

Tips for Clean Eating

The most current USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans reported that about three-fourths of Americans eat less than the recommended amounts of fruits, vegetables, and dairy and more than half eat above the suggested amounts of added sugars, saturated fat and sodium. The Eat-Clean Diet focuses on eating healthier foods that are fresh, clean, non-processed, and non-refined.

Evidence has shown that healthier, cleaner eating patterns are associated with reduced risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity and certain cancers. Use these tips to help you follow a cleaner diet.

- **Cook Your Own Meals.** The best way to avoid processed and packaged foods is to cook your meals at home using fresh, clean, non-refined and organic ingredients.
- **Limit Added Sugar and Saturated Fat.** Cut down on processed foods that are full of added sugars and saturated fat. These include sweets, candy, baked goods, sugary drinks, sodas, sports and energy drinks and other products. Always check the nutrition label to see how much added sugar and fat are in each portion of the product. The Dietary Guidelines recommend eating less than 10 percent of calories per day from added sugars, as well as, saturated fat.
- **Eat Less Meat and More Plants.** Evidence shows that eating plant-based proteins are good for you and the environment. It can help reduce your blood pressure, reduce your risk of heart disease and keep your weight in check. Also, eating more plant proteins can help you increase fiber, healthy fats and vitamins and minerals in your diet. Choose beans, peas, seeds, nuts and soy. If you decide to eat meats, stay away from those that are processed such as bacon, sausage, hot dogs and cold cuts. Instead choose lean meats, poultry and fish.
- **Keep an Eye on Sodium.** It is recommended to consume no more than 2300 milligrams of sodium a day. For people with high blood pressure, diabetes, kidney disease or people over 50, they should limit their intake to no more than 1500 milligrams a day. Cut back on processed foods as many can be loaded with sodium. Minimize using salt while cooking and flavor food with herbs and spices, citrus and vinegar.
- **Watch for Processed Foods.** Foods that are processed usually come in packages. Limit the amount of packaged foods you buy. A clean diet avoids artificial ingredients, preservatives and chemically altered foods. Some packaged foods can be clean, such as yogurt, cheese, whole-wheat pasta, and packaged spinach. Use the ingredient label as a guide. Watch out for long ingredient lists that have words you can't pronounce or know.
- **Navigate the Store.** The freshest foods are often found along the perimeter of the store, while the aisles are often filled with packaged and processed foods.
- **Eat more Fruits and Vegetables.** Whole fruits and vegetables contain fiber, vitamins and minerals that are beneficial for the body. The Dietary Guidelines suggest 3-5 servings of vegetables and 2-4 servings of fruits per day. It is important to eat a variety of vegetables from different color groups (green, orange, red, and yellow.)
- **Choose Whole Grains rather than Refined Grains.** Whole grains are the least processed of all grains. On a food label, they should be the first ingredient. It should be short and recognizable.

They contain all three parts: the bran, germ and endosperm. Refined grains are missing one or more of these parts. During the processing of refined grains, key nutrients such as proteins, vitamins and minerals are lost. Whole grains provide more fiber and have antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties.

Sources: Rutgers Extension, Eatingwell.com and USDA Dietary Guidelines.