



LEARN ABOUT

NUTRITION & FITNESS

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NUTRITION BASICS

Fitness and nutrition go hand in hand. When you are looking for ways to get healthy, learning more about fitness and nutrition can help ensure you create a well-rounded plan. Learning just a few basics can be the start of a lifetime of healthy habits.

Every day news of the latest miracle vitamin or nutrient bombards us. This can leave you with many questions. Should I increase protein? Cut out carbs? Increase or decrease fats? This bounty of information may leave you wondering how to sort through it all and incorporate healthy eating into your daily diet.

The good news is, you don't need to be an expert in everything. A solid understanding of the basics can help transform eating habits with good nutrition in mind.

3 MAIN NUTRIENTS

We eat three major nutrients every day: protein, carbohydrates (carbs), and fat. To understand nutrition, it's helpful to know two things about nutrients. First, what does this nutrient do for me and my body? And second, which foods can I eat (or avoid) to increase (or decrease) a certain nutrient in my diet?

PROTEIN

- Protein is our body's main building block, and is found in every muscle and tissue in our body.
- Good sources of protein include eggs, meats, fish, beans, dairy products, and soy.

CARBOHYDRATES

- Carbohydrates or "carbs" produce quick and easy energy for our bodies. Carbs supply our muscles with a burst of energy when we are active.
- Sources of carbs include grain, pasta, cereal, bread, vegetables, and fruit.

FAT

- As a nutrient, fat serves to store energy in our body. Energy from fat helps us during low-intensity activity.
- Fats in our food come from oils, butter, margarine, and meats. Often, junk foods get their flavor and substance through added fat.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WATER AND FIBER

In addition to the top three nutrients, our bodies also require water and fiber. Although not technically nutrients, they are equally as important in a nutritious diet.

Water - Are you getting your 8 glasses of water each day? Or is it 6 now? Although recommended amounts may differ, there is no dispute that water is absolutely essential! Every process and function in our body requires water. We literally cannot live without it.

Water needs can vary based on body size, percent of body fat, activity level and even the climate you live in. So, do I really need 8 glasses a day? Actually, nutritionists at the Mayo Clinic now recommend the average person in a mild climate drink between 11 and 16 cups of water per day.

Fiber - Fiber is the non-digested parts of fruits, vegetables, and some of the less processed carbs like grains. It helps you feel full after eating and is important in moving food along your digestive system. Fiber aids in maintaining a healthy weight and may lower the risk of diabetes, heart disease and some types of cancer. The Mayo Clinic recommends 30-38 grams of fiber per day for men and 21-25 grams per day for women.

INCORPORATE THE BASICS AND CREATE A HEALTHY DIET

How do the protein, carbs, fat, fiber and water we consume every day work together to create a nutritious diet? Here is where a little knowledge goes a long way toward putting it all together for a healthy diet. Follow a few basic tips, and you can immediately boost the health of your diet.



“HALF-YOUR-PLATE”

The USDA recommends the “Half-Your-Plate” concept and it's as simple as making fruits and vegetables the main focus of your meal. It's an easy way to get your recommended allowance of fruits and vegetables without having to measure portions.

Simply divide your plate in half and fill one side with fruits and vegetables. Then incorporate protein and carbs into your meal by dividing the other side of your plate in half one more time. Fill $\frac{1}{4}$ of your plate with protein and $\frac{1}{4}$ of your plate with carbohydrates.

INCREASE UNPROCESSED FOODS AND DECREASE JUNK FOOD

A healthy diet should include minimally processed foods as often as possible. Foods lose a bit of nutritional value at every stage of processing. Look for foods that are as close to their natural state as possible to reap the most benefits.

Junk food is highly processed and therefore has little to no nutritional value. Limiting the amount of junk food you eat is one of the quickest ways to improve the overall nutritional quality of your diet.

LIMIT REFINED FOODS

Refined foods are so highly processed that almost all their nutritional value is gone. Limiting processed foods with too much fat, salt, and sugar can also have a big impact on improving your diet.

Added sugars are easy to spot when they come in the form of candy, baked goods, soda, and ice cream, but they are lurking where you least expect. Even ketchup and bread often have more added sugars than necessary.

This is the one area where tracking and moderation are definitely important. Don't feel like you have to completely eliminate the tasty treats, just be sure to limit yourself!

Ultimately, the best advice is still to simply eat a balanced diet. Incorporating a variety of foods from each nutrient group is the most effective way to ensure your body gets what it needs for optimal nutrition.

THE FOUNDATIONS OF PHYSICAL FITNESS

In addition to a healthy diet, one of the best things you can do for your health is to incorporate a habit of physical activity. The benefits of exercise are available to everyone.

Over time, consistent activity has many benefits. Experts at the Mayo Clinic tell us exercise reduces the risk of chronic problems like heart disease and certain cancers. It strengthens your bones and muscles and improves balance and coordination. It can even help you control your weight and boost self-esteem.

CATEGORIES OF EXERCISE

There is more to overall physical fitness than just being able to run fast or lift heavy weights. How your body performs in several areas including, aerobic, strength, balance, and flexibility help determine your fitness level. It's important to understand each of these categories.

- AEROBIC OR ENDURANCE TRAINING

Aerobic capacity and endurance involve our body's ability to supply fuel to the circulatory and respiratory systems during exercise. Aerobic exercise causes an elevated heart rate for a sustained period of time and helps keep the heart, lungs, and circulatory system healthy. Aerobic activities can include brisk walking, jogging, swimming, and biking.

The better your aerobic endurance, the stronger your heart muscle becomes. This, in turn, allows your heart to pump more blood per heartbeat. Increased aerobic endurance also helps our body more effectively use the air our lungs take in. A heart rate test or running or jogging test can measure aerobic fitness.

- MUSCULAR STRENGTH OR RESISTANCE TRAINING

When we work our muscles consistently, they increase in strength. Anything you do to work your muscles until they tire will increase your strength over time. What makes your muscles stronger during strength training? Muscle cells actually expand which causes an increase in the number of muscle fibers. More muscle fibers mean a stronger you!

Lifting weights and using resistance bands are both forms of strength training. You can measure increased strength by tracking the amount of weight you are able to lift or the number of repetitions and size of the resistance band you use.

- BALANCE AND FLEXIBILITY

Balance is important, especially as we age. Improved balance makes it easier to walk on uneven surfaces and aids in preventing falls. Taking a class in tai chi or standing on one leg can improve your balance. Flexibility allows you to stretch your muscles and helps you stay limber.



How Often Should I Exercise?

AEROBIC ACTIVITY RECOMMENDATIONS

When it comes to aerobic activity, the US Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) recommends adults add the following amounts of exercise to their schedule each week:

- 150 minutes (2 hours and 30 minutes) of moderate aerobic activity, or
- 75 minutes (1 hour and 15 minutes) of vigorous aerobic activity.

For an even bigger boost to your health, the DHHS recommends increasing activity to:

- 300 minutes (5 hours) per week of moderate intensity, or
- 150 min (2 hours and 30 min) per week of vigorous-intensity aerobic activity.

Exercise for at least 10 minutes at a time and spread your minutes throughout the week.

What About Intensity?

The intensity you choose for your workout will depend on your personal fitness goals. Aerobic activities that increase your heart rate and breathing to some extent are of moderate intensity. Someone exercising at this level would describe their exertion level to be a 5 or 6 on a 0-10 scale. Things like brisk walking, dancing, swimming, and bicycling on level ground are moderate-intensity activities.

Vigorous intensity activities greatly increase breathing and heart rate. Someone exercising at this level would describe their exertion to be around a 7 or 8 on a 0-10 scale. Jogging, singles tennis, swimming continuous laps, and bicycling uphill are all vigorously intense activities.

STRENGTH TRAINING RECOMMENDATIONS

When it comes to strength training, the DHHS recommends you include strength training in your fitness routine at least twice a week. A good strength training routine involves all major muscle groups. Exercises that increase muscle mass, strength, resistance, and endurance are most beneficial.

WATER AND EXERCISE

During a workout, your body loses water. This makes it very important to hydrate while you exercise. According to a mayo clinic article, the American College of Sports Medicine recommends you drink the following amounts of water before, during, and after your workout.

- 2-3 cups of water, 2-3 hours before a workout.
- ½-1 cup of water every 15-20 min during your workout. (depending on your body size & the weather)
- 2-3 cups of water after your workout.

Water is usually the best way to replace lost fluids during a workout. Consider a sports drink when you exercise for more than 60 minutes at a time. A sports drink contains the electrolytes your body needs to maintain balance. They also contain carbs which can give you the energy boost you may need for increased workout time.

How Do I Get Started?

SET GOALS

It's important to talk to your doctor before starting a new fitness routine. Before you begin, set a few goals. Consider your likes and dislikes and take note of what tends to hold you back personally. Develop practical strategies to keep your program going.

START SLOW

Start off slowly and break your exercise into smaller chunks. Even a few minutes at a time can be beneficial. Try planning 10 minutes of exercise into your day a few days a week for several weeks.

PICK UP THE PACE

Gradually add more time and more days to your routine. Try to up your time to 15 or 20 minutes and schedule it in 5 days a week. Then pick up the pace, walk a little faster, or add a second activity like biking for variety. Once you feel like you can handle the smaller increments, continue to look for ways to add even more time and intensity to your plan over several weeks or months. In no time you can work your way up to the recommended amounts of exercise.

DON'T OVERDO IT!

As you increase your exercise, don't overdo it and be sure to listen to your body. Stay safe and injury free by learning the proper way to do exercises. An injury can quickly stall or put an end to your fitness progress.

How Do I Keep It Up?

One of the best ways to ensure you'll keep up your exercise routine is to choose activities you enjoy. Also, set goals that are both realistic and challenging. Track your progress and celebrate when you reach your goals. Even a small reward like a night at the movies can really help to keep your motivation up. With just a little bit of advance planning, choosing activities you enjoy, and pacing yourself, you are on your way to a lifetime of healthy habits.

Are You Ready to Learn More?

Knowledge of both nutrition and fitness are the building blocks of a healthy lifestyle. Interested in learning how you can help people look and feel their best with proper nutrition and adequate exercise? Stratford Career Institute's informative online course about Fitness and Nutrition is an excellent first step. Learn how nutrition, wellness, and physical fitness training can improve your own life or help you pursue a career helping others.

