

Healthy Eating and Food Safety: Eat Smart, Live Well



The Importance of a Balanced Diet

You've heard it before: "Eat a balanced diet." But what does that mean, and why should you care? Let's break it down.

What is a Balanced Diet?

A balanced diet means eating foods from all five main groups: fruits, vegetables, grains, proteins and dairy. Each group gives your body different nutrients it needs to work properly. Fruits and vegetables provide vitamins and fiber. Grains give you energy. Proteins build strong muscles. Dairy keeps your bones healthy. When you eat from all these groups, your body gets everything it needs to work well and stay healthy.

How You'll Benefit

Eating a balanced diet helps you in real, noticeable ways:

- Higher energy levels throughout the day, without the crashes that come from relying on processed foods and sugar
- Stabilized mood through proper nutrition, which directly affects brain chemistry and can help reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety
- Improved immune system, helping you fight colds and infections more effectively
- Improved sleep quality, skin appearance, and mental clarity
- Significantly lower risk of developing chronic conditions like heart disease, diabetes and certain cancers in the long-term

Simple Steps to Start

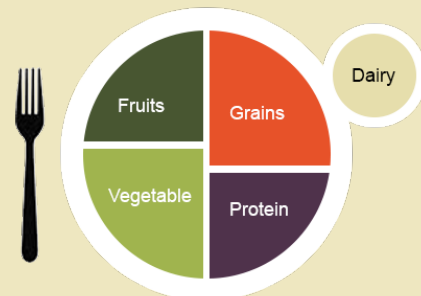
Getting started is easier than you think. Start small by adding more vegetables to your meals. Choose whole grain bread. Drink water instead of soda. Keep healthy snacks like fruit or nuts handy. Plan your meals ahead when time allows. Remember, you don't need to be perfect. It's okay to enjoy treats sometimes — the key is making healthy choices more often than not.

Tips for Eating Healthier

The Healthy Eating Plate is a simple guide that shows you how to build healthy meals. Think of your plate divided into sections, with each section for a different type of food. Here's how it works:

- Start by making half your plate fruits and vegetables. Try to eat lots of different colors like dark green lettuce, red tomatoes, orange carrots and colorful berries. More colors mean more vitamins and minerals.
- A quarter of your plate should be whole grains. Fill one-quarter of your plate with whole grains like brown rice, oatmeal, whole wheat bread or whole grain pasta. Whole grains have more fiber and vitamins than white bread or white rice.
- Make the final quarter of your plate protein. Good protein choices are fish, chicken, beans, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds.

What you drink matters too. Water should be your main drink. You can also have tea or coffee with little or no sugar. Limit milk to one or two glasses per day. If you drink juice, have just one small glass. Try to avoid soda and other sugary drinks. These simple changes can help you feel better and stay healthier. Remember, you don't have to be perfect — just try to make good choices *most* of the time.



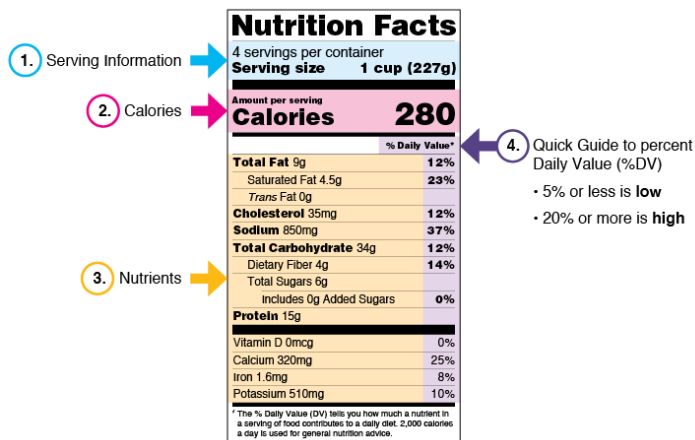
Understanding Nutrition Labels: A Simple Guide

Nutrition labels show important information about your food. They can help you eat healthier, but they might seem confusing at first. The key is knowing what to look for.

Start at the top with the serving size. This tells you how much food the label is talking about. This is an important piece of information — if you eat more than the serving size, you'll need to adjust the numbers on the label. Let's say the serving size is one cup, but you eat two cups. You need to double each number on the label. Many people forget this step and don't realize how much they're actually eating.

Next, look at the nutrients. Calories tell you how much energy you get from one serving. Below that, you'll see fats, cholesterol, sodium, carbohydrates, fiber, sugars and protein. Look at the % Daily Value column on the right. This shows what percent of your daily needs you get from one serving. Here's a simple rule: 5% or less is low, and 20% or more is high. You want low percentages for things like saturated fat, sodium and added sugars. You want high percentages for good things like fiber, vitamins and minerals.

The ingredient list at the bottom matters too. Ingredients are listed from most to least. If sugar or sodium is near the top, the food has a lot of it. Compare labels on similar foods and pick the healthier choice.



Source: U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA)

Food and Nutrition in Your Community

Community nutrition programs do an important job helping people get healthy food and learn about nutrition. These programs include food banks, community gardens, school lunch programs, meals for seniors and WIC (a program for pregnant women, new moms and young children).

Many programs do more than provide food — they also teach cooking classes and show families how to plan meals and shop on a budget. These programs are especially important for people who can't afford enough healthy food. Community nutrition programs work with local groups, health departments, schools and volunteers to help people who need it most. This includes children, older adults, families with low incomes and people with disabilities. The programs teach skills that people can use for their whole lives, helping to build healthier, stronger communities.

Interested in getting involved or looking for assistance?

Find your local community food bank: www.feedingamerica.org/find-your-local-foodbank

Explore the various nation-wide community nutrition programs here:

www.nutrition.gov/topics/food-security-and-access/food-assistance-programs

Cheesy Meatball Casserole



This cheesy meatball casserole is a family favorite that can be made ahead of time and refrigerated for up to three days! Cut back or skip the crushed red pepper for a milder dish.

Makes 8 servings.

Ingredients:

- 16 ounces whole-wheat fusilli pasta
- 1 (24 ounce) jar lower-sodium marinara sauce, divided
- 1 pound 90%-lean ground beef
- ½ cup panko breadcrumbs
- ¼ cup grated sweet onion
- ¼ cup chopped fresh basil, plus more for garnish
- 1 large egg
- 2 teaspoons Italian seasoning
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon crushed red pepper
- 2 cups shredded low-moisture part-skim mozzarella cheese

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Bring a large pot of water to a boil and add pasta; cook until the center of the pasta is still somewhat firm, about 4 minutes less than package directions. Drain the pasta and transfer to a 9x13-inch baking dish. Add half of the marinara sauce to the pasta and stir to coat.
2. Combine ground beef, panko, onion, basil, egg, Italian seasoning, salt and crushed red pepper in a large bowl; gently mix with your hands (do not overmix). Form the mixture into 16 (about 1½ -inch) meatballs, nestling the meatballs into the pasta mixture as you work. Pour the remaining marinara sauce over the casserole and top with cheese.
3. Bake until a thermometer inserted into the meatballs registers at least 160°F and the cheese is lightly browned, 35 to 40 minutes. Garnish with basil, if desired.

NUTRITION INFORMATION

Calories per serving	465
Sodium	607mg
Fat	17g
Saturated Fat	6g
Carbohydrates	53g
Protein	29g
Cholesterol	78mg
Total Sugars	6g
Fiber	7g

Food Safety Matters!



Eating healthy goes beyond the foods you choose. How you handle, cook and store food matters just as much as what you eat. According to [FoodSafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov), every year about one in six Americans get sick from food poisoning. Learning proper food safety habits can help prevent you and those around you from getting food poisoning.

There are four basic steps to keeping food safe:

- 1. Clean.** Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before, during and after handling food; rinse fruits and vegetables before preparing them; and clean your counters, cutting boards and utensils after each use.
- 2. Separate.** Keep certain foods like raw meat away from foods that are ready to eat to prevent cross-contamination. Use separate cutting boards and utensils for meat and vegetables.
- 3. Cook.** Make sure you cook foods to the right internal temperature to kill off any harmful bacteria.
- 4. Chill.** Refrigerate perishable food within two hours after using or eating to stop bacteria from growing.

Different situations and foods require different food safety approaches. For example, raw chicken needs more careful handling than vegetables, and fish has its own storage rules. Special events like backyard barbecues, holiday meals, camping trips and potlucks also need extra attention to keep food safe. One of the most important things in keeping food safe and preventing bacteria from growing in your food is to make sure that foods are cooked to their correct temperature and then stored at the correct temperature.

Below are the temperature recommendations for cooking and storage of common food items.

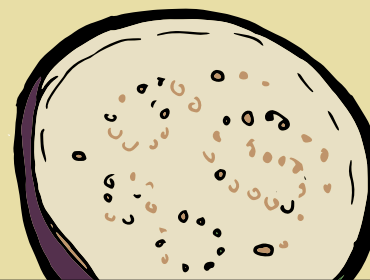
Food	Safe Cooking Temperature	Refrigerator Storage	Freezer Storage
Steaks, roasts, chops	145°F	3-5 days	4-12 months
Ground meat	160°F	1-2 days	3-4 months
Chicken and turkey	165°F	1-2 days	9-12 months
Fish	145°F	1-3 days	3-8 months
Leftovers and prepared foods (pizza, soups, casseroles)	Reheat to 165°F	3-4 days	1-3 months

Sources:

[FoodSafety.gov](https://www.foodsafety.gov)

QUESTIONS ABOUT CORRECT COOKING AND STORAGE TEMPERATURES FOR DIFFERENT FOODS?

Visit www.fsis.usda.gov/food-safety/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/steps-keep-food-safe for a full list!



SEPTEMBER 2026

PROSTATE CANCER AWARENESS

About one in nine men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer in their lifetime. Talk to your healthcare provider about prostate cancer prevention and detection.

Learn more: pcf.org/blue-ribbon-society

HEALTHY SOCIAL MEDIA USE

Social media usage impacts your overall wellbeing. This month, take the time to learn more about healthy social media usage.

Learn more: newsinhealth.nih.gov/2022/09/healthy-social-media-habits

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION MONTH

Understand the warning signs and how you can help prevent suicide. If you or someone needs help, call 988 for the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

Learn more: 988lifeline.org

FOOD SAFETY EDUCATION MONTH

Food safety is part of healthy eating. Learn how to prepare, cook and store food safely to help prevent foodborne illness.

Learn more: fda.gov/food/consumers



SU	MO	TU	WE	TH	FR	SA
		1	2	3	4	5
	Labor Day				Rosh Hashanah Begins	
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Rosh Hashanah Ends						Patriot Day
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Yom Kippur Begins	Yom Kippur Ends International Day of Peace					
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			