

## Nutrition and Your Busy Lifestyle

**Your overall nutrition picture depends on selections of food and serving sizes over a period of time. To make wise food choices you need to know a little about food and healthful cooking techniques. A balanced diet contains a wide variety of foods. The key to making good food choices is to plan.**

### Serving Savvy

Nutritional information on food packaging can be tricky to understand. What does an ounce of cheese look like? How do you know if you're going overboard on your ice-cream intake without measuring every mouthful? To help make sense of these labels, the American Dietetic Association has put together some simple ways of visualizing serving sizes.

Food	Serving	Looks Like
Meat, poultry or fish	3 oz	Deck of cards
Pasta or rice	½ cup	Walkman
Fruits or vegetables	½ cup	Tennis ball
Cheese	1 oz	Two saltines or pair of dice
Ice cream or yogurt	½ cup	Tennis ball

### Planning Meals

Spend time each week planning and organizing your meals. Use cookbooks and grocery ads to make menus and a shopping list. Organize the list by categories. Now you can do all your shopping at once. When shopping, read the *Nutrition Facts Label* and ingredient list. This will assist you in serving amounts and nutrient intake. At first all this may seem awkward and time-consuming, but it will become easier as you become more knowledgeable.

USDA's food recommendations are a good place to start when planning nutritious meals. Begin with a main dish that gives each family member one serving of meat. Add a complementary food from the bread, cereal, rice, and pasta group. Include a hot or cold vegetable and choose a fruit or vegetable salad that complements the main dish. Finish with a dessert such as fresh fruit or a milk or yogurt-based pudding, custard, or malt. Also select a hot or cold beverage – remembering to meet the daily milk requirement.

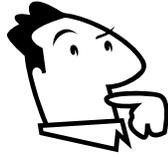
Serving nutritious meals will be useless if the food is bland or unattractive. A delicious meal depends on a blend of flavors, textures, and temperature and a variety of colors and shapes. A pleasant table setting also enhances the appearance of food.

Here's how easy it is. Serve a grilled pork chop with peach chutney. Add a rice pilaf, sautéed spinach, and cooked cinnamon apples. For dessert serve fresh strawberries over a low fat yogurt. Using the grill and the microwave, the meal can be prepared in less than thirty minutes, leaving you more time to spend with your family or friends at the dinner table. Or some time to go take a walk.

Here's another idea. Put baby back ribs in the crock pot in the morning. When you get home, spread some barbecue sauce on top and place under the broiler. Add mashed potatoes, green beans, a carrot and raisin salad, and leave off dessert because it's such a hearty meal. Look at the color. Think of the flavor. See how easy and exciting nutrition can be? It didn't just happen. You spent a little time planning and organizing your meals.

## How to Make Positive Changes

USDA has recommended these tips for rethinking and positively changing your eating and physical activity routines.



**Be Realistic.** Make small changes over time in what you eat and the level of activity you do. Sprinkle shredded low-fat cheese on your salads, vegetables, or pasta to boost your calcium intake.

**Be Adventurous.** Expand your tastes to enjoy a variety of foods. Try a new food or recipe once a month. You'll be amazed at all the great choices.

**Be Flexible.** Balance what you eat and the physical activity you do over several days. Don't worry about just one meal or one day. To fit in a treat like ice cream or pizza with all the works, choose lower fat foods to balance your fat intake and increase your physical activity over several days.

**Be Sensible.** Enjoy all foods. If your favorite food is high in fat or calories, eat a smaller portion.

**Be Active.** Climb the stairs instead of taking the elevator or escalator or park a little further away from your destination.

## Eating Out

The demand for convenience and a change in eating habits have contributed to the popularity of dining out. Busy schedules often force people to "eat on the run" and consume smaller, more frequent meals and snacks throughout the day. Eating away from home, buying TOTE (take-out-to-eat) and frozen foods, and home-delivered foods are characteristic of many Americans. You can still make good food choices when you eat out IF you plan.

Meals eaten away from home, especially fast-food restaurants often contribute excess calories, fat and sodium and limit the intake of calcium, dietary fiber, and vitamins A and C. Excess snacking from low nutrient-dense foods can lead to consuming too much fat and sugar. On days where you know you will be eating a higher calorie lunch, eat a lower calorie dinner, or add some physical activity.

When dining out, you don't have to eliminate all your favorite foods. Simply choose foods high in calories, fat, sodium, and sugars less often and eat smaller portions. Don't forget to eat three meals a day, as skipping meals makes it easier to overeat during another meal or snack. Physical should also be an important part of your daily routine.

**The two trends of dining out more and an increased interest in health, fitness, and nutrition seem to be incompatible. But with careful planning, healthful eating can be achieved regardless of our busy lives.**

## References

- Duyff, R. *American Dietetic Association Complete Food & Nutrition Guide*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. John Wiley & Sons: NJ, 2002.
- It's All About You Nutrition Communicator Tool Kit*, United States Department of Agriculture, 2001.

Sandra Bastin, PhD, RD, LD  
Extension Food & Nutrition Specialist



Educational programs of Kentucky Cooperative Extension serve all people regardless of race, color, age, sex, religion, disability, or national origin. FN-SSB.071 Issued February 1997; Revised October 2004.