

MARCH IS
**NATIONAL
NUTRITION MONTH**



Healthy eating does not have to be complicated. You can nourish your body while still enjoying the foods you love. Food is meant to be enjoyed — not feared, counted, weighed, and tracked.

If you eat too many calories, you may experience weight gain. People with obesity have a significantly increased risk of:

- **Type 2 diabetes**
- **Obstructive sleep apnea**
- **Heart disease**
- **Liver disease**
- **Kidney disease**

Additionally, the quality of your diet affects your disease risk, longevity, and mental health.

Studies have also found that diets rich in ultra-processed foods are associated with a greater risk of conditions like cancer and heart disease.

On the other hand, diets comprising mostly whole, nutrient-dense foods—such as the Mediterranean diet—are associated with increased longevity.

Diets rich in highly processed foods may also increase the risk of depressive symptoms, particularly among people who get less exercise.

If your current diet is high in ultra-processed foods and beverages but low in whole foods like vegetables, nuts, and fish, you're likely not eating enough of certain nutrients. This may negatively affect your overall health.



Do You Have to Follow a Certain Diet to Eat Healthy?

Although certain people need — or choose — to avoid particular foods or adopt diets for health reasons, you don't have to follow any specific diet to feel your best.

“Healthy eating” simply means fueling your body with mostly nutritious foods.

The specifics may be different for each person depending on location, financial situation, culture, and taste preferences.

The Basics of Healthy Eating: Nutrient Density

Even though calories are important, your primary concern should be nutrients.

That's because nutrients, including protein, carbs, fat, vitamins, and minerals, are what your body needs to thrive. “Nutrient density” refers to the amount of nutrients in a food in relation to the calories it provides.

All foods contain calories, but not all foods are nutrient-dense.

For example, egg whites^{Trusted Source} are much lower in calories and fat than whole eggs. However, an egg white provides 1% or less of the Daily Value (DV) for iron, phosphorus, zinc, choline, and vitamins A and B12, while a whole egg packs 5–21% of the DV for these nutrients.

Some nutrient-dense foods, such as numerous fruits and veggies, are low in calories. Others like nuts, Greek yogurt, egg yolks, avocado, and fatty fish are high in calories. That's perfectly OK!

Just because a food is high in calories doesn't mean that it's bad for you. On the same note, just because a food is low in calories doesn't make it a healthy choice.

As a general rule, try to mostly eat foods that are high in nutrients like protein, fiber, healthy fats, vitamins, and minerals. These foods include veggies, fruits, nuts, seeds, beans, fatty fish, and eggs.

Diet Diversity

Following a diet that's rich in different kinds of food:

- Supports your gut bacteria
- Promotes a healthy body weight
- Promotes longevity
- Protects against chronic disease

Eating a variety of foods may be difficult if you're a picky eater. If that's the case, try to introduce new foods one at a time.

If you don't eat many vegetables, start by adding a favorite vegetable to one or two meals per day. You can build off of this at a pace that is comfortable to you.

Although you may not enjoy trying new foods, research shows that the more you're exposed to a food, the greater your chances of growing accustomed to it.

Macronutrient Ratios

Macronutrients — the main nutrients you get from food — are carbs, fat, and protein. (Fiber is considered a type of carb.)

Generally, your meals and snacks should be balanced between the three. In particular, adding protein and fat to fiber-rich carb sources makes dishes more filling and tasty.

For example, if you're snacking on a piece of fruit, adding a spoonful of nut butter or a bit of cheese helps keep you fuller than if you were to eat the fruit alone.

However, it's fine if your diet isn't balanced all the time.

Counting macros and following a set macronutrient plan isn't necessary for most people — except athletes, people seeking a specific body composition, and those who need to gain muscle or fat for medical reasons.

Plus, counting macros and obsessing about staying within a certain macro range may lead to an unhealthy fixation with food and calories or cause disordered eating tendencies.

It's important to note that some people may thrive on diets that are low in carbs and high in fat and protein — or low in fat and high in carbs. However, even on these diets, macronutrient counting typically isn't necessary.

For example, if you feel your best on a low carb diet, simply choosing low carb foods like nonstarchy veggies, proteins, and fats more often than high carb foods will usually suffice.



Highly Processed Foods

One of the best ways to improve your diet is to cut back on ultra-processed foods.

You don't have to avoid processed foods completely. In fact, many healthy foods like shelled nuts, canned beans, and frozen fruits and veggies have been processed in one way or another.

In contrast, highly processed products like soda, mass-produced baked goods, candy, sugary cereals, and certain boxed snack food contain little if any whole food ingredients.

How to Make Healthy Eating Work for You

How to make healthy eating work for you. The first step to following a healthier diet is to make food one of your priorities. This doesn't mean that you have to spend hours meal prepping or cooking elaborate meals, but it does require some thought and effort.

Going to the grocery store regularly will help ensure that you have healthy choices in your fridge and pantry. A well-stocked kitchen makes choosing healthy meals and snacks much easier.

When grocery shopping, stock up on:

- Fresh and frozen fruits and veggies
- Protein sources like chicken, eggs, fish, and tofu
- Bulk carb sources like canned beans and whole grains
- Starchy veggies like white potatoes, sweet potatoes, and butternut squash
- Fat sources like avocados, olive oil, and full fat yogurt
- Nutritious, simple snack ingredients like nuts, seeds, nut butter, hummus, olives, and dried fruit



More Tips on Healthy Eating

Here are some more tips for you to get started with healthy eating:

- Cook at home. Cooking meals at home helps diversify your diet. If you're used to takeout or restaurant meals, try cooking just one or two meals per week to start.
- Understand that your diet isn't going to be perfect. Progress — not perfection — is key. Meet yourself where you are. If you're currently eating out every night, cooking one homemade, veggie-packed meal per week is significant progress.
- "Cheat days" aren't acceptable. If your current diet includes "cheat days" or "cheat meals," this is a sign that your diet is unbalanced. Once you learn that all foods can be a part of a healthy diet, there's no need for cheating.
- Hydrate the smart way. Staying hydrated is part of healthy eating, and water is the best way to stay hydrated. If you're not used to drinking water, get a reusable water bottle and add fruit slices or a squeeze of lemon for flavor.
- Honor your dislikes. If you've tried a specific food several times and don't like it, don't eat it. There are plenty of healthy foods to choose instead. Don't force yourself to eat something just because it's considered healthy.





Ingredients

- 4 salmon fillets, about 6 ounces each
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- ½ teaspoon salt, or to taste
- ¼ teaspoon cracked black pepper, just a pinch if using finely ground black pepper
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 1 teaspoon Italian herb seasoning blend , OR herbs de provence, or ¼ teaspoon each dried thyme, parsley, oregano, and basil
- 1 medium lemon

Easy Healthy Baked Salmon

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees and grease a large baking pan. Arrange salmon fillets on the baking sheet and season generously with salt and pepper.
2. Stir together olive oil, garlic, herbs, and juice of 1/2 lemon. Spoon over salmon fillets being sure to rub all over the tops and sides of the salmon so it has no dry spots. Thinly slice remaining 1/2 of lemon and top each piece of salmon with a slice of lemon.
3. Bake for 12-15 minutes until salmon is opaque and flaky when pulled apart with a fork. You can broil the last 1-2 minutes if desired.
4. Garnish with fresh thyme or parsley if desired and serve.