

Healthy Eating: Cutting Calories



How do calories affect your weight?

Your body needs a certain number of calories each day for you to function and keep doing your daily activities. After your body meets its needs, it stores extra calories as fat. Your weight remains steady when your body takes in the same amount of calories that it burns.

To lose weight, you have to use up more calories than you take in.

How many calories do you need each day?

The more active you are, the more calories you need. When you are less active, you need fewer calories. How many calories you need each day also depends on your age and whether you are male or female.

Here are some general guidelines for adults:

- Less active women and older adults need 1,600 to 2,000 calories each day.
- Active women and less active men need 2,000 to 2,400 calories each day.

- Active men need 2,400 to 3,000 calories each day.

How can you eat healthier and reduce calories?

Cutting back on fat is a good way to reduce the total number of calories in your diet.

Animal foods such as meats and dairy products can be a big source of hidden fats. Try to choose lean or low-fat versions of these products. Also, use smaller amounts of fats like butter, margarine, salad dressing, and mayonnaise. Add fresh garlic, lemon, or herbs to your meals to add flavor without adding fat.

Whole grains, vegetables and fruits, and dried beans are good lower-calorie foods. They give you lots of nutrients and fiber.

Sweets and soda are high in calories. They give you few nutrients and no fiber. Try to limit soda and fruit drinks. Drink water instead. Look on juice labels to be sure you are drinking 100% juice.

If your favorite foods are high in fat, salt, sugar, or calories, limit how often you eat them. Eat smaller servings, or look for healthy substitutes. Fill up on fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

Tips for eating at home

Try some of these ideas for healthier meals at home:

- Use meat as a side dish instead of as the main part of your meal.
- Try main dishes that use whole wheat pasta, brown rice, dried beans, or vegetables.

- Find ways to cook with little or no fat, such as broiling, steaming, or grilling.
- Use cooking spray instead of oil. If you use oil, use a monounsaturated oil, such as canola or olive oil.
- Trim fat from meats before you cook them. Drain off fat after you brown the meat or while roasting it.
- Chill soups and stews after you cook them and skim off the fat after it gets hard.

Fat-free foods

Fat-free cookies, candies, chips, and frozen treats can still be high in sugar and calories. Some fat-free foods have more calories than regular ones. Eat fat-free treats in moderation, as you would other foods.

Tips for eating out

If you eat out often, it may be hard to avoid unhealthy fats and calories. Try these tips:

- Watch your portion sizes. Share an entree or dessert, or take some food home for another meal.
- Don't upgrade your meal to a larger size. Ask for a half-size portion.
- Order foods that are broiled or poached rather than fried or breaded.
- Cut back on how much butter or margarine you use on bread. Use a small amount of olive oil instead.
- Order sauces, gravies, and salad dressings on the side, and use only a little. Choose reduced-fat salad dressings.
- When you order pasta, choose tomato sauce rather than cream sauce.
- Ask for salsa with a baked potato instead of sour cream, butter, cheese, or bacon.