

Family Nutrition Challenge

Looking for ways to eat healthier? Here are some nutrition tips and fun challenges to help you create healthier meals. Explore different ways to encourage healthy eating at home!

Healthy Eating Tips

There are a variety of ways that you can make healthy eating fun for you and your family. The MyPlate graphic is a great resource to help you and your child balance your eating habits. The new look of the plate reminds us that we should:

- Enjoy your food, but eat less
- Avoid oversized portions
- Make half of your plate fruits and vegetables
- Switch to fat-free or low-fat (1%) milk
- Make at least half your grains whole grains
- Compare sodium in foods like soup, bread, and frozen meals – and choose the items with lower numbers

A few additional tips to remember when planning meals are to:

- Eat a variety of vegetables
- Focus on fruits
- Get your calcium rich food
- Go lean with protein
- Drink water
- Keep your foods safe
- Find your balance between food and physical activity

When you sit down to eat, do a quick check of your plate. Does it look like a rainbow? Remember that you should have a variety of colors on your plate. The deeper colors indicate more nutrients are being provided. Remembering these tips the next time you prepare a meal can ensure your family is getting nutrition that is adequate for good health.

For more information on MyPlate visit www.choosemyplate.gov.

Making these changes to your plate all at once can be difficult, so try making one change at a time. These changes can be very rewarding to the health and wellbeing of your family. As a role model, your efforts will help educate and encourage your children to choose healthier options throughout their lives, and help them understand that eating healthy can be fun.

Challenge Your Family

For a fun way to make these changes, we have a list of challenges to help your family make your next meal a healthier one. Simply review these challenges and select the best challenges for your family. Try as many or as few as you want. If you want to make a game out of it, we encourage you to cut each challenge onto a strip of paper and place them into a jar. Have each family member take turns choosing a challenge out of the jar and watch your family discover new ways to eat healthy.

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Fun Family Nutrition Challenge:

- Fruits and vegetables provide important nutrients to our bodies. Not only are they fun to eat, they also provide color, texture, taste and variety to our meals. Here are a few suggestions to increase your intake of fruits and vegetables:
 - Add a different fruit to your cereal (bananas, blueberries, strawberries, etc.)
 - Add fruit to your salads
 - Create a yogurt parfait with layers of plain low-fat yogurt, fruit and granola
 - Microwave a vegetable and add it to a frozen dinner
 - Create vegetable quesadillas
 - Include raisins with your cereal, oatmeal, baked goods or yogurt
 - Make your own fruit cups to take on the go
 - Add puree cooked squash and carrots to spaghetti sauce.
 - Create your own veggie “mix-ins” (bowls of pre-chopped vegetables) and have family members create their own personalized pizzas or omelets.

Working with your family, can you come up with more creative ways to add fruits and vegetables to your diet? Once you have a list, try all the new ways.

For more ideas visit:

- www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.gov
- www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org
- Keep a daily log of the quantity and types of fruits and vegetables you eat. You can make your own daily log or access the following log at <http://teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/magazines/edition4/pdfs/SN4-111609-REPRO-1.pdf> or http://teamnutrition.usda.gov/resources/mpk_worksheet.pdf. Did you and your family members meet your daily required amount? Did you try new fruits and vegetables?
- Make designated sections in your refrigerator and pantry for healthy snacks. Get your children to draw pictures of the food and make signs that say “Healthy Snacks” to go on the shelves or drawers. If you don’t have room to designate a special space, place a fun sticker on the snacks that you want to encourage. Your kids will have fun choosing the healthier snacks that have the stickers.
- Have a family competition to see who can make the most creative fruit kebab with all your favorite fruits.
- Allow kids to help you prepare dinner by using kitchen scissors or peeler to cut-up or peel veggies and fruits. Encourage creativity by seeing who can make shapes or pictures using the vegetables and/or fruits – make sure to supervise and assist as your children use cooking utensils.
- Shop healthy. Plan at least one healthy meal a week. Next week choose another meal (or two). Continue to do this and discover new items for your family menu. For example, instead of buying the usual cereal at the grocery store, try purchasing plain oatmeal and let your child pick different fruit and berry add-ins.
- Have a watermelon carving contest (or any melon that is in season) with your family, and see who can carve the most creative watermelon. When you are done, eat and enjoy your healthy and creative snack.
- When eating out, encourage your children to eat fruit and vegetables as a side dish instead of fries. You can set an example by doing the same.

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- Make your own popsicles out of 100% fruit juices instead of buying sugary store made popsicles. Simply fill a paper cup with fruit juice and chopped fruit. Then, place a popsicle stick in the middle and freeze.
- Take a trip to a local farm or farmers market to allow kids to see how fruits and vegetables are grown. Purchase familiar or new fresh fruits and vegetables to cook for a family meal.
- Bake homemade whole grain bread as a family. Take turns mixing and kneading the dough.
- Make homemade whole grain pizza crust and have your kids top their own mini pizzas with healthy toppings, such as different types of veggies, lean meats (i.e. ground turkey, chicken, etc) and low-fat cheese.
- Making homemade whole grain pancakes. Allow your children to stir the batter. Encourage creativity and fun by creating different shaped pancakes such as butterflies, hearts, etc. Your kids won't even know they are eating whole grains.

Tip: Use a pancake mold and/or cookie cutters to shape the pancakes.

- Allow kids to research fruits and vegetables, and then have everyone in the family choose a new vegetable to try. Once everyone has chosen a new veggie, try to come up with new recipes for dinner to incorporate your new foods.
- Use whole grains or whole wheat bread for school sandwiches instead of using white bread. Use cookie cutters to make fun shaped sandwiches.
- Learn about the nutrition labels on food packages. Make a game out of the trip to the grocery store. See who can find the food with no trans or saturated fat, or the food that has the most potassium, fiber, or iron in it.

www.nutrition.gov/nal_display/index.php?info_center=11&tax_level=2&tax_subject=391&topic_id=1757&placement_default=0

- Have each member of the family color the MyPlate Food Diagram. Draw your favorite foods that represent each category, and then hang it on the refrigerator to remind everyone to choose more items from the left side of the plate.

www.choosemyplate.gov/downloads/MyPlate/ColoringSheet.pdf

- Make your own trail mix out of nuts (almonds, peanuts and sunflower seeds), dried fruits (apples, bananas and raisins) and whole grain cereals. Take it on the go for a quick snack anywhere.
- **Take the Fast Food Challenge!** Try to go one week without eating any fast food. Then, see how many days your family can go without going through a drive-through. If you find yourself at a drive-through before your week is up, choose items that are healthier. If possible, do a little research and choose what you would like to order before you arrive so you're not tempted when you get there.

- Develop your own menu. See who can come up with a day's worth of meals that incorporates all the food groups and recommended amounts of each food. Then, use your homemade menus to plan weekly meals.

www.fns.usda.gov/eatsmartplayhardhealthylifestyle/QuickandEasy/Menus/Week1_samplemenu1.htm

- Try healthy options for meats:
 - Try lean or extra lean meats and poultry when shopping or ordering.
 - Ask for and prepare skinless chicken when ordering or making meals.
 - When shopping, choose skinless, boneless turkey or chicken.
 - Instead of eating fried meat, try grilling or broiling.
 - Prepare foods with a teaspoon of olive oil and spices instead of butter and sauces.
 - Next time you buy lunch meats, have your children pick out their own lean sandwich meat for the week.

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- Conduct your own taste test. Buy every kind of apple from the grocery store. Then, slice up the apples and allow your family to taste every kind and decide which apple is their favorite.
- Count how many soft drinks your family drinks in a week. Then, try to cut down that number throughout the month to help limit the total number of sugar sweetened beverages. Low-fat milk and water are great substitutes.
- Oils are a necessary part of your family's diet. They provide your body with essential fatty acids and vitamin E. However, not all oils are good for you (oils that are solid at room temperature). The ones that are good for you are liquid at room temperature and should be consumed in moderation. Here are some suggestions on cooking and eating with good oils:
 - Limit the amount of oil you consume. Only cook with one tablespoon instead of two.
 - Order salad dressing on the side so you can control how much you consume. Buy “Light” or “Low Fat” dressings.
 - Eat healthy oils such as fish, seeds and nuts.
 - Choose to cook with oils without cholesterol, such as peanut oil, canola oil or olive oil.
 - Make sandwiches with lean meat and lettuce instead of mayonnaise and fried meat. Fried foods contain a lot of unhealthy oils and fats.
- Drink more water. As a family, include water at every meal and offer it throughout the day.
- Switch from whole milk to skim milk for cereals and coffee drinking.
- Do the pantry scavenger hunt and discover if your pantry provides your family with a balanced diet. Make a list of all the food groups, and then go through your pantry and match up your food items to their appropriate food groups. Once you have all your foods categorized, check to see if you have too much of one group and not enough of another. Pay attention to see if you have too many foods in a particular food group such as “processed/packaged foods.” Work to balance out your pantry once you have done your inventory. Repeat this challenge in your refrigerator.
- Order more healthy options when eating out. Use these tips to help your family eat healthier:
 - Decide where you are going to eat before you leave the house, then look at the menu online and decide on the healthiest option. Stick to your plan when ordering at the restaurant.
 - Skip dessert and have some fruit when you return home.
 - Say no to appetizers and complementary chips or bread.
 - Have the waiter bring free rolls or chips with the meal. This will help you eat less of them. Or tell the waiter beforehand that you only want one basket brought to the table.
 - Have an appetizer as your meal.
 - Share entrees – most restaurant meals contain more than one serving.
 - Substitute unhealthy sides for a small salad or steamed vegetables.
 - Ask for your meal to be cooked with less sauce or butter.
 - Ask your server not to bring unhealthy sides (i.e. fried egg rolls) with your food.
 - Choose water instead of sugary sodas or teas as your beverage.
 - Ask your waiter to put half of your entrée in a to-go box before they serve you. This way you will only eat half the meal and not overindulge. Plus, you will have a meal leftover for lunch the next day.
 - Resist from adding extra salt and butter to sides or entrées.

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- **Take the portion control challenge.** Pour a bowl of cereal that you normally eat; then measure out one serving of whole grain cereal and compare it to your normal-sized bowl. Are you eating the right portion? Try this with other snacks such as crackers and popcorn. If you need some help with portion sizes, start measuring so you know how much you're eating.
- Dine in. Keep track of how many times your family eats out. Once you have this number, set a goal to reduce the total number of meals a week your family eats out. Try to increase the number of days you cut back over the next few weeks. See how many times you choose to cook at home instead of going out.
- Work on balancing your family's diet. Did you know we need:
 - 1-4 cups of vegetables per day
 - 1-2 ½ cups of fruit per day
 - 3-10 ounce-equivalents of grains per day
 - 2-7 ounce-equivalents of protein per day
 - 2-3 cups of dairy per day

For more information on food groups and calories needed for your age and size go to the Daily Food Plan at www.ChooseMyPlate.gov

- Select a food group to improve on this week. See how many days this week your family can eat the recommended amount of servings from your group. Add another food group the next week until you've selected all the food groups. Once completed, focus on the food groups you find most difficult. In the beginning you may need to measure out your food until you familiarize yourself with proper serving sizes.
- Skip dessert, substitute fruit go on a walk with your family instead of having dessert. If you are successful, try adding days of the week to skip the sweet cravings.
- Eat three meals a day. It is unhealthy to skip meals, especially breakfast. Remember to watch portion sizes, and add healthy snacks in between meals, such as apple slices, nuts, and other fruits and veggies if needed.
- Go berry picking. Find a local blueberry or strawberry field, or an apple orchard to pick fresh fruit while it's in season. Look into freezing or canning some of the fresh fruits so you can enjoy them throughout the year.