

Eating for Weight Loss

Exercise is one important part of losing weight. Eating nutritious foods is another. Cathy Leman, RD, LD, owner of NutriFit, a nutrition consulting and in-home personal training business in Glen Ellyn, Illinois, offers these suggestions to help you make healthy food choices that will support your weight loss efforts.

1 Keep a Food Log. If your goal is weight loss, it's important to first get a realistic picture of how much and which foods you are eating. You may be underestimating or overestimating food intake. Write down everything you eat and drink for a week or two. Then examine the log to see what changes you need to make to eat more healthfully.

2 Stock Up on Fruits and Vegetables. Are fruits and vegetables prominent in your log? These foods are naturally low in fat and a great source of fiber. Because fiber creates a feeling of fullness without adding calories, you'll eat less and get a natural source of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants.

3 Consume Healthy Dairy Products. Are the dairy foods you eat nonfat or low fat? Sticking with these items reduces total fat intake as well as consumption of saturated fat. Calcium is critical for bone health, so unless you are lactose intolerant or allergic to dairy products, eat low-fat or nonfat dairy products daily.

4 Choose Low-Fat Meats. If you include red meat in your diet, make sure you select lean cuts such as sirloin or round and ensure they are trimmed of excess fat. If you eat poultry, choose white meat without the skin. Use low-fat cooking methods such as grilling, broiling or baking versus deep frying.

5 Eat Healthy Carbohydrates. Don't shortchange yourself by skipping foods that are good carbohydrate sources. Foods such as pasta, rice and bread are naturally low in fat, provide the body's preferred source of fuel and typically contain a healthy dose of B vitamins. Include whole-grain choices such as brown rice and 100-percent whole wheat products for additional nutrients and to increase your fiber intake.

6 Reduce Portion Sizes. If, after examining your food log, you want to eat more healthfully, how do you begin? It's easiest to focus on making small changes over time. Perhaps begin by reducing portion sizes. Serve meals in smaller dishes such as dinner off the smaller lunch plate, pasta in the smaller cereal bowl and salad in the larger pasta bowl.

7 Eat Several Small Meals Daily. Another strategy is to regularly consume small amounts. Try eating five to six mini-meals throughout the day. This method helps keep blood sugar levels stable and energy levels up and staves off the "everything but the kitchen sink" hunger level.

8 Practice the 80/20 Rule. A third strategy is to make the healthiest choices possible 80 percent of the time. This goal gives you permission to include all foods in your diet. You'll benefit from variety, while reducing feelings of deprivation.

9 Focus on Nutrient Density. When planning snacks and meals, try to get more nutritional bang for the calories buck. For instance, 10 Gummy Bears have 85 calories and no fat—yet they also have no fiber and no vitamins and minerals. By comparison, 1 cup of raw, sweet cherries has the same amount of calories, plus 2.69 grams of fiber, 17.55 milligrams (mg) of calcium, 262.08 mg of potassium, 250 mg of vitamin A and many more vitamins and minerals.

10 Avoid Good/Bad Food Thinking. It's tempting to lump foods into "good" and "bad" categories. While some foods such as nuts and avocados may be high in fat, they are also full of nutrients and can be part of a healthy diet in small amounts. Try to focus on the big picture rather than dissecting your diet on a food-by-food basis.

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