Diet & Health

Mountain Valleys HEALTH CENTERS

Why is a healthy diet important?

It's important to eat a healthy diet because eating the right foods can keep you healthy now and later in life. It can lower the risk of problems like heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and some types of cancer. It can also help you live longer and improve your quality of life.

What kind of diet is best?

There is no one specific diet that experts recommend for everyone. These include personal preference, culture, religion, allergies/intolerances, and nutritional goals. People also need to consider the cost and availability of different foods.

In general, experts recommend a diet that:

- Includes lots of fruits, vegetables beans, nuts, and whole grains
- Limites red/processed meats, unhealthy fats, sugar, salt, and alcohol

What are dietary patterns?

A "dietary pattern" means generally eating certain types of foods while eliminating others. Some people need to follow a specific dietary pattern because of their health needs. For example, if you have high blood pressure, your doctor might recommend a diet low in salt.

Examples of dietary patterns include:

- **Mediterranean Diet** - Fruits, vegetables, nuts, whole grains, olive oil, fish, poultry, dairy, minimal red meat, lowers risk of stroke.
- **Plant-Based Diet** - Fruits, vegetables, nuts, whole grains, limit/avoid food that comes from animals, such as meat and dairy, this includes vegan and vegetarian, requires alternate sources of protein.
- **Low-Fat Diet** - Fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, limit refined grains/sugar, keeps weight off but offers very little health benefit otherwise.
- **Low-Cholesterol Diet** - Limits foods high in saturated fats, such as red meat, butter and cheese, can help lower the number of unhealthy fats you eat.

What foods are especially healthy?

- **Fruits & Vegetables** - Can help prevent heart disease, stroke and prevent certain types of cancer. Doctors recommend 5 servings per day.
- **Whole Grains** - Can help with weight control, lower the risk of colon cancer, heart disease and diabetes. Doctors recommend 5-8 servings per day. *(i.e. whole-wheat bread/pasta, steel cut oats)*
- **Foods w/Fiber** - Can prevent heart disease and stroke. If diagnosed with Type II Diabetes, it can help control blood sugar. Doctors recommend 25-34 grams fiber per day. *(i.e. fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts, oatmeal, whole-grain bread/cereal)*
- **Foods w/Calcium & Vitamin D** - To help prevent osteoporosis. People who don't get enough vitamin D in their diet might need to take a supplement. Doctors recommend 2-3 servings of food per day with calcium/vitamin D.
- **Foods w/Protein** - Protein helps your muscles and bones stay strong. Doctors recommend 5 servings of protein per day. *(i.e. chicken, fish, eggs, beans, nuts, soy products)*
- **Foods w/Folate** - Also known as "Folic Acid", helps prevent birth defects. Anyone pregnant, or trying to get pregnant, should get at least 400 micrograms of folic acid per day. *(i.e. oranges, orange juice, green leafy vegetables)*
- **Healthy Fats** - Healthy fats are monounsaturated or polyunsaturated and can help lower the risk of heart disease. *(i.e. fatty fish, nuts, nut butter, avocados, olive oil, avocado oil)*

What food/drinks should I avoid/limit?

- **Alcohol** - Limit alcohol intake *(1-2 drinks/day)*
- **Unhealthy Fats** - Found in margarine, fast food and store-bought baked goods.
- **Sugar** - Avoid sugar-sweetened beverages *(soda, sports drinks)* and canned fruits in heavy syrup.
- **Red/Processed Meats** - Limit meats such as bacon, hotdogs, deli cold-cuts and sausage.

What if I'm having trouble improving my diet?

- Try to make fruits/vegetables part of each meal.
- Keep a bowl of fruit out for snacking.
- Try to eat prepared/processed foods less often.
- Try flavored seltzer water or water instead of juice or soda.
- When eating at fast-food restaurants, look for healthier items, like broiled/baked/grilled chicken.
- When you can, choose whole-grains instead of refined grains. Choose chicken, fish or beans instead of red meat and cheese.