

Healthy living

Food

Being the healthiest you can be means eating a variety of nutritious healthy foods, having regular meals, a healthy eating plan and knowing the benefits of nutrients such as calcium, vitamin D, iron, folate and omega-3 for your bones, immune system, cell growth and mental health.



Healthy eating	<p>The Australian Government's <i>Australian Guide to Healthy Eating</i> recommends you eat a variety of foods by choosing food from each of the five food groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• grain (cereal) foods• vegetables and legumes/beans• fruit• lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds and legumes/beans• milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or alternatives.
Nutrients	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Calcium is one of the essential nutrients necessary for healthy bones• Vitamin D helps increase the absorption of calcium from the stomach, regulates the amount of calcium in the blood and strengthens the skeleton• Iron has various roles in the body, including the transport of oxygen in the blood and helping the immune system to work as it should• Folate (folic acid) is a B vitamin needed for healthy growth, in particular, the nervous system• Apart from lowering heart disease risk, omega-3 may help reduce inflammation, support the immune system, reduce blood pressure and help to prevent and treat depression.
Eating regular meals	<p>Skipping meals is a common and easy mistake to make, but regular meals and snacks help to maintain energy and provide the nutrients needed each day. Eating regularly will help you feel more energetic, may improve your mood and help you avoid overeating.</p>
Variety	<p>To get the range of nutrients you need for healthy living, promote variety in your eating and create meals with at least three food groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• For breakfast, add some fruit with wholegrain cereal and reduced fat milk and/or yoghurt• Serve a fresh green salad with a pasta meal such as spaghetti bolognaise• Include a handful of cashew nuts in a vegetarian stir-fry served with rice or noodles.

What can you do to eat more healthily?

- If you are not eating enough fibre, increase your fibre intake gradually and ensure you also drink plenty of water. Look on packaged food labels to see the amount of dietary fibre they contain. Aim to choose products with at least 7.5g per 100g
- Include at least one serve of fruit or vegetables in your breakfast and at least two serves of fruit or vegetables in lunch and dinner
- Low glycaemic index (GI) foods produce gradual rises in blood glucose levels as they are more slowly digested and absorbed than higher GI foods. Include one low-GI carbohydrate food to lower the overall GI of each meal
- Use margarine instead of butter to reduce your saturated fat intake. Look at the labels on food packaging – compare the saturated fat content using 'quantity per 100g'. Choose products with lower amounts of saturated fat.

Plan for healthy eating

Step 1. Plan: ask yourself what three important changes can be made to my eating and how can I maintain these changes

Step 2. Getting started: set small achievable goals, find healthy quick and easy meals to prepare

Step 3. Reflect: look at the changes you have made and focus on what you have achieved. Reward yourself for successes

- Cutting down on salt can help reduce blood pressure and the risk of heart disease and stroke. Use other flavourings (eg herbs, spices, pepper) instead of adding salt to food when cooking. Limit foods high in salt such as cheese and processed meats like ham
- A small amount of sugar isn't a problem, but you may be consuming more sugar than you realise. Think about the food and drink you regularly have and ensure you aren't having too much sugar. Eat fruit instead of foods with lots of added sugar
- Aim to have 6-8 glasses (1.5-2 litres) of water each day
- Eat calcium-rich foods such as dairy, nuts and green leafy vegetables
- See your doctor to have a blood test to determine your level of vitamin D
- Eating a wide variety of foods will help meet your requirements for all nutrients, including iron. If you are a meat eater, include 2-3 serves of lean red meat each week. Include sources of vitamin C to help the absorption of iron, such as fruit and vegetables
- Eat fish 2-3 times each week – eg canned tuna in a sandwich or on wholegrain biscuits with salad, fresh salmon or flathead with vegetables or salad
- Healthy snacks may be a good way to include an extra serve of fruit and vegetables, or get some extra calcium from a yoghurt or fruit smoothie.

For more information go to jeanhailes.org.au/health-a-z/healthy-living

Updated April 2014

This fact sheet is designed to be informative and educational. It is not intended to provide specific medical advice or replace advice from your medical practitioner.

Jean Hailes for Women's Health gratefully acknowledges the support of the Australian Government.

© Jean Hailes for Women's Health 2014

Jean Hailes for Women's Health takes a broad and inclusive approach to the topic of women's health. This fact sheet generally uses the terms 'women' and 'girls'. These terms are intended to include women with diverse sexualities, intersex women, and women with a transgender experience.

Jean Hailes
FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH

1800 JEAN HAILES (532 642)
jeanhailes.org.au