

A photograph of two women sitting at a table in a restaurant or cafe. The woman on the left has long brown hair and is wearing a white and blue patterned sleeveless top. She is smiling and holding a fork with a piece of food on it. The woman on the right has dark curly hair and is wearing a blue and white striped top. She is also smiling. In front of them is a white bowl filled with green salad. To the left, there is a glass of water with a straw. The background shows shelves with various food items and a counter.

HEALTHY EATING,
MADE SIMPLE:
A Guide for Women



JOHNS HOPKINS
MEDICINE



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INTRODUCTION

It can be hard to keep up with all the latest news on healthy eating. What new superfood is everyone raving about? Are carbs good or bad now? If you're wondering which foods are best for your health, well, it's not necessarily whatever's trending this week. (In fact, Johns Hopkins researchers found that [commercial fad diets are short on science](#).) The best way to eat well is to focus on healthy foods, not fads. So where do you start?

In this guide, we'll give you practical, expert-approved advice from Johns Hopkins nutritionists for developing good eating habits now that will help you maintain a healthy weight, keep you feeling energized — and give you a foundation for long-term health.

FIND A HEALTHY DIET YOU CAN STICK TO

Health professionals recommend developing healthy eating habits you can stick with over the long term. You may see slower progress if you're trying to shed pounds, but you're more likely to maintain a lower weight in the long run.



Go Mediterranean

The Mediterranean diet: It's one that's here to stay. You may have seen it on TV or read about it in a magazine — and this one isn't just hype. Research confirms the health benefits of the Mediterranean diet, including a 30 percent reduction in [heart disease](#) (the number one cause of death in women), an 80 percent lower risk of early death and a 43 percent lower risk of weight gain. The diet emphasizes plant-based foods, lean proteins and healthy fats.

30%

REDUCTION IN
HEART DISEASE

80%

LOWER RISK OF
EARLY DEATH

43%

LOWER RISK OF
WEIGHT GAIN

How do you go Mediterranean?

Stock up on:

- whole grains such as oatmeal, quinoa and brown rice instead of refined carbs such as white bread and pasta
- fish and poultry instead of red and processed meats
- fruits and vegetables, including leafy greens
- beans and lentils that provide important fiber, protein, vitamins and minerals
- healthy (unsaturated) fats such as olive oil, nuts and avocados in place of saturated fats found in fried foods and animal products such as beef and full-fat dairy items.
- low-fat dairy foods, such as skim milk and low-fat yogurt, which provide calcium to strengthen your bones
- red wine (optional), for a daily glass
- limited sweets and processed foods

Ready to get started? Get more details on the [Mediterranean diet](#).



Are Eggs All They're Cracked Up to Be?

You may wonder whether eggs are a healthy choice, given the bad rap they've gotten in the past.

Previous dietary guidelines have recommended limiting dietary cholesterol, including from sources such as eggs. Scientists now know that dietary cholesterol doesn't raise blood cholesterol — it's just that many high-cholesterol foods are also high in saturated fat. Eggs are actually low in saturated fat, making them an ideal low-calorie protein source. That is some eggs-tra good news!

MAXIMIZE NUTRITION WITH MINIMAL TIME

Sometimes life can get in the way of a healthy diet. Our experts share some tips on how to get the most out of your diet, even when you are short on time.

Planning Ahead Helps You Stay on Track

Research shows that people who frequently eat meals at home consume fewer calories than those who cook less. They also eat fewer carbohydrates, less sugar and fat, and more fruits and vegetables. Overall, the quality of their diet is better.

MEAL
TIP

Here's a trick: Learn to make simple versions of your favorite foods at home, such as pizza or tacos. When you make food at home, it's generally going to be healthier than what you get from a restaurant.



A little meal planning can make it easier to stick to healthy eating habits. Setting aside time to plan your meals and shopping list puts nutritious ingredients at your fingertips all week long.

Need some strategies to make meal planning part of your routine?

- Find a system or app for saving recipes. It doesn't have to be complicated. Download an app to your phone, save a folder on your laptop, or print out recipes and store them in a binder — whatever's easiest for you to have on hand.
- Pick the same day each week to plan meals and make your shopping list.
- Choose a theme for each night, such as Meatless Mondays, so it's easier to come up with ideas.
- Plan meals you can repurpose later. Why not turn Sunday's roast chicken into Monday's chicken salad?



Mix It Up for Meatless Mondays

Going meat-free on Mondays is a great way to cut back on saturated fat, but it doesn't have to mean cutting back on protein. In fact, Meatless Mondays can be a fun way to add some variety to your diet. Get suggestions for [five protein-packed](#) foods and get inspired!

Grab Your Chef's Hat: Easy Meal Prep (We Swear!)

Preparing healthy meals doesn't have to take hours. Keep things simple with easy recipes, focusing on healthy versions of foods you already like. Strategies for making meal prep easier:

Keep it simple. Plan meals where you only have to assemble ingredients, such as a salad with tuna or hard-boiled eggs on top.

Buy pre-cut vegetables. Reduce your time spent washing, cutting and cleaning up before you even start cooking.

Try a meal delivery service. It may be a bit pricier, but you'll learn new recipes and be exposed to a variety of ingredients — maybe you'll even discover a new favorite food!

Stock frozen vegetables. Keep frozen vegetables on hand for an easy, nutrient-packed addition to any meal.

Spice it up. Bored of baked chicken? Using different herbs and spices can completely change the flavor of simple ingredients. Buy pre-made spice blends to keep it simple, or make your own.

Plan a prep day. Prep a week's worth of healthy lunches on Sunday. Having lunch ready to go means you're less likely to get off track during the week.

Double up. Save time by cooking in large batches. Pack leftovers for lunch or freeze them for an easy dinner on a hectic day.



WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO MANAGE YOUR WEIGHT?

You think you eat well, you try to stay active, and yet: You step on the scale and get an unwelcome surprise. One reason? Your metabolism tends to slow down as you age. A slower metabolism means you are burning fewer calories every day — which means it is easier to gain weight. What to do?



Ditch the Fads and Go for Long-Term Success

Research shows crash dieting may have a negative impact on your metabolism, and restrictive diets that lead to rapid weight loss carry a high risk of regaining the weight.

Most people who lose a large amount of weight regain it two to three years later. Researchers offer a theory why:

- When you decrease the number of calories you consume, you also experience a drop in the rate at which your body burns calories. As a result, it takes longer to burn calories, making it increasingly difficult to lose weight over a period of months. Also, a lower rate of burning calories may make it easier to regain weight after resuming a more normal diet.

- To lose weight and keep it off, you need to make permanent changes in your diet and exercise routine. Think of it as, “This is how I now eat,” rather than, “I’ll do this for a while so I lose weight, and then I’ll stop.”

What’s a Healthy Weight, Anyway?

Body mass index (BMI) is a measure of your weight relative to your height. A BMI of less than 18.5 is underweight, 18.5 to 24.9 is normal weight, 25 to 29.9 is overweight and anything above 30 is considered obese. Wondering what your BMI is? Our adult [BMI calculator](#) can tell you in seconds.

<18.5	18.5 - 24.9	25 - 29.9	30>
underweight	normal	overweight	obese

BMI is a rough indicator of overall health risk. A BMI that is too low or too high could potentially put you at increased risk of disease.

But this measurement of your health has limitations:

- It doesn’t take body composition into account, so people who are more muscular might be perfectly healthy — but wind up with a BMI in a higher category.
- There is also a wide range of weights that fit in the normal category, but not all of them are right for everyone.

Maintaining a healthy weight lowers your risk of diabetes and [heart disease](#), which is the number one cause of death for women. If you’re concerned about your weight, talk with your health care provider about what a healthy weight might be for you. If you need to lose weight, dropping 7 to 10 percent of your body weight can provide significant health benefits.

Simple Ways to Lose Weight

Strategies to help you maintain a healthy weight:

Recognize portion distortion. Portion sizes have grown in recent decades. Your fist is roughly the size of a cup, which is helpful for measuring a cup of whole grains or the two cups of vegetables recommended as a starting point for a balanced meal. Out to dinner? Restaurants are notorious for their big portions. Cut yours in half.

Share meals wisely. Sometimes we wind up eating portions similar to those of our dining companions. If you're sharing a meal with a man, remember that women typically need fewer calories than men do.

Identify emotional triggers. Pay attention to when you eat out of sadness, anxiety or boredom. Develop healthy coping strategies for these emotions, such as going out for a brisk walk, to help with weight management.

Keep a food log. Write down everything you eat and how you feel for a few days to tune into your eating habits and how your emotions relate to them. Use a notebook, this [printable food log](#) or one of many calorie-tracking smartphone apps. Capture details such as how hungry you are, how much you eat, where you are, who you're with and how you feel afterward.



Eat Out Without Going All Out

Just because you're committed to eating right doesn't mean you have to give up your social life. ("I can't join you tonight. I'm slicing my carrot sticks.") There are plenty of healthy choices available at restaurants. Plan wisely and you can enjoy a meal you won't regret. Try these tips:

Preview your options. Many restaurants make their menus available online, and some even post nutrition information. If you have a chance to check out the menu before you go out, you're less likely to make an impulse decision when you order.

Share with a friend. Since restaurants tend to serve huge portion sizes, you can split an entree with a friend and still have a decent-size meal. Alternatively, you don't need to finish every last bite. Stop when you feel full, and ask the restaurant to pack up the leftovers for you to take home.

Study the salad menu. Salads have evolved past limp iceberg lettuce and mealy tomatoes. Look for one that is chockfull of all the good (and fun) stuff — fresh or grilled vegetables, slices of chicken or lean meat, beans, tofu and whole grains.

Be wary of sides and sauces. Ask for your dressing or sauce on the side, so you can control how much you add. If your meal comes with fries, ask if you can substitute a side salad.

Watch the "extras." Bread and butter, chips and salsa, drinks, appetizers, desserts and nibbles off your friends' plates add up! Be mindful.





What About Snacks?

Yes, it's true: Snacks can be part of a healthy diet. Sometimes they're even essential! After all, if you show up starving to a meal, you might eat too fast and wind up overeating. Smart snacking helps avoid this. Choose snacks that give you a high “bang for your buck” — foods that are filling and provide good nutrition for the calories. Eating snacks is also a great way to load up on fruits and vegetables. Try fruits or vegetables paired with:

- plain or vanilla Greek yogurt
- an ounce of nuts
- two tablespoons of nut butter
- a cheese stick
- hummus



Don't Eat and Text: How to Eat Mindfully

Another way to keep a healthy weight is to simply slow down while eating. Mindful eating means paying closer attention to what you eat, so you can enjoy your food more and stop when you've had enough. In a world full of electronic distractions, it's easy to eat mindlessly, which sets you up for overeating.

Try these tips to practice mindful eating:

- Sit down at the table and not in front of the TV.
- Turn off electronic devices (you're more likely to overeat if you're scrolling through social media while absentmindedly eating dinner).
- Eat slowly.
- Think about what you're eating and whether you like it.
- Check in mentally to see if you're full, and if you are, stop eating.

Get more expert advice on [maintaining weight loss](#), including the truth about weight cycling.

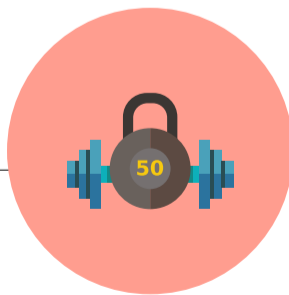
How Important Is Exercise?

While your diet plays the biggest role in weight loss, exercise is also important for weight management. Your workout routine should include both aerobic (cardio) exercise and strength training every week.

- **Aerobic:** Get 150 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise weekly. If you exercise vigorously — such as running, swimming or dancing — you can cut that time in half.
- **Strength training:** Women lose muscle mass as they age. Strength training or lifting weights twice a week builds healthy muscle mass and boosts your metabolism. This type of training also strengthens your bones and helps [prevent osteoporosis](#).



150 MINUTES
WEEKLY



2X A WEEK

Be Careful of Compensation

It's possible to compensate for exercise by eating more after a workout, and some people are more prone to this than others. Be aware of what you're eating so you don't sabotage your efforts — it's very easy to consume more calories than you just burned.



HEALTHY EATING ACROSS LIFE STAGES

Pregnancy Eating Do's and Don'ts

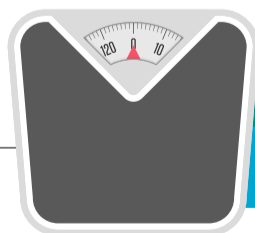
If you're pregnant, you know you need to eat for two now (but don't eat twice as much). Try these tips to eat well during pregnancy:

DO load up on the good stuff — whole grains, vegetables and fruits, low-fat dairy foods, lean proteins, healthy fats (think olive oil and avocados) and water, water, water.

DON'T eat foods that can increase the risk of infection and harm you and your baby. Hold off on deli meats, soft cheeses, sushi and undercooked eggs for a few months. Limit caffeine, and avoid alcohol and high-mercury seafood such as shark, swordfish, king mackerel and ahi tuna. Choose light tuna instead of albacore for lower mercury levels — higher levels could be harmful to your baby.

DO pop your baby pills. Prenatal vitamins promote the baby's healthy development. Talk to your doctor about taking a prenatal vitamin that has iron, calcium and folic acid, and find out if you should take an omega-3 supplement as well.

DO gain the right amount of weight. Although you're eating for two, one of you (the baby!) is very small. You don't need to double your calories. For most women, adding an extra 340 calories per day during the second trimester and 450 calories per day during the third trimester will do the trick.



Second trimester: +340 calories

Third trimester: +450 calories

Nutrition Needs As You Get Older

As your body adjusts to the changes of menopause, tweaking your diet can help. Nutrients and foods to consider incorporating into your diet include:

Calcium: Increasing calcium is important for fighting [osteoporosis](#), a disease that thins the framework of the bones. But as you age, calcium absorption decreases. Try to eat calcium-rich foods, such as milk, kale, broccoli and yogurt. And talk to your doctor about whether a calcium supplement is right for you. You'll also need 600 IU of vitamin D to help you absorb the calcium. Your doctor may recommend getting your vitamin D levels checked and taking a supplement if levels are low.



Protein: Eating enough protein is necessary for bone health and can help protect against age-related muscle loss when paired with muscle-building physical activity.

Iron: After menopause, you no longer need as much iron to replace the iron in the blood lost in menstruation. Talk to your doctor or a dietitian to figure out how to get the recommended amount of iron in your diet.

Whole soy foods: Some women find that eating soy helps reduce menopause symptoms. Whole soy foods contain phytoestrogens, compounds similar to estrogen, which can improve symptoms. In addition, soy protein can help lower bad cholesterol (LDL). While those with a history of estrogen receptor-positive [breast cancer](#) should limit soy products such as pills, powders and supplements, whole soy foods have not been associated with increased disease risk.

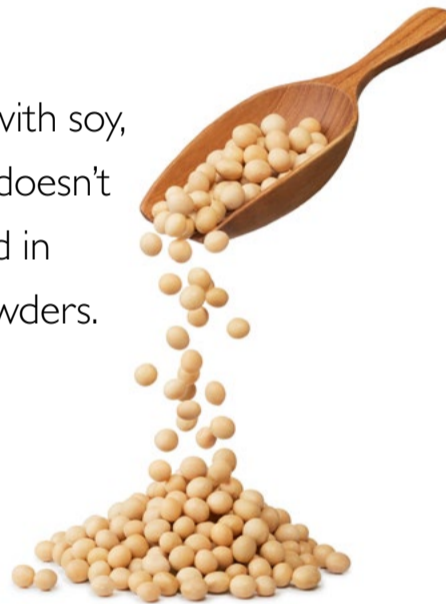
Need help figuring out the right diet for you? Ask your doctor for a referral to a dietitian.

The Joy of Whole Soy

To get the health benefits associated with soy, you have to eat whole soy foods. This doesn't include the textured soy protein found in meat substitutes or processed soy powders.

Whole soy foods include:

- edamame (soybeans) and soynuts
- tofu, tempeh and miso
- soy milk



The MIND Diet: Brain Food

You know about eating foods that are good for your heart, but what about foods that are good for your brain? Can what you eat affect your cognition — your ability to think and reason?

The MIND diet may not make you better at trigonometry, but it's firmly linked to a lower risk of developing [Alzheimer's disease](#). In fact, a large study found that this diet may result in:

- 53 percent reduced risk of Alzheimer's disease in people who followed the diet strictly
- 35 percent reduction in risk for those who followed it moderately well

What Is the MIND Diet?

The MIND diet combines two approaches to healthy eating:

- **DASH diet:** These letters stand for Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension ([high blood pressure](#)). Johns Hopkins doctor and hypertension expert [Lawrence Appel](#) was instrumental in developing the DASH diet, in a study supported by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute.
- **Mediterranean diet:** This diet has been proven to cut heart and neurodegenerative disease risk.



“MIND” is a mashup of DASH and Mediterranean: Mediterranean-DASH Intervention for Neurodegenerative Delay. Neurodegenerative diseases are debilitating conditions that cause the death of nerve cells, leading to problems with movement and cognition.

Fill Up: Foods to Eat on the MIND Diet

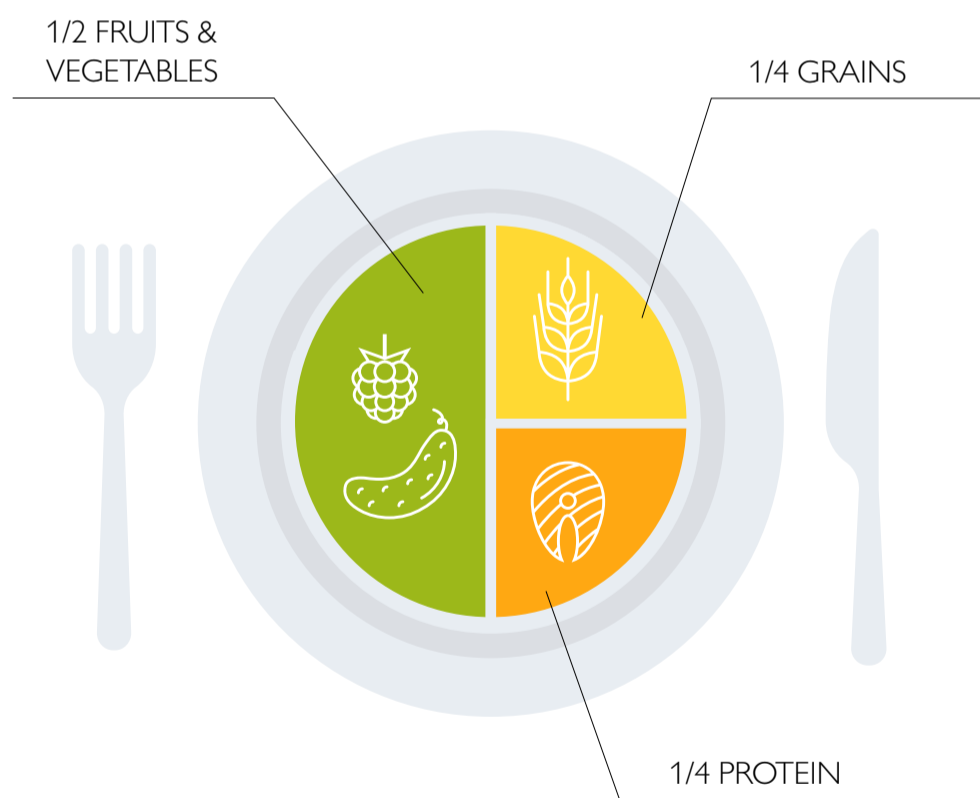
This brain-healthy eating plan is built for simplicity, focusing on 10 foods to eat regularly and five foods to avoid.

YES 	 AVOID
Whole grains <i>at least three servings daily</i>	Red meat <i>fewer than four servings per week</i>
Dark green leafy vegetables <i>at least six servings per week</i>	Sweets and pastries <i>fewer than five servings weekly</i>
Other vegetables <i>at least one additional vegetable every day</i>	Butter and margarine <i>less than 1 tablespoon per day</i>
Berries <i>at least twice weekly</i>	Cheese <i>less than one serving weekly</i>
Nuts <i>at least five servings per week</i>	Fried and fast food <i>less than one serving weekly</i>
Beans/legumes <i>more than three servings per week</i>	* <i>To reduce inflammation that can cause Alzheimer's disease and dementia, the MIND diet recommends avoiding foods high in saturated fat or excess sugar.</i>
Poultry <i>at least two servings weekly</i>	
Fish <i>at least once a week</i>	
Wine <i>one 5-ounce glass per day</i>	
Olive oil <i>regular olive oil as the main cooking oil, reserving extra virgin olive oil for drizzling or salads</i>	

And while the MIND diet doesn't focus on weight loss, reducing sugar and unhealthy fats while increasing lean protein and whole foods helps support a healthy weight. Keep in mind that, whatever eating pattern you choose, make sure it's something you can stick with for the long term. You want to be able to enjoy the food you eat to ensure healthy eating habits are sustainable.

The Link Between Blood Sugar and Heart Health

Find out what Johns Hopkins researchers have discovered about [how controlling blood sugar benefits your heart](#).



RESOURCES

[Johns Hopkins Healthy Recipes](#)

[Meatless Mondays Campaign](#)

[Johns Hopkins Digestive Weight Loss Center](#)

[Nutrition & Fitness Topics from Johns Hopkins Healthy Woman](#)