

**Health Corner -
Nutrition: Calories, Nutrients, Needs**



The role of proper nutrition is to promote a healthy lifestyle, healthy aging, to prevent diseases, and to aid in recovery during disease treatment. Research shows that proper nutrition can help to lower people's risk for many chronic diseases, including heart disease, stroke, some cancers, diabetes, and osteoporosis. Being committed to following a healthy diet is one of the most important things you can do to contribute positively to your overall health.

Unfortunately, a large gap remains between healthy dietary patterns and what Americans actually eat. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in 2005 only one-fourth of U.S. adults ate five or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day. To help people improve their eating habits, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture published Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The Dietary Guidelines describe a healthy diet as one that:

- Emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products;
- Includes lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, and nuts; and
- Is low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt (sodium), and added sugars.

Calories

There are a target number of calories for you to eat each day. This number depends on your age, gender, activity level, and whether you're trying to gain, maintain, or lose weight. It is important to know how many calories you need to achieve or maintain a healthy weight. The following table shows the estimated daily calorie needs based on age, gender, and activity level. It is taken from the Dietary Guidelines for Americans:

		Activity Level		
Gender	Age (years)	Sedentary	Moderately Active	Active
		Calories		
Female	19-30	2,000	2,000-2,200	2,400
	31-50	1,800	2,000	2,200
	51+	1,600	1,800	2,000-2,200
Male	19-30	2,400	2,600-2,800	3,000
	31-50	2,200	2,400-2,600	2,800-3,000
	51+	2,000	2,200-2,400	2,400-2,800

Nutrients

Many Americans consume more calories than they need without meeting the recommended intakes for many nutrients. It is important to understand that the types of food your calories come from matter because meeting your recommended nutrient needs is important.

In general, absolute nutritional requirements in men are greater than in women, simply because men as a population are larger and have more muscle mass than women. According to the USDA Dietary Guidelines, each basic food group (grains; vegetables; fruits; milk, yogurt, and cheese; and meat, poultry, fish, dry beans, eggs, and nuts) is a major contributor of at least one nutrient while making substantial contributions of many other nutrients. Because each food group provides a wide array of nutrients in substantial amounts, it is important to include all food groups in your daily diet. Give your body the balanced nutrition it needs is by eating a variety of nutrient-packed foods every day, and stay within your daily calorie needs.

Men's vs. Women's Nutritional Needs

Men and women alike should be aware of their unique set of nutritional needs and health concerns to stay healthy and prevent disease. The differences are not that huge, but there are still distinctions to be made between the nutritional needs of men and women:

- For women of childbearing age, blood loss through menstruation can lead to iron deficiency. The Institute for Medicine of the National Academies recommends a daily allowance of 18 milligrams of iron for women aged 19 to 50. During pregnancy a woman's requirements are even greater. Men in that same age range need just 8 milligrams daily.
- Daily calcium recommendations for women under 50 are 1,000 milligrams a day, and 1,500 milligrams a day for women 51 and older. The requirements for men are the same as for women even though men are much less prone to osteoporosis than women. The recommendation takes into account the fact that women are smaller than men, thus the amount of daily calcium is greater for women on a proportional basis.
- Carbohydrates should provide 45%-65% of daily calories for men and women. Most of those calories should come from the complex carbohydrates in high-fiber and unrefined foods. Men need more fiber than women: 38 vs. 25 grams a day before the age of 50 and 30 vs. 21 grams a day thereafter.
- Protein should provide about 15% of a healthy person's daily calories. Men need more protein than women: 56 vs. 46 grams per day.
- Both women and men need folate or folic acid. At proper levels, it has been linked to better heart health and possible protection from colon cancer. But for women in their childbearing years, getting enough of this B-vitamin can greatly reduce the chances of neurological birth defects. The Institute of Medicine recommends 400 milligrams daily for people over age 14. Pregnant women need 600 milligrams daily, and women who are breastfeeding need 500 milligrams daily.

It's true for both men and women: being committed to following a healthy diet is one of the most important things you can do to contribute positively to your overall health. A healthy eating pattern is fundamental to the maintenance of good health and well-being. Food provides the energy and nutrients you need to be healthy. The key is to:

- Eat a variety of foods, including vegetables, fruits and whole-grain products
- Eat lean meats, poultry, fish, beans and low-fat dairy products
- Drink lots of water
- Go easy on the salt, sugar, alcohol, saturated fat and trans fat

Each day in the news there is a new diet plan or life-saving "magic" food or nutrient. How do we know the right thing to do? Everyone wants to live a longer and healthier life, but how do we sort through all the inaccurate and untrue claims? If the claim seems too good to be true, it probably is. Do not replace a healthy diet that includes a variety of nutritious foods with fad diets and supplements. If you have questions about nutrition claims that you have heard, talk to your doctor to get the facts. If you want to live a longer, healthier life you need to adapt appropriate lifestyle habits of healthy eating and exercise each and every day for a lifetime.

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