

Tips for Eating Right from the American Dietetic Association

THIS OR THAT?

When it comes to eating right, things can get confusing. What's the difference between this or that choice? What vitamins do I need and why? Am I choosing the right things? Here's a quick list that breaks down some common conundrums.

Yogurt Wars: Frozen vs. Regular

No matter how similar their names, frozen yogurt is nutritionally different from regular yogurt—not just a colder version.

The nutrient content of frozen yogurt is actually closer to low-fat ice cream than to regular yogurt. Plain or fruit-flavored regular yogurt supplies considerably more calcium than frozen. Some frozen yogurts do contain prebiotics and probiotics, which provide possible health benefits.

With yogurt, as with any food item, read the Nutrition Facts label to learn its nutrient and calorie content.

Which Is Healthier: Butter or Margarine?

From a fat and calorie standpoint, butter and margarine are the same with about 35 calories and four grams of fat per teaspoon. Both are primarily fat; only the source differs. Butter contains more saturated fat than most margarine. Because margarine is made from vegetable oil, it has no cholesterol.

For a spread with less saturated fat and minimal or no trans fat, buy soft tub or liquid margarine. Whipped versions of butter or margarine have less fat per tablespoon, too. Reduced-fat margarine is also available but is not suitable for some recipes.

Whether you prefer the taste of butter or margarine, enjoy in small portions. And for margarine, choose liquid or tub, rather than stick.

Which Bread Is “Whole”?

Brown or the multigrain bread is not necessarily whole-grain. The rich brown color may come from caramel coloring, not from whole-grain flour.

For the record, if it's labeled “whole wheat,” bread must be made from 100 percent whole-wheat flour. However, “wheat bread” may contain some refined white flour. Proportions vary. Oat, corn, and rye flours are whole-grain, too.

To find bread with more fiber, check two spots on the label:

- Nutrition Facts for fiber content. A slice of whole-wheat bread has about 2 grams of fiber unless fiber-fortified; a slice of white, about 0.6 grams of fiber. (Daily fiber advice is: men, 30 to 38 grams; women, 21 to 25 grams, depending on age.)
- Ingredient list for whole-wheat or other whole-grain flours. They should be first or second on the list.

What's the Difference in Olive Oils?

Research suggests cooking with olive oil can be beneficial to your health. Its monounsaturated fat content can help lower LDL, or “bad” blood cholesterol when used in place of saturated fats as part of a healthy diet. The question then becomes: which type of olive oil to use?

Olive oil comes in a number of varieties, including virgin, light and extra virgin. All are the same in terms of fat content, either types of fat or total amounts of fat. The difference in olive oils lies mostly in the flavor.

- Extra virgin olive oil is lower in acid, resulting in a fruity flavor and aroma, so you don't need to use as much to enjoy the flavor.
- Virgin olive oil is more acidic, meaning you need to use more to get the distinct olive oil flavor.
- Light olive oil is lighter in color and flavor.

Whichever type of olive oil you prefer, remember they all have something else in common: They are all high in total fat and calories, so go easy on portions.

Thiamin, Riboflavin and Niacin

You have heard of the many vitamins and minerals our body needs to stay healthy, but you may not know specifically what they do for you.

For example, you may know you need thiamin, riboflavin and niacin, but do you know why you need each of them?

- Thiamin helps produce energy from carbohydrates in all cells of your body. Thiamin can be found in whole-grain and enriched grain products such as bread, rice, pasta and tortillas.
- Riboflavin helps produce energy in all cells of your body and change an amino acid called tryptophan in your food into niacin. Eggs, green, leafy vegetables and nuts provide smaller amounts.
- Niacin helps your body use sugars and fatty acids, helps enzymes function normally in your body and helps produce energy. Foods high in protein are usually good sources of niacin, such as poultry, fish, beef, peanut butter and beans.

Consult a registered dietitian to find out how much of each vitamin is right for you. Remember, a variety of foods with plenty of vitamins and minerals is part of your ticket to good health.

What's the Difference Between Enriched and Fortified?

"Enriched" and "fortified" are terms that mean nutrients—usually vitamins or minerals—have been added to make a food more nutritious.

"Enriching" means adding back nutrients that were lost during food processing. For example, B vitamins, lost when wheat is refined, are added back to white flour.

"Fortified" means adding nutrients that were never present in the food to begin with.

Knowing the difference between "enriched" and "fortified" will help you make an informed and healthy decision.

EAT RIGHT IN ANY SITUATION

Eating right is a lot easier when you have time to plan and choose—but with our crazy schedules, things get tricky. Here are some tips and ideas for how to take on what life throws at you and still make smart choices.

When Dining Out, Know What's on Your Plate

Watching your calories while dining at a restaurant can be as easy as asking your server or the chef a few simple questions:

- How are the vegetables seasoned? Are they salted? Is butter or margarine added?
- Is the fish grilled, broiled, breaded or fried? Is it cooked with butter, margarine or some other fat?
- How is the sauce prepared? Can I have the sauce, salad dressing or whipped cream on the side?
- Is the soup broth-based or cream-based?
- Can I substitute fruit or vegetables for my side dish?

Dining out doesn't mean your healthful eating plan has to stay at home. Ask a few questions and your meal can be as healthy as if you made it yourself.

Snacks You Might Not Find in the Office Vending Machine

If the middle of the afternoon often becomes your "I wish I could take a nap" time, the reason may be that your body needs energy.

Spacing meals three to four hours apart makes it easier to stay energized throughout the day, so an afternoon snack can be your key to making it through. Try some of these snack ideas:

- Three cups of microwave low-fat popcorn
- Four or five whole-wheat crackers with peanut butter
- Fresh fruit, either plain or with low-fat cheese
- Half of a small whole-wheat bagel topped with one tablespoon of peanut butter or hummus
- One cup of low-fat yogurt with two tablespoons whole-grain cereal
- Six to eight carrot and pepper strips with low-fat salad dressing
- Two tablespoons of sunflower or pumpkin seeds
- One-fourth cup of trail mix

Remember, snacking from a bag or box often results in overeating. Keep your snack portions small by placing the food on a plate and eating slowly.

Steakhouse Dining

Usually, you can get a variety of salads and steamed or lightly sautéed vegetables, baked potatoes and grilled seafood dishes, in addition to lean meats like sirloin, at most steak restaurants. Beware, however, of the fried and greasy accompaniments and the delectable desserts; if you choose to have these, make the portions small.

Choose these more often:

- Lean broiled beef (3 to 6 ounces), such as London broil, filet mignon, sirloin, and round and flank steak
- Tomato and onion salad, chopped salad or garden salad with balsamic vinaigrette
- Green beans, spinach or broccoli, steamed or lightly sautéed in olive oil and garlic (and/or lemon juice and herbs)
- Grilled or baked fish or other seafood dishes

Working from Home: Tips for Nutrition

The number of people who work from home continues to grow; making the transition involves not just shifting your office needs but it also means a shift in meeting nutritional needs.

When it comes to meeting nutritional needs from a home office, the tips include not just what to eat, but also how to avoid overeating. Start your healthy eating plan with a schedule; set aside time for breaks, time for lunch and even, if possible, time for a short walk outside or on a treadmill. A schedule for eating will help you avoid the “run to the kitchen to grab a snack temptation.”

Maximize nutrition by keeping easy to prepare foods like frozen entrées, pasta and lean deli meat, and tortillas that can be stuffed with everything from beans to string cheese and even potatoes for micro waving as a quick meal. Home offices make it easier to get plenty of fruit and vegetables that can fill you up and make for easy, healthy snacks.

Since socialization is important to all of us, schedule an occasional lunch meeting or date with a colleague or friend.

FRUIT & VEGGIE FIX

We all know fruits and veggies are good for us. Here are some tips and tidbits about just how good they are and how to get them into your daily diet.

When It Comes to Fruits and Vegetables, More Matters

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend adults consume two cups of fruit and 2 ½ cups of vegetables per day, based on a 2,000-calorie eating plan. Research indicates more than 50 percent of adult consumers know they need to eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables every day, but more than 90 percent of us don't eat the recommended amount.

Here are some easy ways to meet your daily recommendation:

- Toss a handful of berries or sliced fruit on cereal, pancakes or waffles or in a cup of plain low-fat yogurt.
- Add a refreshing crunch to sandwiches with a slice of pineapple or apple. Replace jelly with banana slices on a peanut butter sandwich.
- Fruit is an excellent on-the-go snack. Bring an apple with you in your gym bag, throw a banana in your briefcase or a plum in your purse.
- Pack more nutrition into pasta dishes by adding colorful steamed vegetables.
- Boost your intake by adding vegetables to sandwich and pizza.

The Health Benefits of Watermelon

Juicy, delicious and sweet, watermelon is a food with many health benefits. Watermelon gets its name because it is made up of about 91 percent water. A good source of vitamins A and C and potassium, watermelon is also high in lycopene, an antioxidant that may help reduce the risk of cancer and other diseases.

A one-cup serving of watermelon contains about the same amount of lycopene as two medium-sized tomatoes.

Was Popeye Onto Something?

Can spinach actually make you strong, like Popeye? Spinach may not make you sprout muscles in seconds but its health benefits go a long way:

- Spinach contains lutein and zeaxanthin, which contribute to healthy vision and may aid in the prevention of cancer.
- Spinach is a great source of beta-carotene, which your body converts to vitamin A. It also provides vitamin C, folate, vitamin K, magnesium and potassium.

- Spinach contains vitamin E, an important antioxidant that helps protect cells from everyday damage, boosts your immune system and helps keep your skin and hair healthy.

Head for the weight room if you want to look like Popeye. Meanwhile, take advantage of the nutritional benefits from adding spinach to your daily eating plan.

Tomatoes Provide Flavor and Health Benefits

Red, yellow, pink, orange—tomatoes come in many different colors, shapes and varieties. They all taste great and provide many health benefits, too. Just eating one tomato a day provides one-third of your daily requirement of vitamin C and one to two grams of fiber. Tomatoes are a great complement to sandwiches, salads, pasta and rice and can provide additional flavor to meat, fish and poultry.

Tomatoes are good sources of vitamin C and potassium. They also pack plenty of the phytochemicals that provide disease prevention benefits. Tomatoes are high in lycopene and phenolic compounds, which may aid in heart disease prevention and help reduce your risk of prostate and digestive tract cancers.

The Artichoke Is One Complex Vegetable

Here are a few tips for choosing and cooking artichokes:

- Buy artichokes that are heavy, have a tight leaf formation and a dark green color. Artichokes that look dry aren't your best bet.
- Store artichokes in a plastic bag in the refrigerator for up to three days.
- Like all produce, wash them before eating.
- After cooking the artichoke, break off the leaves one at a time. Pull the leaf through your teeth to remove the soft portion and throw away the rest of the leaf. The soft base can be enjoyed as well.

If preparing and eating whole artichokes seems difficult, canned artichokes (not packed in oil) are a delicious addition to pastas, salads and dips. Artichokes are high in potassium, low in calories, fat-free and contain some folate, magnesium, fiber and vitamin C.

The Buzz on Pomegranates

With a flavor both tart and sweet, the pomegranate contains clusters of small edible seeds with juicy red fruit. Pomegranate seeds are often used in salads and cooked dishes.

Like all fruits and vegetables, pomegranates are a good source of a variety of phytochemicals, including polyphenols, which seem to provide protection against heart disease.

Studies on both mice and people show pomegranates may help prevent the process that results in LDL—or bad—cholesterol contributing to clogging arteries. Pomegranates may also help maintain blood flow, keeping your blood vessels healthy.

The buzz about pomegranates is based on evolving science, but adding pomegranates to your shopping list can improve variety in your diet and possibly your health.

The Wide World of Mushrooms

Dainty enoki mushrooms, earthy dried porcini and hearty portobellos have joined the white button mushroom as staples in the kitchen, and choices continue to increase. What's even better news about mushrooms? They are about 90 percent water, making them low in calories and virtually fat free.

The complex flavors and appealing textures of mushrooms make them a versatile ingredient. Add crunchy raw enokis to salads or soup. Stir-fry almost any fresh mushroom or sauté with garlic and toss with pasta. Sautéed mushrooms frequently top steaks, chicken and omelets. Creminis, which look like brown button mushrooms, may be oven roasted with a drizzle of olive oil and eaten hot or allowed to cool and tossed into salads.

Portobellos are large creminis, perfect for brushing with toasted sesame oil and soy sauce and then grilling. Dried mushrooms, such as porcini and shiitake, add flavor to stocks, sauces and risotto.

No matter what type of mushrooms you choose, make sure they are firm and smooth. Since mushrooms can absorb water, opinions differ on whether to wash mushrooms or just brush off obvious dirt. Most chefs agree a quick rinse won't make mushrooms soggy. Trim off the stem end before using.

Telling the difference between edible and poisonous mushrooms takes expertise, so avoid the wild varieties and get your mushrooms at the grocery store.