

# Eating Well for Weight and Health

Healthy bodies come in all shapes and sizes. If your weight is affecting your health and quality of life, some of the strategies in this handout may help you.



## Getting Started

There are many strategies that can help you eat well for your weight and health. This handout talks about What, How much, When, and Why we eat. It also mentions how being physically active and keeping a lifestyle journal can benefit you.

Everybody's journey is different. If you're ready to make a change, you can choose what works best for you!

## What

What you choose to eat and drink can have a big impact on your health and weight. Use the following tips and the *Guide to Healthy Food and Drink Choices* (page 3) to help you.

### Choose foods that help you feel full

- Eat foods with protein and fibre at meals and snacks.
- Include small portions of healthy fats.

### Choose healthy drinks

- Drink mostly water through the day.
- Choose drinks with added sugar less often.

### Shop for groceries with your goals in mind

- Go to the grocery store with a plan and follow it.
- Buy food and drinks that will support your goals.
- Have something to eat before you go to the grocery store.

### Limit foods high in added sugar, salt, and saturated fats

- Foods high in added sugar, salt, and saturated fats can be less filling. This makes them easy to overeat. Have these foods less often and in small amounts.
- Choose foods that are grilled, boiled, barbequed, or baked.
- Eat foods prepared at home more often. This lets you decide what goes in your food and how it is cooked.

### Read food labels

- The Nutrition Facts table can tell you how many calories and nutrients a food has in a serving.
- To learn about reading food labels, talk to your healthcare provider. Or, visit [unlockfood.ca](http://unlockfood.ca) and search for *food labels*.

## How much

Along with what you eat, how much you eat or drink can affect your weight and health. Below are tips to help you be aware of how much you eat.

- Try using a smaller plate.
- Aim for a healthy plate at every meal:
  - ½ plate vegetables and fruits
  - ¼ plate protein foods
  - ¼ plate whole grain foods
- If you're eating away from home and portions are large, you can share a meal. Or, eat half and take the rest home for another day.



## When

When and how often you eat can change day-to-day. It depends on your daily schedule, stress, emotions, or physical activity. For your weight and health, you may benefit from:



- eating something within 2 hours of waking up
- spacing what you eat over the day
- not skipping meals or eating too often (grazing)
- considering having snacks, if this helps you manage portions at meals

Some people find eating 3 meals and snacks as needed works well for them.

## Why

Think about the reasons you eat. This can help you be more aware of your food choices and your eating habits. Hunger and appetite are two reasons we eat. Both hunger and appetite can increase when you eat less.

**Hunger** happens when your body needs food. When you start to feel hungry, your stomach may start to growl and you may feel weak, dizzy, or irritable.

Listen to your body's hunger signals. This can help you eat the amount of food your body needs.

**Appetite** is the desire to eat. Appetite can be affected by many things, including emotions (such as boredom, stress, sadness, or happiness), social events, food advertising, or habits. Sometimes these things can cause us to eat more than our body needs.

## Tips to manage hunger and appetite:

- Before you eat, ask yourself if you're hungry, or if you want to eat for other reasons. Is your stomach starting to growl, or are you upset, bored, or tired?

If you're hungry, eat! If you're not hungry, try an activity that helps you listen to how your body is feeling, such as going for a walk or calling a friend.



- Eat slowly, take small bites, and chew your food well. Notice when your stomach feels comfortable and satisfied.
- Eat without distractions so that you notice how your body is feeling. For example, choose to eat at the kitchen table instead of in front of the TV, computer, or while driving.
- Pay attention to your thoughts and self-talk. Think about changing negative thoughts to positive ones. For example, instead of "I'm not allowed to eat that," you can say "I love that food and I'll enjoy it every now and then."

## Be active

Activity is an important part of a healthy lifestyle. Some of the many benefits of activity include: a lower risk of heart disease, having stronger bones and muscles, improved sleep, and improved mental health.

For more information on activity, talk to your healthcare provider or visit [Canada.ca](http://Canada.ca) and search for [Physical Activity Tips for Adults](#).

## Keep a lifestyle journal

People who keep a lifestyle journal tend to make lifestyle changes that last. You can choose what to record: the food you eat (what, how much, when, and why), and/or your physical activity. You can also choose how to record, and how often to record. Make a plan that works best for you.

# Guide to healthy food and drink choices

Below are food lists divided into *Choose more often* and *Choose less often*. The foods in these lists are only examples. The table below tells you how the foods were divided.

● Choose more often	▼ Choose less often
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• higher in vitamins and minerals</li> <li>• higher in protein or fibre</li> <li>• little or no added sugar, salt (sodium), and/or saturated fats</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lower in vitamins and minerals</li> <li>• lower in protein and/or fibre</li> <li>• higher in added sugar, salt (sodium), and/or saturated fats</li> </ul>

Using the *Choose more often* and *Choose less often* lists in the food tables below can help you make healthy food choices. Eat a variety of healthy foods each day. In each list, you can use the space under *My foods* to write foods that you would normally eat.

## Vegetables and fruits

Aim to make half of your plate vegetables and fruit. Choose a variety of vegetables and fruits each day to help you get enough vitamins, minerals, and fibre. Fresh, frozen, or canned vegetables and fruit can all be healthy choices.



● Choose more often	▼ Choose less often
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fresh vegetables and fruit</li> <li>• frozen vegetables and fruit with little or no added sugar or seasonings</li> <li>• baked, boiled or roasted potatoes</li> <li>• canned vegetables, rinsed or low sodium</li> </ul> <p><b>My foods:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• canned fruit in water or juice</li> <li>• dried fruit with little or no added sugar</li> <li>• low sodium vegetable juice</li> <li>• frozen vegetables or fruit with added sugar/seasonings</li> <li>• breaded or fried vegetables</li> <li>• French fries and hash browns</li> <li>• canned vegetables, not rinsed, high sodium</li> <li>• canned fruit in syrup</li> <li>• dried fruit with added sugar</li> <li>• 100% fruit juice or sugar sweetened fruit-flavoured beverages</li> <li>• vegetable juice cocktail</li> </ul> <p><b>My foods:</b></p>

## Protein foods and drinks

Include protein foods at every meal and snack to help manage hunger and to get enough protein, vitamins, and minerals. Protein foods from plants also provide fibre, and most are lower in saturated fats than animal protein foods.



● Choose more often	▼ Choose less often
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• pulses: beans, lentils, chickpeas, peas, dried or canned, low sodium, rinsed</li> <li>• soy foods: edamame, soy nuts</li> <li>• vegetarian meat substitutes, made with soy or pea protein</li> <li>• eggs or liquid egg whites</li> <li>• fish and shellfish, fresh or canned in water</li> <li>• lean meat, trimmed: beef, pork, lamb, bison, moose, venison</li> <li>• skinless poultry: chicken, turkey, duck, goose</li> </ul> <p><b>My foods:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• unflavoured fortified soy beverages</li> <li>• unflavoured milk, less than 2%</li> <li>• cheese, less than 20% M.F.</li> <li>• cottage or ricotta cheese, 1–2% M.F.</li> <li>• yogurt</li> <li>• kefir or yogurt drinks with little or no added sugar</li> <li>• smoothies, homemade without juice and little or no added sugar</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• canned baked beans</li> <li>• processed meats: bologna, salami, ham, bacon, sausage, hotdogs</li> <li>• regular ground beef or pork</li> <li>• marbled/untrimmed meat: beef, pork, lamb, veal, bison</li> <li>• poultry with skin: chicken, turkey, duck, goose</li> <li>• canned chicken or ham</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• meat, fish, or poultry with store-bought coatings (breaded, battered)</li> <li>• flavoured milk or soy beverages with added sugar</li> <li>• milk, more than 2%</li> <li>• cheese, more than 20% M.F.</li> <li>• cottage or ricotta cheese, more than 2% M.F.</li> <li>• kefir or yogurt drinks with added sugar</li> </ul> <p><b>My foods:</b></p>
<p>M.F. = Milk Fat</p>	

## Grain foods

Choose whole grain foods with little or no added sugar. Whole grain foods have important nutrients such as fibre, vitamins, and minerals.



● Choose more often	▼ Choose less often
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>whole grain foods: bread, naan, pita, tortilla, roti</li> <li>brown or wild rice</li> <li>bulgur, millet, quinoa, barley</li> <li>whole grain pasta</li> <li>whole grain, low sodium crackers</li> </ul> <p><b>My foods:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>unsweetened, whole grain hot or cold cereal</li> <li>air popped popcorn without toppings or with low sodium seasonings</li> </ul> <p><b>My foods:</b></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>white grain foods: bread, naan, pita, tortilla, roti</li> <li>white rice</li> <li>white pasta or noodles</li> <li>white crackers</li> <li>high sugar and/or low fibre cereal</li> </ul> <p><b>My foods:</b></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>tortilla chips</li> <li>baked goods: danishes, donuts, pies, cakes, croissants, store-bought muffins, cookies</li> <li>regular microwave popcorn or theatre popcorn</li> </ul>

## Oils and fats

Include small amounts of healthy fats from the *Choose more often* list every day to help lower your risk of heart disease.



● Choose more often	▼ Choose less often
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>unsaturated oils: olive, canola, peanut, sesame, soybean, corn, safflower, sunflower, avocado</li> <li>non-hydrogenated margarine</li> <li>light cream, less than 10% M.F.</li> <li>nut/seed butters: peanut, almond, tahini</li> </ul> <p><b>My foods:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>unsalted nuts and seeds</li> <li>avocado</li> <li>salad dressing, yogurt-based or oil and vinegar</li> <li>sour cream, 5% M.F. or less</li> <li>light cream cheese</li> </ul> <p><b>My foods:</b></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>saturated oils: palm, coconut</li> <li>butter</li> <li>cream, 10% M.F. or more: half and half, whipping cream</li> <li>creamy salad dressing</li> <li>regular sour cream</li> </ul> <p><b>My foods:</b></p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>regular cream cheese</li> <li>meat drippings or gravy</li> <li>mayonnaise</li> <li>coconut milk</li> <li>nut/seed butters with added sugar, such as hazelnut chocolate spread</li> </ul>

## Other foods and drinks

Other foods include foods that don't fit in the tables above, such as condiments and sweets.

● Choose more often	▼ Choose less often
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• water</li> <li>• fortified almond, rice, oat, hemp, or cashew beverages with no added sugar</li> <li>• club soda or mineral water</li> <li>• coffee or tea, with or without milk</li> <li>• low sodium broth or bouillon cubes/powder</li> <li>• vinegar</li> </ul> <p><b>My foods:</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• herbs and spices</li> <li>• condiments low in sugar or sodium: horseradish, mustard, hot sauce</li> <li>• sugar-free gelatin or gum</li> <li>• sugar substitutes</li> <li>• diet pop</li> <li>• jam or fruit spread with little or no sugar added</li> <li>• tomato paste</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• almond, rice, oat, coconut, hemp, cashew beverages with added sugar</li> <li>• other drinks with added sugar or fat: pop, slushies, ice tea, specialty coffees, energy drinks, milkshakes</li> <li>• coffee and tea drinks with added sugar/fat</li> <li>• alcohol</li> <li>• processed cheese spread</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• condiments or sauces high in sugar or sodium: barbecue sauce, ketchup, oyster sauce, soy sauce, fish sauce</li> <li>• sweets: fruit roll ups, fruit flavoured gummy snacks, chocolate, candy</li> <li>• sugar, honey, syrup</li> <li>• jam with added sugar</li> <li>• non-dairy coffee whitener</li> </ul> <p><b>My foods:</b></p>

## Next steps

### Goal setting

This resource includes several lifestyle choices for your weight and health. Change can be hard, especially if we try to make too many changes at once. When you're ready to make a change, it can help to set a goal, and break your goal into smaller steps. You're more likely to reach smaller goals.

### More support

Talk to your health care provider about a referral to a dietitian if you would like more support with eating well for your weight and health.

Sometimes, managing your weight and health can be complicated. Talk to your health care provider if you have concerns about:

- how a medicine or medical condition may be affecting your weight
- feeling out of control around food, or if you are really concerned about your eating behaviours

Photo sources: © Obesity Action Coalition; Canada.ca/FoodGuide