



Lifestyle Risk Factors: Diet



Keeping Connecticut Healthy
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Why is this important?

Good nutrition is vital to good health, and may reduce the risk of chronic disease. [Cardiovascular disease](#), [hypertension](#), [high cholesterol](#), [type 2 diabetes](#), [overweight & obesity](#), [osteoporosis](#) and certain cancers are all known to be linked to poor diet and physical inactivity.

- **Fruits & vegetables** provide dietary fiber, and many vitamins and minerals vital for the health and maintenance of your body. Eating a diet rich in fruits & vegetables may:
 - Reduce risk for stroke;
 - Reduce risk for type 2 diabetes;
 - Reduce risk of coronary heart disease;
 - Protect against certain cancers (mouth, stomach, colon and rectal cancer); and,
 - Help to lower calorie consumption, and supporting weight loss and/or weight management.
- **Grains**, especially whole grains, are an important source of fiber and other nutrients. Consuming foods rich in fiber, such as whole grains, fruits and vegetables:
 - Helps reduce blood cholesterol levels;
 - Reduces the risk of coronary heart disease;
 - Aids in digestion and helps reduce constipation;
 - Helps give a feeling of fullness with fewer calories and may help with weight management.
- **Meat & beans group:** meat, poultry, fish, dry beans & peas, nuts & seeds supply many important nutrients—protein, B vitamins, iron, zinc, magnesium & vitamin E—which perform vital functions from building bones, muscles, skin and tissues to carrying oxygen in the blood.
- **Milk & milk products** provide important nutrients such as calcium, potassium, vitamin D and protein, which help build and maintain bones & teeth, and may reduce the risk of osteoporosis. Milk products are the primary source of calcium in the American diet.
- **Fats & oils** supply energy and are part of a healthy diet, but the type of fat makes a difference to heart health. The amount of fat consumed is also important.

According to the CDC, each year **over \$33 billion in medical costs** and \$9 billion in lost productivity due to heart disease, cancer, stroke and diabetes are attributed to poor nutrition.

(See the [Online Resources](#) section for additional information.)

How does this affect me?

According to the USDA, most Americans consume too many calories, and too much fat, cholesterol, sugar and salt. Most Americans would benefit from increasing their intake of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and many Americans should decrease their consumption of calories to achieve or maintain a healthy weight.



- It is important to include all food groups in your daily diet. Selecting a variety of foods within the grain, vegetable, fruit and meat groups may help ensure the adequate intake of nutrients.
- Choosing low-fat foods and foods with no added sugars (“nutrient-dense” foods) can help meet nutrient needs while avoiding over-consumption of calories and unhealthy fats. Major sources of added sugars in the American diet include regular soft drinks, sugar, candy, cakes, cookies and pies, fruit drinks, and milk products like ice cream.
- Between two-thirds to three-quarters of Connecticut adults do not eat enough fruits & vegetables—defined as at least 5 servings a day—regardless of their age, sex, race, ethnicity, income or educational level.
- Between 1977 and 1996, [portion sizes](#) for key food groups grew rapidly in the U.S., not only at fast-food outlets, but also in homes and at conventional restaurants.



One study of portion sizes for typical items showed that:

- Salty snacks increased 70% (from 132 to 225 calories);
- French fries increased 36% (from 188 to 256 calories);
- Soft drinks increased 35% (from 144 to 193 calories);
- Hamburgers increased 25% (from 389 to 486 calories).¹

It is estimated that about 16% of deaths in men and 9% of deaths in women—from any cause—could be eliminated by the adoption of healthy dietary behaviors.

(See the [Facts & Figures](#) section for additional data.)

¹ See JAMA 2003; 289:450-453.

Take Control: 10 Steps You Can Take to a Healthy Diet

Redesign your plate. Aim for meals made up of 2/3 (or more) vegetables, fruits, whole grains or beans, and 1/3 (or less) animal protein. Your calorie intake may drop, while the quality of your diet improves—without counting calories! Balance calorie intake with physical activity to achieve or maintain a healthy body weight.



1. **Eat heart healthy.** Consume a diet rich in [vegetables](#) & [fruits](#). Eat a variety to get the full nutritional benefit (be sure to include dark green & orange vegetables).
2. **Gradually increase fiber.** Choose [whole grains](#) over [refined grains](#) most of the time (look for the term “whole” before the grain name on the product’s ingredients list).
3. Include fat-free or low-fat [milk & milk products](#) and lean [meats, poultry, fish and dry beans](#), peas and nuts in your diet. (For information on vegetarian diets, [click here](#).)
4. **Reduce the fat.** Eat foods low in [saturated fats](#), [trans fats](#) & [dietary cholesterol](#). You can limit your intake of unhealthy fats and cholesterol by:
 - choosing lean and lower-fat meats and vegetable alternatives like veggie burgers;
 - limiting egg yolks, liver, giblets and other organ meats (all high in cholesterol);
 - selecting fat-free (skim), low-fat (1%) or reduced fat (2%) dairy products;
 - limiting solid fats like butter, stick margarine, shortening and lard;
 - avoiding foods with trans fats (often labeled “hydrogenated” or “partially hydrogenated” oils);
 - broiling, grilling or roasting meat, poultry and fish instead of frying; and,
 - avoiding high-fat gravies and cream-based sauces.
5. **Use less salt** (a.k.a. “sodium” or “sodium chloride”). Choose and prepare foods with little or no salt. Avoid salty foods and cut down on salt added in cooking or at the table. Experiment with herbs and spices—learn which ones bring out the best natural flavors in food. Caution: read the label. Prepared seasonings can have high salt content and increase your risk for high blood pressure. Beware, too, of the sodium content in canned soups & vegetables, and processed meats.
6. **Consume less sugar.** Limit consumption of high-calorie, low-nutrient foods and sugar-sweetened beverages. Don’t drink your calories! Minimize foods & beverages with added sugars. Added sugars add calories, but few—if any—healthy nutrients.
7. **Avoid “portion distortion”.** It is easier—and more effective—to control portion size than to count calories. Focus on portion control and substituting healthy foods (fruits & vegetables, whole grain cereals, beans, low-fat dairy, fish, and low-fat meats) for unhealthy food choices.
8. **Read Nutrition Facts labels** & ingredients lists. Compare alternatives and choose foods with:
 - higher fiber content (higher % Daily Value);
 - less salt (lower % Daily Value of sodium; < 140 mg sodium/serving = low sodium);
 - fewer unhealthy fats (saturated fats, partially hydrogenated oils, trans fats);
 - fewer added sugars (see *Terms for Added Sugars*, below); and,
 - lower cholesterol (less than 300 mg a day).
9. **Eat more** dark green and orange vegetables, dry beans & peas (“[legumes](#)”), fruits, whole grains, and low-fat milk products.
10. **Eat less** salt, and fewer calories, refined grains, added sugars, processed foods and unhealthy saturated and trans fats.

If you don't or can't consume milk ...
choose lactose-free products or alternative calcium sources.

If you are **lactose intolerant**, but don't want to lose the health benefits of milk:

- choose lactose-free or lower-lactose products from the milk group (hard cheese, yogurt or lactose-free milk); or,
- add the enzyme *lactase* before consuming milk products.

Or, you can choose an **alternative source** for calcium, such as:

- calcium-fortified juices, cereals, breads, soy or rice beverages;
- canned fish (sardines, salmon with bones);
- soybeans and other soy products (soy-based beverages, soy yogurt); and,
- some other dried beans and some leafy greens (collard and turnip greens, kale, bok choy).



[Click here](#) for more *Non-Dairy Food Sources of Calcium* [USDA].

Caution: Calcium-fortified foods & beverages such as soy beverages or orange juice may provide calcium, but may not provide the other nutrients found in milk and milk products.

Please note that individuals who must or choose to avoid all milk products (e.g. lactose intolerant, vegans) should check with their health care provider about non-dairy alternatives to help meet calcium requirements.

**Look for these Terms:
Names for Added Sugars on Food Labels²**







Here are some of the names for added sugars that may be in processed foods.
Look for them on the ingredients list!

- Brown sugar
- Corn sweetener
- Corn syrup
- Dextrose
- Fructose
- Fruit juice concentrates
- Glucose
- High-fructose corn syrup
- Honey
- Invert sugar
- Lactose
- Maltose
- Malt syrup
- Molasses
- Raw sugar
- Sucrose
- Sugar
- Syrup



² [Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005](#), USDA.
Chapter 7 Carbohydrates; Table 14.

Know Your Goals!
(per *Dietary Guidelines 2005*)

Food Group	One Serving	Recommended Amount
<p align="center">Fruits</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ½ cup fresh, frozen or canned fruit; - ½ cup 100% fruit juice; - 1 medium fruit; or, - ¼ cup dried fruit. 	<p align="center">4 daily servings (2 cups)</p>
<p align="center">Vegetables</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ½ cup raw or cooked vegetables; - ½ cup 100% vegetable juice; or, - 1 cup raw leafy vegetables. 	<p align="center">5 daily servings (2 ½ cups)</p>
<p align="center">Grains</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 slice bread; - 1 cup dry cereal; or, - ½ cup cooked rice, pasta or cereal. 	<p align="center">6 daily servings, with at least 3 servings of whole grains</p>
<p align="center">Meat & Beans</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 ounce meat, poultry or fish; - 1 egg (max 4 egg yolks/week); - 1 tablespoon peanut butter; - ¼ cup cooked dry beans; or, - ½ ounce nuts or seeds. 	<p align="center">5.5 ounce equivalents</p>
<p align="center">Milk & Milk Products</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 cup milk or yogurt; - 1 ½ ounces natural cheese; or, - 2 ounces processed cheese. 	<p align="center">3 daily servings (3 cups)</p>
<p align="center">Oils</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 teaspoon soft margarine - 1 tablespoon low-fat mayonnaise - 2 tablespoons light salad dressing - 1 teaspoon vegetable oil 	<p align="center">6 teaspoons per day</p>

Solid Fats & Cholesterol:

- Total fat intake: 20% - 35% of calories (most fats should come from fish, nuts & vegetables oils)
- Saturated fats: < 10% of total calories
- Cholesterol: < 300 mg/day
- Trans fat: as low as possible

References: Agency for Healthcare Research & Quality; American Cancer Society; American Heart Association; American Institute for Cancer Research; American Medical Association; Centers for Disease Control & Prevention; *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005* (USDA); Mayo Clinic; National Heart, Lung & Blood Institute; Produce for Better Health Foundation; U.S. Food & Drug Administration.

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