

21 Easy Ways to Improve Your Diet

Eating healthy can reduce your risk of illness and lengthen your life. Eating a balanced, low-fat, low-cholesterol diet reduces your risk of heart disease, certain cancers, diabetes, stroke and other diseases.

Follow these tips to help improve your diet:

1. Have seconds on vegetables. Doing so will help ensure you consume the recommended three- to five-serving daily minimum. Reminder: A typical vegetable serving size is 1/2 cup.
2. Eat a whole-grain cereal for breakfast.
3. Top your cereal with fresh fruit. You'll add fiber and, depending on the fruit, a healthful dose of vitamins A, B and C.
4. Order healthy choices when you eat out. Request that foods such as fish and chicken be baked instead of fried.
5. Keep salads healthy by going easy on regular dressing or using low-fat or nonfat dressing. Four tablespoons of regular dressing can contain 60 grams of fat, which is as much as most adults should consume in a day.
6. Eat fish for dinner at least once a week. The omega-3 fatty acids in fish can reduce your risk of heart attack.
7. Choose whole fruit over fruit juice. You'll consume less sugar and more fiber.
8. Add onions to pizza, sandwiches, hamburgers, salads, and chili. They're good for your blood and your heart.
9. Educate yourself about nutrition. Your new knowledge will make it easier to eat a well-balanced diet.
10. Drink a full glass of water before a meal and another one with it. You'll stay hydrated and be less likely to overeat.
11. Add lentils, beans, kasha, brown rice and peas to your diet for an added fiber boost.
12. Buy low-fat or fat-free bologna, ham and other cold cuts.
13. Choose low-fat alternatives when a food craving hits. Go for a low-fat candy bar instead of a regular one, or baked chips instead of regular ones.
14. Don't peel apples, pears, peaches and potatoes. Many of their nutrients and a lot of their fiber is contained in, or just under, their skins.
15. Buy "healthy," low-salt versions of soups, pasta sauces and luncheon meats if you're watching your sodium intake.
16. Drink iced tea instead of soda. Tea contains antioxidants and can help protect against heart disease and cancer.
17. A 12-ounce can of regular soda contains 10 teaspoons of sugar; diet sodas are sugar-free but contain no nutrients and lots of chemicals.
18. Read food labels of comparable brands of salad dressings, convenience foods, frozen foods, packaged dinners, cookies, and crackers. Choose those with the least fat, cholesterol and sodium.
19. Switch from whole milk to 1 percent or skim milk.
20. Take fresh or dried fruit to work for a midmorning or mid-afternoon snack.
21. Eat reasonable portions of food. Even healthy foods can cause weight gain if you eat too much of them.