

5 Take Home Nutrition Messages

Remember and implement these top five tips to ensure you are giving yourself and those you serve the best in nutrition.



Go Fresh

Eat fresh fruits and vegetables in season to get the most vitamins and minerals. Also choose fresh cuts of lean meat and fish. Canned and frozen fruits, vegetables, meats, and fish also contain many nutrients and can be good choices, but watch out for added ingredients such as salt and sugar. Try to avoid foods that are highly processed because they usually contain more fat, sugar, salt, and other unwanted preservatives. Examples of highly processed foods to watch out for are boxed, canned, or frozen meals, hot dogs, and snack foods. “Go Fresh” by preparing and cooking at home more often.

Read Labels

Looking at food labels and reading the ingredient list can tell you a lot about a food and help you make healthy choices. Food labels will not only help you cut back on certain things, but also increase important nutrients you need to consume in greater amounts.

- Limit the amount of fat, cholesterol, sodium, and sugar. Avoid trans fats. Eating too many of these can cause increased risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes, some cancers, and high blood pressure.
- Help improve your health and decrease your risk of disease by getting enough fiber, iron, calcium, and vitamins A and C. Use the food label to find foods with more of these nutrients.
- Look at the ingredient list to see what has been added to the food. Ingredients are listed in descending order by weight. Find foods that contain fewer and recognizable ingredients. Highly processed foods often contain a long list of unrecognizable ingredients and are usually less healthy.

Limit Added Sugars

There are two types of sugar found in foods, naturally occurring and added sugar. Foods such as fruits and dairy products contain natural sugars. Sugar and syrups added to foods during preparation and processing of the food are called added sugars. Added sugars do not give us needed nutrients, but they do provide extra calories which can lead to weight gain and other health problems.

The most common foods containing added sugar are soft drinks, fruit drinks, candy, cakes, cookies, and dairy desserts. Even ready-to-eat breakfast cereals can contain a lot of added sugar.

Added sugar can come in many forms, so it is important to look at the ingredient list. For example, one food may contain sugar, corn syrup, and dextrose, all of which are added sugars.

Look at the two yogurt ingredient lists below. The plain yogurt contains naturally occurring sugars, but no added sugars. The fruit yogurt contains both natural sugars as well as added sugar.

Plain Yogurt—10 grams sugar (naturally occurring sugar)

INGREDIENTS: CULTURED PASTEURIZED GRADE A NONFAT MILK, WHEY PROTEIN CONCENTRATE, PECTIN, CARRAGEENAN.

Fruit Yogurt—32 grams sugar (10 grams naturally occurring sugar and 22 grams added sugar)

INGREDIENTS: CULTURED GRADE A REDUCED FAT MILK, SUGAR, APPLES, HIGH FRUCTOSE CORN SYRUP, CINNAMON, NUTMEG, NATURAL FLAVORS, AND PECTIN.

Select Whole Grains

Two grain subgroups are whole grains and refined grains. Whole grains contain the entire grain kernel. Refined grains only use part of the kernel and, through processing, lose some nutrients. Choose to eat whole grains to increase fiber and gain other nutritional health benefits. Look for the word “whole” on the ingredient list to be sure the food is a whole grain. Use whole wheat bread, brown rice, oatmeal, and whole grain tortillas. Try different whole grains such as barley and quinoa.



Choose Healthy Fats

Fats play an important role in our bodies like regulating our body temperature, insulating our organs, and helping absorb certain vitamins.

Choose healthy fats such as vegetable oils (olive, canola, peanut), avocados, nuts, and seeds.

Steer clear of trans fat and limit saturated fat in your diet. These fats are often solid at room temperature and include butter, shortening, and high fat dairy products.

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