

HEALTHY EATING THROUGH THE LIFECYCLE

The basics of good nutrition – a balanced diet with lean meats, whole grains, fruits and vegetables, and low fat dairy products – are important at all stages of life. However there are some nutrients, vitamins, and minerals that are needed in greater amounts depending on your age.

Here are a few healthy eating tips for each life stage. Be sure to talk to your health care provider about diet changes and visit www.umc.edu/cbmh for more resources.



PREGNANT WOMEN:

Prenatal vitamins

Start taking prenatal vitamins as soon as you find out you are pregnant or if you are trying to get pregnant.

Folic acid

Be sure to get an adequate amount of folic acid by eating such foods as lentils, dried peas and beans, green leafy vegetables and take a folic acid supplement.

Calcium

Eat at least 4 servings a day of calcium. Good food sources include low-fat dairy products, dark green leafy vegetables, and calcium-fortified foods.

Iron

Include good iron food sources in your diet such as lean red meats and pork, eggs, iron-fortified cereals, whole grains, dried fruits, and beans.



INFANTS:

Breast milk or Infant Formula

Breast milk is the best choice for infants because it supplies all the required nutrients for the first 4 to 5 months of life and supports babies' immune systems. If you decide not to breast feed, commercial formulas provide adequate nutrition.

Iron-fortified Infant Cereal

Around 4 to 6 months, infants can be fed iron-fortified cereal from a spoon. It is not advised to put infant cereal into a baby's bottle because it can lead to over-eating, allergic reactions, and possible inhalation.

Fruits and Vegetables

Baby food fruits and vegetables can be added to an infant's diet when she is ready to eat infant cereals (between 4 to 6 months). Be sure not to add sugar or salt to flavor baby foods.

Vitamin D

Most infants need supplemental Vitamin D drops since breast milk and infant formulas are often low in this vital nutrient.



TODDLERS:

Balanced Meals

Toddlers need balanced meals in small portions and should eat 3 meals a day, plus 2 snacks. Meals should consist of dairy products, whole grains, vegetables, fruit, and protein. Limit fast and junk foods.

Finger Foods

Toddlers are learning to self-feed and need small, healthy foods with which to practice. Avoid any small food that might cause choking such as hard candy, hot dogs, dried fruit, mini

marshmallows, etc.

Diverse Foods

Toddlers need exposure to food items at least 10 times before they feel comfortable eating a new food. So if your little one doesn't like something the first time, try, try again.



CHILDREN

Rainbow Foods

Choose fruits and veggies in a rainbow of colors to ensure children are getting a range of important nutrients. Include such foods as red peppers, orange cantaloupe, green beans, and blueberries at meals and snack times and encourage children to "eat a rainbow."

Dairy Products

Low-fat dairy products provide children with Vitamin D, potassium, and protein that they need for growing bones.

Protein

Healthy proteins are important for bones and muscles. Choose lean meats for dinner, eggs for breakfast, and unsalted nuts for snacks as healthy protein options.

Water and Milk

Encourage children to drink water and low-fat milk instead of sugary drinks to avoid "empty calories" and inappropriate weight gain.



TEENS:

Healthy Breakfast

Teens often skip breakfast before school resulting in a "mid-morning slump." Encourage healthy foods they can grab on the go like string cheese, peanut butter sandwiches, low fat yogurt, and granola bars.

Calories

Depending on size and weight, the average teenager needs more calories during early adolescence than any other time of life. Boys often need about 2700 calories per day and girls need about 2200 calories per day. Make sure calories are from nutrient rich foods, not junk food.

Calcium and Iron

There is an increased need for calcium and iron, especially for girls, during the teen years. Good sources of iron include lean red meats and pork, eggs, whole grains, iron-fortified cereals, and dried fruits and beans.

Healthy Snacks and Drinks

Keep healthy snacks available to displace chips and cookies. Encourage teens to drink water, milk, and occasionally juice. Limit energy drinks and sodas because of the added sugar and caffeine.



ADULTS:

Limit Empty Calories

In adulthood, a person's need for calories decreases as metabolism slows, and physical activity often reduces. It's important to get the most nutrient value for the calories you consume, so avoid highly processed, sugary foods and drinks that have little nutrition.

Go Natural

Eat foods closest to their natural state. For example, brown rice is better than white, and fresh cuts of meat are better than processed ones.

Beware of Comfort Foods

Adults tend to eat comfort foods when experiencing stressful situations and often consume too many carbohydrates. When stressed, try reaching for fruits or vegetables instead or combine fruits and vegetables with comfort foods (ex. bananas dipped in chocolate, carrots with peanut butter, etc.)



SENIORS:

Protein

Seniors often need more protein in their diets, which they can get from lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, and protein shakes.

Multi-Vitamins

Seniors should consider taking a multi-vitamin to help ensure proper nutrition as their caloric intake and metabolism decrease.

Calcium

Women and men in their later years need more calcium to support strong bones.

Vitamin B-12

Vitamin B-12 helps support brain function and the nervous system. Good food sources of Vitamin B-12 include fish and shellfish, red meats, dairy products, poultry, and eggs.

