

10 Tips to a Great Plate

The USDA has a meal guide called "MyPlate." Use the following food ideas to balance your calories, and to find foods to eat more often and what to eat less.

Balance Calories

Find out how many calories you need for a day as a first step in managing your weight. Being physically active also helps balance calories.

Enjoy Your Food, but Eat Less

Take the time to enjoy your food as you eat it. Eating too fast or when your attention is elsewhere, such as when you are watching television, may lead to eating too many calories. Pay attention to hunger and fullness cues before, during and after meals. Use them to recognize when to eat and when you have had enough.

Avoid Oversized Portions

Use a smaller plate, bowl and glass. Portion out foods before you eat. When dining out, choose a smaller size option, share a dish or take home part of your meal.

Foods to Eat More Often

Eat more vegetables, fruits, whole grains and fat-free or 1 percent milk and dairy products. These foods have the nutrients needed for health, including potassium, calcium, vitamin D and fiber. Make them the basis for meals and snacks.

Make Half Your Plate Fruits and Vegetables

Choose red, orange and dark green vegetables like tomatoes, sweet potatoes and broccoli, along with other vegetables for meals. Add fruit to meals as part of a main dish, as a side dish or as dessert.

Switch to Fat-Free or Low-Fat Milk

Fat-free (skim) or low-fat (1 percent) milk have the same amount of calcium and other essential nutrients as whole milk, but fewer calories and less saturated fat.

Make Half Your Grains Whole Grains

To eat more whole grains, substitute a whole-grain product for a refined product. For example, eating whole-wheat bread instead of white bread, or brown rice instead of white rice.

Foods to Eat Less Often

Cut back on foods high in solid fats, added sugars and salt. They include cakes, cookies, ice cream, candies, sweetened drinks, pizza and fatty meats like ribs, sausages, bacon and hot dogs. Consume these foods as occasional treats, not everyday foods.

Compare Sodium in Foods

Use the Nutrition Facts label to choose lower sodium versions of foods like soup, bread and frozen meals. Select canned foods labeled "low sodium," "reduced sodium" or "no salt added."

Drink Water in Place of Sugary Drinks

Cut calories by drinking water or unsweetened beverages. Soda, energy drinks and sports drinks are a major source of added sugar and calories in American diets.

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