Top 10 tips for a healthy diet

Consuming a healthy diet reduces your risk of developing chronic diseases such as heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, and certain types of cancer. If you already have one of these conditions, a healthy diet may help relieve symptoms and even slow disease progression.

You don't have to change everything at once. Start with one small change that works for you, then build on it over time.

1. Choose whole, minimally processed foods

Choose foods that are close to their original form, with few added ingredients. These foods can provide important nutrients, including vitamins, minerals, and fiber.

What foods should you choose?

- **Vegetables and fruits**: Fresh, frozen, or canned varieties without added sauces or syrups.
- **Whole grains**: Oatmeal, brown rice, and quinoa.
- **Protein-rich foods**: Beans, lentils, eggs, fish, and plain yogurt.
- **Nuts and seeds**: Almonds, walnuts, pumpkin seeds, and sunflower seeds.

Try this: Choose plain oatmeal instead of flavored instant oatmeal, or plain yogurt topped with fresh fruit instead of sweetened fruit-flavored yogurt.

2. Make plant foods the main part of your meals

Plant foods provide vitamins, minerals, fiber, and other nutrients that support your health. Eating a variety of plant foods helps you get different nutrients.

What foods should you choose?

- **Vegetables and fruits**: Choose different colors and varieties to get a wider range of nutrients.
- **Beans, lentils, and soy foods**: Provide protein, iron, and other important nutrients.
- **Nuts and seeds**: Provide protein, healthy fats, and minerals such as zinc.
- **Leafy greens and calcium-set tofu**: Good sources of calcium.

How much should you eat?

Include vegetables and fruits in your meals every day. Aim to make vegetables a substantial part of your plate.

Try this: Add ½ cup of beans to a salad, include a serving of vegetables with lunch and dinner, or replace some meat with lentils in a favorite recipe.

3. Choose fiber-rich foods throughout the day

Fiber supports healthy digestion, helps regulate blood sugar and cholesterol, and feeds beneficial gut bacteria. It can also help you feel full longer.

How much fiber should you eat?

Aim for 20–35 grams of fiber each day. Your needs may vary depending on your age and individual health needs.

Which foods are rich in fiber?

Food	Fiber (approximately)
Beans and lentils	7–9 g per ½ cup
Apple or pear with skin	3–4 g per medium fruit
Blackberries	4 g per ½ cup
Broccoli	3 g per ½ cup
Avocado	13 g per whole avocado
Artichoke	7 g per medium artichoke

Try this: Add ½ cup of beans to a salad or eat a pear with the skin as a snack. These simple choices can add approximately 3–9 grams of fiber to your day.

4. Make whole grains part of your daily diet

Whole grains provide fiber, B vitamins, iron, magnesium, zinc, and other nutrients that support overall health. They can also help support regular digestion and steadier blood sugar levels.

How much should you eat?

Aim for 2–4 servings of whole grains each day, depending on your individual needs.

What counts as one serving?

Whole-grain food	Serving size
Cooked oatmeal	½ cup
Brown rice or quinoa, cooked	½ cup
Whole-grain bread	½ cup

Try this: Choose oatmeal instead of a refined breakfast cereal, replace white rice with brown rice, or use whole-grain bread for your sandwich.

5. Choose healthier fats

Healthy fats support heart and brain health and help the body absorb vitamins A, D, E, and K. Choose more unsaturated fats and limit saturated and trans fats.

- **Choose more often**: olive and canola oils, nuts, seeds, avocados, and fatty fish such as salmon.
- **Limit saturated fats**: butter, cheese, cream, fatty or processed meats, and foods made with coconut or palm oils. Keep saturated fat below 10% of your daily calories. For a 1,800-calorie diet, that's no more than 20 grams per day.
- **Avoid trans fats**: check ingredient lists for partially hydrogenated oils.

Try this: Replace 1 tablespoon of butter with olive oil when cooking, or swap a small handful of unsalted nuts for potato chips.

6. Choose more foods rich in omega-3 fats

Omega-3 fats support heart health and help lower triglycerides (a type of fat in your blood). They also help your body regulate inflammation.

Which foods provide omega-3 fats?

- **Fatty fish**: Salmon, trout, sardines, and certain types of tuna.
- **Plant foods**: Walnuts, chia seeds, ground flaxseeds, and soybeans.

How often should you eat these foods?

- Aim to eat fish, especially fatty fish, twice a week.
- Include plant sources of omega-3 fats regularly, such as walnuts, chia seeds, or ground flaxseeds.

Try this: Eat salmon or trout for dinner twice a week, or add 1 tablespoon of ground flaxseeds or chia seeds to your oatmeal or yogurt.

7. Use less salt

Too much salt (sodium) can raise blood pressure, which increases the risk of heart disease and stroke. Most sodium comes from packaged, prepared, and restaurant foods rather than the salt shaker.

How much sodium should you limit yourself to?

Keep sodium below 2,300 milligrams (mg) per day for most adults. That's about the amount of sodium in 1 teaspoon of table salt.

How can you reduce sodium?

- **Check food labels**: Choose foods labeled “low sodium,” which contain 140 mg or less per serving.
- **Flavor foods without salt**: Use herbs, spices, garlic, lemon juice, or vinegar.
- **When eating out**: Ask for sauces and dressings on the side, and look for lower-sodium options.

Try this: Compare the sodium content of two canned soups and choose the one with less sodium. You can also choose canned vegetables labeled “no salt added”.

8. Limit added sugars

Eating too much added sugar can contribute to weight gain and raise triglycerides (a type of fat in your blood). Choose foods and drinks with less added sugar.

How much added sugar should you limit yourself to?

Aim to limit added sugar to 25 grams (about 6 teaspoons) per day. Children younger than 2 years should avoid added sugars

How can you reduce added sugar?

- **Check food labels**: Look for “Added Sugars” on the Nutrition Facts label, not just “Total Sugars.” The natural sugars in whole fruit and plain milk are not added sugars.
- **Recognize added sugars**: Common examples include table sugar, honey, corn syrup, high-fructose corn syrup, maple syrup, molasses, fruit juice concentrate, dextrose, fructose, maltose, and sucrose.
- **Choose less-sweetened options**: Select plain yogurt, unsweetened drinks, or cereals with less added sugar.

Try this: Replace a 12-ounce regular soda, which typically contains about 39 grams (almost 10 teaspoons) of added sugar, with sparkling water flavored with lemon or lime.

9. Choose foods that help keep blood sugar steady

Foods that raise blood sugar quickly can lead to a rapid rise followed by a drop in blood sugar and energy. Choosing less processed, higher-fiber foods can help keep blood sugar levels steadier.

How can you keep your blood sugar steadier?

- **Build balanced meals and snacks**: Combine carbohydrates with protein and healthy fats to help slow digestion and help you feel full longer.
- **Choose fiber-rich carbohydrates**: Beans, lentils, vegetables, whole-grain breads and cereals, sweet potatoes, and brown rice are good options.
- **Eat whole fruits**: Apples, pears, cherries, peaches, and plums are good choices.

Try this: Pair an apple with 1–2 tablespoons of peanut butter, or add beans and avocado to brown rice for a balanced meal.

10. Build healthier eating habits

Eating regularly can help you manage hunger and maintain steadier energy levels. Paying attention to when and how much you eat can also help you develop healthier eating habits.

How can you build healthier eating habits?

- **Eat regularly**: Establish a consistent pattern of meals and snacks throughout the day.
- **Be mindful of portions**: Pay attention to how much you eat, not just what you eat.
- **Listen to your body**: Learn to recognize physical hunger and fullness, and distinguish hunger from cravings.
- **Plan your meals**: A simple routine might include breakfast, lunch, an afternoon snack, and dinner.

Try this: Plan your meals and snacks for the day. Before eating, notice how hungry you feel, and during your meal, pay attention to when you begin feeling comfortably full.

Start with one small change

Healthy eating doesn't have to be complicated. You don't need to follow all ten tips at once.

Choose one change that fits your lifestyle and try it this week. It could be adding more vegetables to your meals, choosing whole grains, or replacing a sugary drink with water.

Once that change becomes part of your routine, build on it by trying another tip. Small, consistent changes can make a meaningful difference to your health over time.