

## Choosing Healthy Foods Easily

We all know how important it is to eat a healthy, balanced diet. But eating well takes more than simple knowledge; it takes dedication, commitment and hard work.

Choosing healthy foods seems like a simple enough concept, but after a hard day at work it's just so much easier to stop for drive-thru burgers or, worse yet, sit down with a comforting tub of cookie dough ice cream. You need to educate your mind before feeding your body. Understand what you'll get from good nutrition, and you'll find it much easier to make healthier choices.

### Vegetables

The earth provides us with a huge assortment of delicious vegetables that should be the basis of every healthy diet. Choose a variety of vegetables, and eat no less than 2 1/2 cups per day. Select an assortment of dark, leafy vegetables including spinach and broccoli. Carrots and sweet potatoes are excellent choices as well. Dry beans including kidney, lima, pinto beans and chickpeas are loaded with nutrients. Pass up the French fries for a leafy spinach salad, skip the chips and grab a bag of baby carrots, and you will easily meet your daily recommended vegetable intake.

### Grains

Nutritionists recommend that we consume six ounces of grains everyday. To give you an estimate of just how much six ounces can be, consider that an average slice of bread contains one ounce. A cup of cereal also contains an ounce of grain. Of course, choosing whole grain products will boost your intake. Rice, crackers and pasta are also good grain choices.

### Fruits

Sweet, delicious fruits make choosing healthy foods so easy. Try to eat two cups of fruit each day. That's about the equivalent of an apple and a banana. Toss a handful of grapes into a salad, or slice a banana over a bowl of cereal. Fruit salad is a great way to get a variety of flavours in one sitting. Fruits can be canned, frozen or dried, but fresh is always the best choice. A glass of fruit juice can also count toward fulfilling your daily intake, although fruit juices should be consumed in moderation.

### Dairy

Calcium is necessary for healthy teeth and bones, and is a vital requirement at any age. Children from two to eight years of age should have a calcium intake totaling about two cups of milk. Older children and adults need three cups. When choosing dairy products including milk, cheese and yogurt, go for the low-fat options. If you are lactose intolerant, there are lactose-free products on the market, as well as a variety of calcium-rich fortified foods and beverages.

### Meat and beans

The food guide suggests that we eat five ounces of protein-packed meat or beans every day. This doesn't necessarily mean that sitting down to a ten-ounce strip loin or a half-pounder at the burger joint is a wise idea. Remember, you should be choosing healthy foods. Meat should be baked, grilled or broiled to prevent grease from spoiling your diet. It's easy to vary your protein intake with options like nuts, peas, beans and fish.

### Fat

Certain fats are necessary for the body to function normally, but for the most part it's smart to limit fats wherever possible. Choosing healthy foods is only part of the equation. You also need to be smart in your preparation methods. Instead of loading your skillet with butter, margarine, lard or shortening, sauté your food in a little broth, or just use a non-stick pan. Seasonings and fruit juices can add flavour to your food without loading it up with fat. Foods that are high in fat will raise your weight and your cholesterol, so avoid them whenever you can.

Processed foods are packed with salt, fats and additives, so try to limit your shopping to the fresh meat and produce aisles. If you must choose some pre-packaged foods, make sure to read the nutrition facts and ingredient labels before you buy. This is an important step to limiting your intake of sodium as well as saturated and trans fats.

It really is amazing how choosing healthy foods can literally change your entire lifestyle. When you fuel your body with a nutrient-charged diet, you'll have more energy and a brighter overall outlook. Where you used to lie on the couch after consuming an eight-slice pizza, you'll find you have enough energy after your healthy dinner to enjoy an evening stroll around the neighbourhood. Choosing healthy foods can be hard work, but you'll receive a lifetime of good health for your efforts.