

Food Countdown for Weight Loss

Despite all of the attention given to popular diets today, most nutrition experts agree that minimizing dietary fat, controlling portions and staying physically active are the real keys to healthy weight management.

We know from decades of research that a diet rich in high-carbohydrate foods—such as whole grains, vegetables and fruits—helps prevent disease, maintain healthy body weight and optimize athletic performance. There is no substantial evidence to support a change in that recommendation, says Debra Wein, MS, RD, nutritionist and exercise physiologist at the University of Massachusetts in Boston.

What formula can you follow to manage your dietary fat as well as your portions? Nutritionist Carroll Reider, MS, RD, suggests an easy-to-follow low-fat eating plan, adapted from the USDA Food Guide Pyramid. Each day, count down your food choices from 5 to 1 (see chart).

Weight Loss Tip

If you are concerned about your weight, Reider says, go wild on vegetables. They're only about 25 calories per serving. But do not eat more than three servings of fruit or five servings of grains. If your weight is fine, you can eat as many grains, vegetables and fruits as you want.

5 Servings: Whole Grain Breads, Pastas and Cereals
Serving: 1 slice bread, 1/2 bagel, 1/2 cup cereal, 1/3 cup rice, 1/2 cup noodles or potatoes.

Whole Grains: wheat, oats, rye, corn, brown rice, barley or millet in the form of cereal, side dishes, pasta or bread.

Also include: potatoes, yams, winter squashes, chestnuts, beans and peas.

4 Servings: Raw or Cooked Vegetables
Serving: 1 cup raw vegetables, 1/2 cup cooked vegetables, 1/2 cup vegetable juice.

Include: Dark green and yellow or orange vegetables.

3 Servings: Fruits
Serving: For most fruits, a serving of whole fruit fits in your hand. Fruit juice (1/2 cup) is also a serving.

2 Servings: Dairy Foods
Serving: 1 cup nonfat milk, 3/4 cup nonfat yogurt, 2 ounces nonfat cheese.

1-2 Servings: Fish, Poultry or Meat
Serving: About the size of the palm of your hand and the thickness of a deck of cards. A serving of shrimp is about 2 ounces; lean red meat, 3.5 ounces.

Vegetarian Options: 6 ounces beans or low-fat tofu, 2 ounces nonfat cheese.

Monitor and Moderate

- Many nutrition experts agree that monitoring your eating with a food diary can be invaluable to weight management planning.
- Moderation is essential. Some foods include several food groups, and you will naturally eat servings that are both larger and smaller than the single serving size. A good goal is to eat the recommended amounts and balance of food groups 80 percent of the time, says Daniel Kosich, PhD, author of *GET REAL: A Personal Guide to Real-Life Weight Management*. That will give you a solid foundation for an active, healthy lifestyle.
- Both quantity and quality count. A low-fat diet that is too high in calories or a low-calorie diet that is too high in fat will not be healthy for you over a lifetime.
- The quality of the carbohydrates you eat is important. Heavily processed convenience foods with a lot of refined sugars may have a negative impact on your blood sugar level and cholesterol ratio, your mood and your ability to manage your portions. You can get caught in a dangerous cycle of eating excessive portions of unhealthy foods with little or no nutritional value. The solution is to stick to fresh whole grains, vegetables and fruits for up to 60 percent of your diet.

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Note: To order *GET REAL: A Personal Guide to Real-Life Weight Management*, call (800) 999-IDEA or (858) 535-8979, ext. 7.

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