

## Healthy Eating Fact Sheet

Eating healthy plays a big role in lowering the risk of stroke and many other health conditions.

### What is healthy eating?

Healthy eating means eating a diet that is high in nutrients and low in fat, sugars, and sodium. According to the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010*, a healthy eating plan includes:

- A focus on fruits, vegetables, and whole grains
- Fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products
- Lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, and nuts
- Foods low in saturated fats and *trans* fats
- Foods low in fat, salt (sodium), and added sugars

### What are the benefits of healthy eating?

Healthy eating is one of the best things you can do to prevent and control many health problems. And, a healthy diet can help you maintain a healthy weight, feel your best, have more energy, and handle stress better.

On the other hand, unhealthy eating can be harmful to your arteries, blood pressure, and glucose level. It can also lead to excess weight, putting a strain on your body.



### What is the best way to start eating healthy?

Eating healthy does not have to be scary or complex, and healthy foods do not have to be bland and boring. These guidelines can help you start enjoying healthy food, feeling better, and improving your health.

**Fruits and vegetables.** These are packed with key vitamins and nutrients, such as calcium and fiber. Aim to eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables every day.

**Lean protein.** When you pledge to eat healthy, it's okay to enjoy meat. The important thing is to choose lean meat. This includes boneless, skinless chicken breasts and turkey cutlets, and leaner cuts of ground beef. Broil grill, roast, poach, or boil meat instead of frying. Also try to avoid sauces

and gravies that are high in fat and sugar.

**Seek low-fat dairy options.**

While many dairy products are rich in protein and calcium, they are also high in fat, which can cause cholesterol to build up in arteries increasing the risk for many major health problems.

**Drink in moderation.** Drinking too much alcohol increases blood pressure and the risk of stroke. Aim to drink no more than two drinks a day for men and one drink a day for women.

**Watch your calories.** Part of eating healthy means having a healthy weight, which includes not eating more calories than you burn off. Calorie intake is based on gender, age, and activity level.

**Plan.** Vending machines and fast food can be tempting when you're rushed or stressed. To eat healthy, plan menus ahead of time and keep healthy snacks on hand.

**Change your choices.** Simple changes in how you prepare and ask for food can add up to big changes. Choose grilled fish instead of fried. At a restaurant, choose vegetables as a side instead of French fries.

**Stay positive.** It can take a long time to begin new habits in the way you eat and drink, so go easy on yourself as you're starting out. Remember that every small change you make in the way you eat adds up to big differences in your overall health.

For more information about ways to reduce your risk of stroke, visit [www.stroke.org](http://www.stroke.org).

Note: This fact sheet is compiled from general, publicly available information and should not be considered recommended treatment for any particular individual. You should consult your provider about any personal medical concerns.

*All publications are reviewed by National Stroke Association's Publications Committee.*

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