



# Foods for Health: Managing Your Weight



INTERNATIONAL  
FOOD INFORMATION  
COUNCIL FOUNDATION

## Developing Bodies and Minds

Many factors play a role in achieving and maintaining a healthy weight. Eating too much and not exercising enough are largely at play when it comes to weight gain. If you are overweight, you are not alone. More than two-thirds of Americans are either overweight or obese. We can manage our weight by monitoring what we eat and how often we move. Use this resource to learn more about how to build a sensible diet that includes foods and beverages that can help you achieve a healthy weight.

### Calories Count

Findings from the *IFIC Foundation Food & Health Survey* indicate that many people are confused about calories. Our bodies need a certain amount of calories to complete day-to-day activities and exercise. Each person has unique calorie needs that depend on a number of factors, including height, weight, age, gender and activity level. Know your number. Learning how many calories you should consume in a day is a critical first step in managing your weight. In order to find out your individual needs, visit [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov); the “My Pyramid Plan” tool can help you determine your target calorie range.

### Calorie Balance

Take charge of your weight. Balancing the calories you eat and drink with the calories you burn through physical activity puts you in control. The vast majority of foods and beverages contain calories. Remember, your body needs calories for everything it does! In order to maintain your weight, the calories you eat should equal the calories that you use during everyday activities and exercise. Consuming more calories than you need can lead to weight gain. On the other hand, consuming fewer calories than you need can lead to weight loss.

Decreasing calories by eating less is only half of the story when it comes to losing weight and keeping it off. Regular physical activity requires energy and can help you burn more calories. A gradual weight loss of half a pound to two pounds per week is recommended to keep the pounds off and develop healthful habits!



### Portions Matter

There are other tips and tricks that may help you on your path to weight management. One trick is to manage portions. The amount of a food or beverage you eat or drink is directly related to the amount of calories you consume. Using smaller plates and/or serving utensils and serving smaller portions can help curb calories and keep your weight on the right track. If you practice portion control, you can always find a way to fit in the foods and beverages that you love. Keep tabs on how much you eat and balance large portions with smaller ones over time to better manage weight.

### Breakfast Builds Better Bodies

Research suggests that those who regularly eat breakfast tend to have healthier body weights. According to the National Weight Control Registry, almost eight in ten adults who have maintained a 30-plus pound weight loss for at least a year report that they eat breakfast on most days.

When you choose breakfast items, such as skim or soy milk, cereal, oatmeal, eggs, yogurt and fruit, you start the day off with a good supply of energy and nutrients. Frequent consumption of these foods can also help build strong bones, promote good digestion and support a healthy heart.

## Foods to Help You Stay Full and Fit

Protein and fiber are both needed for good health and are a part of a balanced diet.

Studies have shown that both of these nutrients can help you feel full, which may help you better manage your calorie intake and therefore help you manage your weight.

- **Power-up with Protein.** Choose protein-rich foods that are low in saturated and *trans* fat to obtain benefits for overall health. Look for sources of protein such as beans, soy, lean meat, poultry, fish, eggs and low-fat dairy.
- **Find Fiber.** Make sure to stock up on high-fiber foods like fruits, vegetables, beans, and whole grain breads and cereals.
- **Get “Nutty.”** Eat a handful of nuts, which provide protein and fiber, every day to help manage weight. Nuts are also good sources of unsaturated fat that are good for your heart and brain. Just a small handful of nuts is all you need.

## Foods for Happy Scales

Base your plate on nutrient-rich foods that offer beneficial nutrients and fewer calories.

- **Make Half Your Grains Whole.** Try looking for fiber rich whole-grain products like certain ready-to-eat cereals, bread, flour, pasta, brown rice, barley, bulgur and oats. Read the Nutrition Facts panel to determine that your choices are indeed high fiber.
- **Vary Your Veggies.** Fresh, frozen or canned veggies can add color and fiber to any dish. Plan meals around a vegetable dish like a soup, stir-fry or veggie kabobs.
- **Focus on Fruit.** Dried, frozen and canned fruits all count toward your daily fruit intake. When choosing canned fruit, go for water, or 100% juice-packed rather than syrup-packed cans and plastic containers. Vary your choices and eat a rainbow of colors to ensure that you are getting all the vitamins and minerals you need.
- **Go Lean With Protein.** Buy 90% lean beef, skinless chicken and low-fat lunchmeat. Fish, beans and soy are also good low-fat protein sources.
- **Fit Dairy In.** Serve low-fat or skim milk as a drink at meals. Make a sweet or savory yogurt dip for fruits and veggies.

## Stay Active

Exercise does not always have to mean going to the gym or stair-stepping for 30 minutes. Exercise can be fun, easy and should include your favorite activities.



According to the 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans, adults need at least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity a week along with two days of muscle strength training for health benefits. Along with reducing calorie intake, many adults will need to do more than 150 minutes a week of moderate aerobic activity as part of a program to lose weight and/or keep it off.

Dancing, biking, canoeing, water aerobics, tennis and gardening are all moderate aerobic activities. You can replace your weekly amount of moderate activity with 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity. Some examples of vigorous activity include fast dancing, hiking uphill, jumping rope, running or swimming laps. Strength training should include all of your major muscle groups like legs, hips, back, chest, stomach, shoulders and arms. Pick an exercise for each group and do this 8-12 times, three times in a row.

As you decide what physical activities to incorporate into your daily schedule, pick activities that are easy and enjoyable for you to fit into your life. You don't have to do all of your exercise at one time; you can break it up into 10, 15, 20, or 30 minute increments throughout the day. Try to engage in physical activity at least three days each week for best results.

To learn more about the *Physical Activity Guidelines*, go to: <http://www.health.gov/paguidelines/default.aspx>.

## About International Food Information Council



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Learn more about foods and beverages that can help with weight management by watching our “Foods for Health: Managing Your Weight” video with David Grotto, RD.

Learn more [“Quick Tips to Give Your Diet a Boost”](#) and about [“Finding Balance: Understanding How Calories Work”](#) on [FoodInsight.org](http://FoodInsight.org).