

Zeroing In – Food & Drink: Nourishing & Fueling

Truly, you are what you eat. Everything that goes into your body can become part of it. Good nutrition can help you feel better in all sorts of ways, and it can help prevent future problems as well. Here are things to explore if you want Food & Drink to be part of your Whole Health Plan.



Key Points

- Figure out the way to eat that works best for you as an individual.
- Buying and preparing food are skills. What more can you learn?
- Eat a colorful diet with a lot of natural foods, especially vegetables and fruits.
- Really pay attention when you eat. Notice if you are hungry or not.
- You can adjust what you eat to help you with your health problems.
- Get support from dietitians.

Food & Drink Plan

Create Your Own Food & Drink Plan. You are most likely to follow through with a plan for healthy eating if you take it slow and make one change at a time.

- Don't get caught up in "good" and "bad" labels.
- It's not just about how many calories – different sources of calories affect the body differently.
- Consider your budget and what you have access to.
- Is there something it would be good to add more of to your diet? To remove?
- Can you change just one habit related to Food & Drink that you don't want to follow?

Preparing Meals

Learn More About Preparing Meals. Many VAs offer classes where you can learn about buying food and preparing it. Consider taking a class.

- Buy whole foods if you can. These are foods, like an apple, or a piece of fish, that really only have one ingredient in them.
- Learning to cook means you can rely less on fast food or eating out and know what is in the food you eat.

Eat Mindfully

Eat Mindfully. The more you pay attention to what you are eating, the more you will feel filled and satisfied. Some ways to eat more mindfully include:

- Really appreciate each bite. Take some time to use all your senses. How does the food look? What do you smell? What is the texture?
- Take a moment to think about all that has happened to get the food to you. Who grew it? Who gathered, butchered, or processed it? Who delivered it to the place where you bought it?
- Try not to do other things while you eat. Enjoy the company of others, but don't watch TV, work, or read.
- Pay attention to when your body tells you it is feeling full.

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Eat for Your Health Needs

Tailor You're Eating to Your Health Needs. Everybody has a diet they think you should be on. You must ask what works best for you. Make sure you don't harm your body as you try different ways to eat.

- Different foods can help –or worsen– health issues. If you change your eating patterns, it can really help. Some examples:
 - Type 2 diabetes is tied to eating patterns.
 - Certain fats increase the risk of heart disease and stroke.
 - Some foods increase inflammation in the body, which is linked to problems like pain, depression, and memory loss.
 - Some spices, like turmeric, can reduce inflammation.
 - Alcohol can harm the liver.
 - Certain foods can trigger migraines or gut symptoms.
 - Foods can interfere with blood thinners.
 - Some foods increase the risk of kidney stones, reflux, or.
 - Some foods can cause allergic reactions, including skin problems.

Dietitians

Work With a Dietitian. The VA has dietitians who can guide you in making healthy nutrition changes that are supported by good research.

- Talk to your primary care team about whether a dietitian would be helpful. Some primary care teams have a dietitian as part of the team.
- Dietitians can guide you by tailoring your diet to your various health issues.
- A dietitian can help you with creating Food & Drink goals for your Personal Health Plan.

One Small Change

Make One Small Change. There are all sorts of opportunities. Think about what would work best for you and decide when you will make the change. Choose things you feel sure you can do. Every little bit of activity helps. Here are a few more examples:

- Add in an extra vegetable each day.
- Cut back on a favorite dessert like ice cream to only a few times a week instead of every day.
- Try a food you have never tried before.
- Only eat when you are hungry.
- Chew your food a certain number of times with each bite.
- Go to a farmers' market. Some VAs have them on site.
- Change from soft drinks to water for some of your daily fluids.
- Think of your best meal ever. Ask what made it so great, and then try to bring some of those things into other meals.
- Cook a meal for someone.
- Try eating breakfast, if you usually skip it.
- Take time to eat lunch without working.
- Pay attention to pesticide levels in foods. Eat the "Clean 15" if you can. (See the links list.)
- If you eat out, choose a place with healthy options.
- Make sure you are getting enough of your daily vitamins and minerals and other nutrients.
- If you have an eating disorder (anorexia, bulimia, binge eating) ask for help.
- Do what you can to make sure eating is fun, not frustrating.

Food & Drink Links

You can check out the links below to get more information about Food & Drink:

Whole Health Veteran Materials. These are indexed at <https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/veteran-handouts/index.asp>.

- An Introduction to Food & Drink for Whole Health. <https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/Veteran-Handouts/docs/IntroFoodDrink-508Final-9-4-2018.pdf>.
- Deciding How to Be a Healthier Eater. <https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/Veteran-Handouts/docs/DecidingHowToBeAHealthierEater-Final508-08-29-2018.pdf>.
- Eating to Reduce Inflammation. https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/veteran-handouts/docs/EatReduceInflam_Final508_07-25-2019.pdf.
- Healthy Tips on Eating Out and Grocery Shopping. <https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/Veteran-Handouts/docs/HealthyTipsEating-508Final-9-4-2018.pdf>.
- How a Healthy Gut Makes for a Healthier You. <https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/Veteran-Handouts/docs/HealthyGut-508Final-9-4-2018.pdf>.
- Carbohydrates and Your Health: Glycemic Index, Glycemic Load, and Blood Sugars
- Probiotics for Specific Conditions. <https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/veteran-handouts/docs/CarbsandYourHealthWtLoss-Final508-07-12-2018.pdf>.
- How to Eat a Mediterranean Diet. <https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/Veteran-Handouts/docs/MedDiet-508Final-9-4-2018.pdf>.
- When Your Food & Drink Could be Causing You Problems – Elimination Diets. <https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/Veteran-Handouts/docs/EliminationDiets-Final508-03-25-2019.pdf>.
- The Low FODMAP Diet. <https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/veteran-handouts/docs/FODMaP-508Final-10-28-21.pdf>.
- Whole Health Food, Drink, Activity and Symptom Log. <https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTH/Veteran-Handouts/docs/FoodDrinkLog-508Final-9-4-2018.pdf>.

Other VA Resources

- Move! Weight Management Program - <https://www.move.va.gov/>. Be sure to click on the link to the right under Resources for handouts and worksheets to help you out.
- There are 32 handouts specific to nutrition at: <https://www.nutrition.gov/topics/basic-nutrition/printable-materials-and-handouts>.
- Nutrition and Food Services - <https://www.nutrition.va.gov/>. Facts, blogs, and recipes are available.
- There are Veteran materials at <https://www.nutrition.va.gov/veteranNutritionLinks.asp> for:
 - Cancer
 - Diabetes
 - Food and Drug Interactions
 - Heart Health (Cholesterol, High Blood Pressure)
 - Kidney Diseases
 - Neurological Disorders and Spinal Cord Injuries
 - Vitamins and Supplements
 - Weight Management for both losing and gaining weight
- The site also features Healthy Teaching Kitchen recipe books at https://www.nutrition.va.gov/Healthy_Teaching_Kitchen.asp.

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Other US Government Resources

- United States Department of Agriculture Nutrition Site. <https://www.nutrition.gov/>. This website has a lot of resources that provide information on calories and nutrients depending on age and depending on medical condition. Also, has shopping tips, information on calories, and weight management. If you require food assistance will link you to government resources. <https://www.nutrition.gov/subject/food-assistance-programs>.
- United States Department of Agriculture Choose My Plate. <https://www.myplate.gov>. Has some tips, advice, and a few tools to guide eating. Will link to <https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2014/11/21/usdas-whats-cooking-website-serves-cost-effective-healthy-recipes>, a page with healthy recipes.

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- USDA's National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference. <https://data.nal.usda.gov/dataset/usda-national-nutrient-database-standard-reference-legacy-release>. To search for the contents of various nutrients, including fiber, in any given food, check out the "Start your search here" to see the nutrients in a particular food.

Academic Groups

- Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics - <https://www.eatright.org/>. Has information and resources based on age and gender. Also includes resources on fitness.
- Harvard School of Public Health, The Nutrition Source. <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/>. Has general information on nutrients and many healthy recipes.
- Mayo Clinic Nutrition Resources. <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/basics/nutrition-basics/hlv-20049477>.
- University of Wisconsin Integrative Health. <http://www.fammed.wisc.edu/integrative/resources/modules/>
- Integrative Medicine for the Underserved Nutrition Materials. <https://im4us.org>.

Free Nutrition Tools and Guides

- Has multiple recipes, as well as dietplans for specific conditions. <https://snaped.fns.usda.gov/resources/nutrition-education-materials/recipes>
- The World's 100 Healthiest Foods Detailed list: <https://www.listchallenges.com/top-100-worlds-healthiest-foods>
- Fruits and Veggies—More Matters. The site focused on how to increase one's fruit and vegetable intake. <https://www.fas.usda.gov/data/commodities/fruits-and-vegetables>
- Plant-Based Research. <http://plantbasedresearch.org>. Site that compiles research related specifically to plant-based nutrition.
- California Dairy Research Foundation Probiotics Information. Nice summary of research. <https://cdrf.org/>

Food Safety

- Environmental Working Group. www.ewg.org. Excellent source of food safety information. They create the "Dirty Dozen" and "Clean 15" lists of fruits and veggies with the highest and lowest pesticide levels (after washing). They also list Food Scores, rating various foods based on nutrition, ingredient, and processing safety at <http://www.ewg.org/foodscores>.
- Overeaters Anonymous - <https://oa.org/>. If you struggle with compulsive eating, under-eating, food addiction, anorexia, bulimia, binge eating, or over-exercising, there are resources to help.

Finding Local Resources

- Find Real Food App. <http://www.findrealfoodapp.com>. Tells where there are good quality food stores in a given area.
- Local Harvest Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) site. <http://www.localharvest.org/>. Search out local CSAs, or order fresh foods from around the country.

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Specific Eating “Styles”

- Oldways: <http://www.oldwayspt.org/health-professionals>. Focuses on cultural eating traditions. Can teach you how to eat a Mediterranean Diet. Has specific diet guides for people from Asian, African, and other backgrounds. Also has diets for people on blood thinners. Check out the recipes.
- Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (DASH). https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/files/docs/public/heart/dash_brief.pdf. “Your Guide to Lowering Your Blood Pressure with DASH,” from the National Institutes of Health.
- Websites for Prevention of Cancer Using Foods
 - American Institute for Cancer Research: <http://www.aicr.org>.
 - Foods that Fight Cancer page: <http://www.aicr.org/foods-that-fight-cancer>

Mindful Eating

- The Center for Mindful Eating. <http://thecenterformindfuleating.org>. This is where Mindful Awareness meets Food & Drink.

Apps

- Fat Secret, Calorie Counter - <https://www.fatsecret.com/>. A free app that allows you to keep a food diary, provides healthy recipes, an exercise log, and a journal. The app also has a barcode scanner to help you track the foods you buy.
- Fooducate Weight Loss Coach - <https://www.fooducate.com/>. A free app that in addition to counting calories will “grade” and tell you how the quality of those calories came from. Attempts to teach you about choosing healthy options.
- My Fitness Pal - <https://www.myfitnesspal.com/>. A free app and website to help count calories. Fairly simple to use.
- US Department of Veterans Affairs - <https://www.move.va.gov/MOVE/MoveCoach.asp>. A free phone app created by the VA to help track diet, activity, and weight.