



**HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL**  
*Trusted advice for a healthier life*

# Nutrition 101: Good eating for good health

Turn on your TV, open a newspaper, or boot up your computer and you're bound to get some confusing news about diet and health. Don't let it drive you to distraction — or to the donut shop. Instead, remember four key facts:

1. What you eat affects your appearance, your energy and comfort, and — above all — your health.
2. America is on the wrong track. Two out of every three of us are overweight or obese. Diabetes and high blood pressure are on the rise. Heart attacks, strokes, and cancer are distressingly common. Many factors contribute to these complex problems, but the basic reasons are simple: we eat too much, we choose the wrong foods, and we don't get enough exercise.
3. Scientists know what diet is best for health (see below). The fine print has changed and is likely to change some more, but the key facts are in.
4. Good eating is not a punishment, but an opportunity. If you know why it's important and what to do, you'll find it enjoyable and satisfying. And if you establish an overall pattern of healthful nutrition, you'll have plenty of wiggle room to savor the treats that matter most to you.

## Your goals

For most people, TLC stands for tender loving care. For doctors, it stands for the Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes diet. The TLC diet provides sound goals for most Americans.

The TLC Diet	
Total calories	<b>Adjusted in conjunction with exercise to attain or maintain a healthy body weight. (Your doctor or a nutritionist can help you figure out how many calories you, personally, should be taking in.)</b>
Total fat	25% - 35% of total calories
Saturated fat	Less than 7% of total calories
Polyunsaturated fat	Up to 10% of total calories

Monounsaturated fat	Up to 20% of total calories
Cholesterol	Less than 200 mg a day
Protein	About 15% of total calories
Fiber	<p>The Institute of Medicine recommends:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• men 50 years and younger get 38 grams per day</li> <li>• women 50 and younger get 25 grams per day</li> <li>• men over 50 get 30 grams per day</li> <li>• women over 50 get 21 grams per day</li> </ul>

## Making changes

Here are five tips to create a healthful diet that you can enjoy.

- Learn to think about food in a new way. Years ago, meat and potatoes were the American ideal. Now we know that vegetables, fruits, whole grains, nuts, and fish are best.
- Experiment with new recipes and meal plans. Be creative and take chances. Instead of dreading your new diet, have fun with it.
- Change slowly. By the time you are 40, you'll have eaten some 40,000 meals — and lots of snacks besides. Give yourself time to change, targeting one item a week.

Start with breakfast, switching from eggs, bacon, donuts, white toast, or bagels to oatmeal or bran cereal and fruit. If you just can't spare 10 minutes for a sit-down breakfast, grab high-fiber cereal bars instead of donuts or muffins.

Next, try out salads, low-fat yogurt or low-fat cottage cheese, tuna or peanut butter sandwiches, and fruit for lunch.

Snack on unsalted nuts, trail mix, fruit, raw veggies, Rye Krisp, or graham crackers. Try eating a few handfuls of a crunchy fiber cereal such as Kashi, or nibble on a cereal bar.

For dinner, experiment with fish, skinless poultry, beans, brown rice, whole-wheat pasta, and, of course, salads and veggies.

Fruit and low-fat frozen desserts are examples of desirable after-dinner treats. And there's nothing wrong with the occasional cake, pie, or chocolates as long as the portions are moderate.

- Be relaxed about your diet. You will never find a perfect food. Not everything on your plate needs to have a higher purpose. Take your tastes and preferences into account. If roast beef is your favorite food, it is okay to eat it — but try to make it a Sunday treat instead of a daily staple. The choices are your — and the better your overall diet, the more "wiggly

room" you'll have to indulge your passions.

- Take a long-range view. Don't get down on yourself if you slip up or "cheat" from time to time. Don't worry about every meal, much less every mouthful. Your nutritional peaks and valleys will balance out if your overall dietary pattern is sound.