

Healthy Eating: Using a Food Journal



What is healthy eating?

Balance, variety, and moderation are keys to healthy eating. Having a balanced diet means that you eat enough but not too much, and the foods you eat give you the nutrients you need to stay healthy.

Eating a variety of foods can help you get all the nutrients you need. Eat foods from each food group: grains, vegetables, fruits, milk, and meat and other proteins, including beans.

Moderation means no foods are off limits, but be aware of how much you eat. Limit how often you eat foods that are high in fat, salt, sugar, or calories. Eat smaller servings, or look for healthy substitutes.

How can keeping a food journal help?

A food journal can help you look at your eating habits and make healthy changes. You can see which foods you need to eat more or less of. You can also check to see if you are eating a variety of foods.

Using your food journal

Each day write the amounts you eat from each food group. The example below shows the suggested daily amounts for each food group. Compare what you eat to the suggested amounts.

Food journal		
Food group	Recommended minimum daily amounts	Your daily amounts (cups or ounces*)
Grains	At least 3 ounces of whole grains	
Vegetables	2 to 3 cups	
Fruits	1½ to 2 cups	
Dairy	3 cups	
Protein foods	5 to 6½ ounces	

*A 3-ounce serving of meat is about the size of a deck of cards. A slice of bread is about 1 ounce of grains. One cup is about the size of your fist.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has an online food journal tool at www.choosemyplate.gov. Click on "SuperTracker & Other Tools" and go to "Daily Food Plans."

How can you make changes to eat healthier?

Eat a variety of foods, especially those high in nutrients, such as whole grains, fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy products, fish, lean meats, and poultry.

Try these tips:

- Use whole-grain wheat bread and pasta.
- Eat brown rice instead of white rice.
- Try low-fat cheeses and low-fat yogurt.

To eat more fruits and vegetables:

- Add fruit to yogurt and cereal.
- Keep a bowl of fruit within easy reach.
- Keep dried fruit on hand for a snack.
- Buy packaged, ready-to-eat fresh vegetables and fruits.
- Dip raw vegetables in low-fat salad dressing, hummus, or peanut butter.
- Add lots of vegetables to sandwiches.

Make small changes

Pick one or two changes that you want to work on. Start slowly, and don't try to change your eating habits all at once.

If you eat the same foods over and over, find ways to add variety. Buy a new cookbook, trade recipes with friends and family, or go online to find healthy recipes.