

## Healthy Eating

### **What Should Be On Your Plate**

1 Every time you sit down to eat a meal, you make a choice about what you are going to eat. It's important that you make healthy choices at every meal, even if everything on your plate isn't completely healthy. But how do you know if you've made healthy decisions? Fortunately, nutritionists have done a lot of research to tell us what eating healthy really means.

2 Nutritionists say that half of your plate at every meal should consist of fruits or vegetables. This is because fruits and vegetables have a lot of important nutrients that keep our bodies strong. They have vitamin C which helps our bodies heal, and they also have fiber, which helps our digestive system and keeps our stomachs healthy.

3 Half of your plate might seem like a lot, but there are so many fruits and vegetables out there that it's easy to fill half of your plate with broccoli, cucumber, carrots, strawberries, and blueberries if those are your favorites. You can eat a banana and strawberries with toast in the morning or eat baby carrots and an apple with your sandwich at lunch.

Any combination of fruits and veggies is good as long as it makes up about half of your plate!

4 About  $\frac{1}{4}$  of your plate should be made up of grains. You can find grains in bread, pasta, or oats. Grains are carbohydrates, which means that they give us energy and help us do things like play sports or ride a bike. Whole grains are the best kind of grains, which means that every part of the grain is included in what you're eating, and you're getting all the nutrients from the grain.

5 The last  $\frac{1}{4}$  of your plate should be protein. Protein can come from lots of different sources like meat, eggs, fish, or even peanut butter. Protein is good for giving us energy over longer periods of time, building up our muscles, and carrying oxygen throughout our bodies.

6 When you make healthy choices for your plate, your body feels better, and you have more energy to do the things you love to do. Eating healthy might not always be fun, and of course, it's okay to have unhealthy things sometimes, but overall, if you eat healthy food, you'll live a healthy life!

## **What is One Serving?**

7 All foods are not created equal, so all serving sizes are not the same size. Depending on what kind of food you're putting on your plate, you'll need to check the serving size to see how much of it you should be eating. However, there are some general serving sizes that are good rules of thumb. 8 For many fruits like apples, oranges, bananas, or pears, one piece of fruit represents one serving size. For berries,  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of sliced strawberries, blueberries, or raspberries make up 1 serving size. This makes it easy for you to keep track of how many servings of fruit you've had in a day. If you've had an apple and a small bowl of fruit salad, you've had 2 servings of fruit!

9 For vegetables, it's a little trickier. About 1 cup of leafy vegetables such as lettuce, spinach, or cabbage is 1 serving. Most people agree that 1 cup is about the size of your fist, which can help you estimate how many servings of lettuce or spinach you're having. About 6 baby carrots or 1 large carrot is a serving, or half of a red pepper is 1 serving size of vegetables. This is why lots of people choose to put several servings of vegetables together into a salad to make it easier. When you combine 2 cups of

lettuce with red pepper, carrots, broccoli, and cucumber, you can estimate that you've had 3 servings of vegetables in 1 bowl.

10 Grains are easy to measure. Rice or pasta has a  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup serving size, which is about the size of a tennis ball. These items also usually come from packages, which means you can check how much 1 serving size is on the package.

11 Finally, proteins like chicken, steak, or fish are typically about  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup also. Since it might be hard to measure a piece of chicken in a measuring cup, you can estimate the serving size based on the size of the piece of meat. It should be about the size of the palm of your hand or a deck of cards.

12 Beyond making sure that you are making healthy food choices, you'll also want to make sure that you're eating the proper amounts of each food.

Eating too much of one thing is never healthy, even if it happens to be lettuce! It's the combination of nutrients that you get from all healthy foods that fuels your body effectively.

## **Why Is Sugar Bad for You?**

13 Most people know that eating sugar is not good for you, but they might not know why it is so unhealthy to choose chocolate over an apple.

Understanding why something is unhealthy is just as important when you're making healthy decisions as eating vegetables is. Otherwise, it's easy to forget why you should choose to eat broccoli, chicken, and whole wheat pasta instead of cookies and a milkshake.

14 When you eat something that has a lot of sugar in it, that sugar immediately goes into your bloodstream, which means your blood sugar spikes and you get a "sugar rush". This can make you feel overly energized, which is why people sometimes get jittery or antsy when they eat too much sugar. But, the sugar rush doesn't last very long, and your blood sugar goes back down to normal, as though you didn't eat anything at all.

15 When your blood sugar level goes back down, it's called a sugar crash, and that means your body feels sluggish and has very low energy. That's because all the energy from the food you ate was expended during the sugar rush, and once it's gone, you feel tired and slow.

16 There are two problems with having a sugar high and then a sugar crash. The first is that there isn't any nutritional value to sugar. It doesn't have protein or healthy carbohydrates or any vitamins or minerals. This means that your body will get hungry again very quickly, and you'll need to fuel it with more sugar, which means another sugar rush and another sugar crash. When you eat something that doesn't give your body the nutrients it needs, your body will continue to crave food, which can cause you to eat more than you normally would and can lead to unhealthy weight gain.

17 When you eat sugar all the time, you also crave sugar all the time, meaning that it's all you want to eat. These cravings mean that you aren't as likely to make healthy choices at most of your meals, which can mean that you consume more sugar and have even more sugar cravings.

18 Of course, you should have dessert sometimes and enjoy the occasional treat! But it's important that these sweets are worked in around a diet that is made up of mostly healthy food. Otherwise, it's easy to start eating much more sugar than you should and forget about eating healthy.