to slow the body's absorption of sugars, thereby producing a less dramatic shift in blood sugar and insulin levels. Adding fiber has the same effect, so adding ground golden flaxseed to yogurts or smoothies will have a favorable influence on metabolism.

4 oz plain sugar-free yogurt with berries & a few slivered almonds

Apple or pear with ½ oz cheese or a few almonds or walnuts

½ cup sugar-free yogurt with 2 tbsp ground golden flaxseed

Fruit smoothie (sugar-free yogurt, milk, strawberries)

½ cup berries with tbsp cream or sour cream

½ cup cooked edamame with lemon zest

½ cup berries with ¼ cup cottage cheese

¼ cup of almonds, walnuts or cashews

Cottage cheese and cherry tomatoes

Dill pickle with cheddar cheese

Handful of sunflower seeds

Carrot chips with hummus

Apple with peanut butter

Tuna salad and celery

A few green olives

Hard-boiled egg

Deviled eggs (2 halves)

Marinated artichoke hearts

Fresh fruit with cottage cheese

1 oz ham wrapped around rib of celery

1 oz turkey wrapped around carrot stick

Iceberg lettuce rolled with slice of turkey

Celery with peanut butter or pimiento cheese