

NIH News in Health

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Plan Your Plate

Shifting to a Healthy Eating Style

What's the eating style that's best for health? Is it a Mediterranean eating plan? Vegetarian? Low carb? With all the eating styles out there, it's hard to know which one to follow.

Healthy eating is one of the best ways to prevent or delay health problems. Eating well, along with getting enough physical activity, can help you lower your risk of health problems like heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and more. To reach your goals, experts advise making small, gradual changes.

"The best diet to follow is one that is science based, that allows you to meet your nutritional requirements, and that you can stick to in the long run," says Dr. Holly Nicastro, an NIH nutrition research expert. "It's not going to do you any good to follow a diet that has you eating things that you don't like."

The main source of science-based nutrition advice is the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. These guidelines describe which nutrients you need and how much. They also point out which ones to limit or avoid.

"Every five years an expert panel reviews all available scientific evidence regarding nutrition and health and uses that to develop the dietary guidelines," Nicastro explains.

The guidelines are regularly updated because our scientific understanding of what's healthy is continuously evolving. These changes can be confusing, but the



key recommendations have been consistent over time. In general, healthy eating means getting a variety of foods, limiting certain kinds of carbs and fats, watching out for salt, and being aware of your portion sizes.

Limit Added Sugars • Added sugar is the extra sugar added to foods and drinks during preparation. Corn syrup, high-fructose corn syrup, brown sugar, and honey are examples of sweeteners added to foods and drinks, especially regular sodas.

"The sugars present normally in milk and fruit are not considered added sugar," explains Dr. Kimber Stanhope, a nutrition researcher at the University of California, Davis.

Stanhope's research focuses on the effects of added sugar on the development of disease. Her studies have shown that consuming too

much high-fructose corn syrup may increase the risk of weight gain and heart disease.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans suggest a daily limit on added sugar of no more than 10% of calories. That's about the amount in 16 ounces of regular soda (190 calories). You can find information about added sugars on most Nutrition Facts labels now.

"Anybody can improve their diet by substituting fruits and vegetables for sugar as their snacks, as part of their dessert, and as part of their meals," says Stanhope. "There are no advantages of consuming added sugar."

Consider Your Fats • Fat is high in calories and can increase your chances of developing obesity, heart disease, and other health problems. But there are different kinds of fats.

Fats that are liquid at room temperature, or oils, are considered to be healthier than those that are solid. Solid fats are found in high amounts in beef, chicken, pork,

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cheese, butter, and whole milk. Solid fats have more saturated fats than liquid oils. Liquid oils—such as canola, corn, olive, or peanut oil—have mostly unsaturated or polyunsaturated fats.

The dietary guidelines encourage consuming liquid oils rather than solid fats. Nicasastro advises that you examine the fat content on the Nutrition Facts label. The label shows how much saturated fat a product contains. Experts suggest that you aim for getting less than 10% of your calories from saturated fats.

“For the average person, that’s going to be less than 20 grams of saturated fat per day,” Nicasastro says.

For example, a small cheeseburger may have 5 grams of saturated fat, a typical cheeseburger may have 13, and a double cheeseburger with bacon may have 24!

Check Labels for Salt • The Nutrition Facts label also shows salt, or sodium. Experts advise you to limit salt, which tends to be very high in processed foods.

If you eat salty, highly processed food, you can quickly go over the daily limit of one teaspoon of salt

(2,300 milligrams of sodium). Two hot dogs might have 900 milligrams of sodium. A can of ravioli might have 1400 milligrams. Other examples of salty, highly processed foods are bacon, frozen pizzas, and salad dressings.

Along with a lot of added salt, processed foods might have preservatives, sweeteners, and other substances added during preparation.

“Stuff that comes in a box or a bag that has a whole lot of different ingredients—many of which you can’t read and understand or pronounce—those things are highly processed and generally bad for your health,” explains Dr. David C. Goff, Jr., a public health expert at NIH.

Make a Meal Plan • “Figuring out what to eat is less than half the battle,” Nicasastro says. “Sticking to your plan is a bigger challenge. So that’s why it helps to be really prepared and plan ahead.”

You’re much more likely to stick to your meal plan if you have healthy food that is ready to go. Some people find it helpful to prepare meals for the week in advance so that healthy food is within reach.

The DASH eating plan is a good start. DASH was developed by NIH-supported research to help people lower blood pressure without medicine, but it’s for anyone. Studies have shown that it reduces the risk of many diseases.

“The DASH diet is very flexible because you can follow DASH without going to a specialty grocery store. You can follow it with items that are very familiar to most people in this country,” Nicasastro says.

The DASH eating plan is rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, seeds, nuts, and fish. Compared to the typical American diet, it’s lower in salt, added sugars, fats, and red meat. It’s also higher in



Wise Choices

Make Healthy Diet Choices

- Eat a variety of foods—vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, nuts, seeds, lean meat, seafood, eggs, milk, yogurt, and cheese.
- Limit foods that are low in vitamins and minerals.
- Avoid foods with added sugar.
- Limit foods with saturated fat.
- Watch out for foods high in salt.

fiber, potassium, magnesium, and calcium than the typical American diet.

“Anybody can follow it, despite specific preferences or culture,” Nicasastro says. It even works for people who are vegetarian or only eat Kosher foods.

You can find weekly DASH menus and a form to track your food and physical activity habits at www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health-topics/dash-eating-plan.

Get Expert Advice • The Dietary Guidelines for Americans are designed to help people avoid developing obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. But everyone is different. You may have needs and risks that aren’t like the average American. Talk to your health care provider about your unique nutritional needs.

“A great resource for someone to help you with your diet is a registered dietitian nutritionist, or RDN,” Nicasastro says.

You can find this type of expert in your area by visiting the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics website at www.eatright.org/find-an-expert. ■

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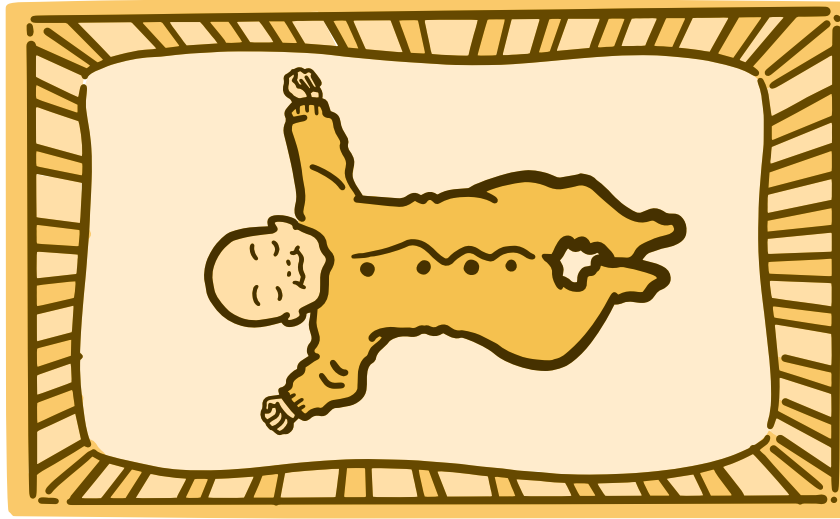
For more about healthy eating, see “Links” in the online article: newsinhealth.nih.gov/2018/12/plan-your-plate

Safe Sleep for Baby

Reducing the Risk of SIDS

Did you know that babies should sleep on their back rather than their belly? Research has revealed many risk factors for sudden infant death, and sleep position is the most important one.

Each year in the U.S., about 3,500 infants die suddenly and unexpectedly in their sleep. In about half of these deaths, doctors can't find a medical reason to explain why, even after a complete review. When the doctor doesn't have answers, the death is called sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS).



to understand what's going on in those babies and hopefully identify a screening tool to help save their life," Koso-Thomas says.

What causes SIDS may not be known, but several things raise the risk. In addition to sleep position, research shows that soft bedding above or below your infant is a danger.

"There is no need to have a blanket," Koso-Thomas says. Instead,

dress your baby in sleep clothing, such as a onesie, that's designed to keep them warm. This keeps them safer.

Make sure they're dressed appropriately for the environment. But don't overbundle. Check for signs that they're too hot, like sweating or if their chest is hot to the touch.

It's important to prevent your baby's nose and mouth from becoming covered. "The area around them should not have any clutter—no toys, no bumpers," Koso-Thomas emphasizes.

Experts also advise that you keep your baby in the same room, but not in your bed with you. When you're done feeding, place your baby in their safe area, such as a cradle next to your bed.

"The safe sleep environment is the biggest factor that's going to reduce or eliminate the SIDS risk for a baby that's less than a year old," Koso-Thomas says. See the Wise Choices box to learn other tips for providing a safe sleep environment. ■

"All babies are at risk, especially those under 1 year of age," explains Dr. Marion W. Koso-Thomas, a child health expert at NIH. Babies are most vulnerable to SIDS up to 4 months old.

"One of the critical pieces to SIDS risk reduction is how the baby sleeps," she says. "Babies who are sleeping should be on their back."

Limit a baby's belly time to when they're awake. A baby shouldn't sleep on their belly or side.

Why does sleep position matter? Sleeping on the belly lowers an infant's blood pressure and reduces their ability to get oxygen to the brain. Between 2 and 4 months old, especially, the reflex to breathe to get more oxygen is repressed when an infant sleeps on their belly.

Researchers also suspect that a brain condition may be a cause of SIDS. They have been studying the part of the brain that controls breathing and heart rate during sleep. They think these babies may not have the reflex to awaken when breathing becomes impaired.

"More research needs to be done



Wise Choices

Help Protect Your Baby From SIDS

- Always place babies on their back to sleep, for naps and at night.
- Use a firm and flat sleep surface, such as a mattress in a crib. Cover the surface with a fitted sheet.
- Do not use any blankets, bumpers, toys, or other soft items in the sleep area.
- Breastfeed your baby if you can.
- Share your room with your baby. Keep your baby close to your bed in a crib or other surface made for infants for the first year, or at least the first 6 months.
- Don't smoke or let others smoke around your baby or in your baby's environment.
- Get regular health checkups and recommended vaccinations for your baby.



Web Links

For more about safe sleep for your baby, see "Links" in the online article: newsinhealth.nih.gov/2018/12/safe-sleep-baby



Health Capsules

For links to more information, please visit our website and see these stories online.

Probiotic May Stop Staph

A new study suggests that people who have a certain helpful microbe, or probiotic, in their gut may be less likely to have harmful “staph” germs.

Staph is short for *Staphylococcus aureus*. It’s a very common germ. Staph usually doesn’t cause problems. But it can cause boils, pneumonia, and other infections.

Antibiotics usually cure staph infections. But some staph germs are resistant to treatment. These infections can be deadly.

NIH-funded researchers have been studying whether probiotics can help prevent staph infections. *Bacillus* bacteria are often found

in probiotic products. *Bacillus* are found on vegetables harvested from the ground.

Researchers examined the bacteria in 200 stool samples from people who live in rural Thailand, where people are more likely to eat fresh vegetables. About half the samples contained *Bacillus*. Many of the people studied had staph. But no staph was found in any of the people with *Bacillus*.

In laboratory tests, the researchers found that *Bacillus* makes specific substances that stop staph from thriving. When they gave mice a probiotic product that

contained *Bacillus*, staph didn’t grow in the gut.

“Probiotics frequently are recommended as dietary supplements to improve digestive health,” says Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, director of NIH’s National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. “This is one of the first studies to describe precisely how they may work to provide health benefits.”

However, more studies are needed to test whether a probiotic product with *Bacillus* could prevent the growth of staph in people. ■

Inspire Others to Move More and Eat Better

More than two of every three adults carry excess weight. Overweight and obesity increase the risk of diabetes, kidney disease, heart disease, and other health problems. Communities across the country need help.

Some black women have a high risk of being overweight. The “Sisters Together” program was developed by NIH and other experts, along with black women in the Boston area who volunteered to

help. The program encourages black women to get physically active and make healthy food choices so they can reach and maintain a healthy weight.

Anybody can start a local program—even you! The step-by-step guide will show you how.

You’ll find lots of ideas and tips. The guide includes examples of activities that have worked for other community program leaders.

Sample fliers, fact sheets, emails, and messages for social media are all included.

Although the program was tailored for black women, others can also benefit from these messages about physical activity and healthy eating.

Visit www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/weight-management/sisters-together-program-guide. ■



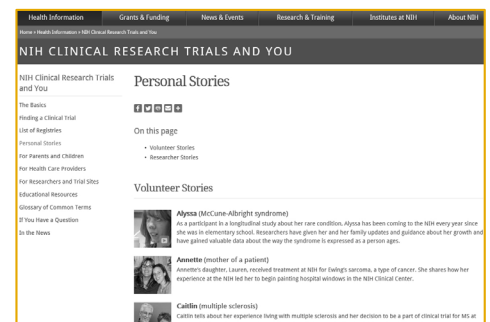
Featured Website

Personal Stories

www.nih.gov/health-information/nih-clinical-research-trials-you/personal-stories

Have you ever wondered who takes part in clinical research studies? Clinical research is medical research that involves people just

like you. Hear personal stories from volunteers and researchers who are helping others and moving science forward.



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