

What's for Dinner?

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What's for dinner? If we look at the foods that Americans are now eating it would be safe to assume that we're eating saturated fats, added sugars, salt, and refined grains. Translated to food, what you would see on your plate is white bread, fried meat, salt shaker on the table and rich sauces. If that sounds like your diet you are not alone.

The 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans were released earlier this year. As a nation we are getting heavier and heavier. The ultimate goal of the current Guidelines is to help steer people to making healthier food choices with more nutritious foods, balancing calories with weight over a lifetime and become more physically active.

Previous versions of the Guidelines, issued every five years, used phrases such as "eat a variety of foods", "avoid too much salt, sugar, saturated fat", and "use alcohol in moderation." People were understandably confused about what to do. Although not perfect, the new Guidelines start to address what we should eat rather than what we shouldn't.

What should we be eating? There is strong scientific evidence that we should be eating more foods made with whole grains, including whole wheat flour, oats, bran and brown rice. The goal is to eat three servings of whole grains a day, which doesn't seem too hard to do, except that the average American eats less than one serving of whole grain a day. A diet rich in whole grains provides more fiber, and can help reduce the risk of a wide range of health issues currently plaguing everyone from the very young to our senior citizens.

The Food Guide Pyramid, has long supported getting plenty of fruits and vegetables every day. This means more than a glass of juice for breakfast, French fries for lunch, and canned corn with dinner. Instead of snacking on a high fat, high sugar, baked bread product, add fruit and vegetables to your diet by crunching into a fresh apple during breakfast, adding a sliced cucumber and some carrot sticks to your lunch, and reaching for a sliced mango for your mid-afternoon snack. Choose to bake a sweet potato or steam some fresh spinach to compliment your dinner. Add a pear to your dinner salad, sprinkle some dried cranberries into your morning oatmeal or create a veggie plate with carrots, green peppers, celery, and grape tomatoes with some fat free ranch dressing to use as a dip for an appetizer. Simple changes go a long way to reaching the goal of 2 ½ cups of vegetables and 2 cups of fruit each day.

Other foods to add to your regular diet include fat-free or low fat dairy products including low-fat yogurt products. Be sure to eat at least two servings of seafood each week. Consider trying some of the fortified soy beverages currently in your grocery store. When choosing protein foods, choose leaner versions to reduce your intake of solid fats. It is not necessary to avoid fats completely, but use oils rather than solid fats whenever possible.

Carefully consider how many calories you get each day from the beverages you drink. Most contain added sugars but don't provide any critical nutrients. It can be very easy to get hundreds

of empty calories a day from liquids. Remember, water doesn't have any calories at all and it's good for you.

Tuft's University's Health & Nutrition Letter offers some simple guidelines to help you follow the 2010 Dietary Guidelines. Monitor your food intake. Many people keep a food journal. You may have an "app" on your cell phone that will help you do that, and there are several computer programs that almost do the work for you. When you eat out, and we do that a lot, choose smaller portions or the lower calorie option. Remember you can always take home part of your dinner and eat it the next day. Practice portion control. A serving of vegetables is one-half cup. A glass of juice is 6-8 ounces. A serving of meat is 3 ounces, the size of a deck of cards. Consider leaving the serving dishes in the kitchen, don't put them on the table. It can encourage over-eating. Don't forget to eat breakfast. Eating a nutrient-dense breakfast has been associated with weight lost and overall improved nutrient intake.

Finally, limit screen time. Do you ever think about how much time you spend in front of a screen? If you use your computer at work, then go home and catch up on things on your home computer, and finish your day in front of the television, your total screen time is hours and hours. It is recommended the children and adolescents spend no more than one to two hours a day in front of a screen. That's probably good advice for the adults in the household also.

If you want more information about what you should be eating to create a healthier you, go to www.dietaryguidelines.gov or www.mypyramid.gov. Both websites provide resources to help you understand what you should eat, how much you should eat and why you should eat the recommended foods.

Next time you hear the question "What's for dinner?" you can answer "Grilled boneless chicken, whole wheat orzo with broccoli, spinach salad, a whole wheat roll and fresh fruit for dessert." See how easy it is?