

# Healthy Eating, Why it Matters

Healthy eating can make it easier to meet your daily calorie target and provides many benefits including more energy, improved satiety, larger meal size and increased calorie burning through digestion. It can also lead to better health and reduce your risk of chronic diseases. Strive for your best diet – the healthiest diet possible that you truly enjoy and can maintain long term.



## Beyond Calories

We spend a lot of time discussing the overall calorie value of food since the **currency** of weight is calories. A surplus of calories leads to weight gain and a deficit in calories leads to weight loss. Regardless of the quality of your diet, you could still be successful in your weight loss efforts as long as you limit calories. However, eating healthy makes it easier to reach your calorie target.

What about the **quality** of calories? You would not buy an article of clothing without looking beyond the price tag. You may consider the quality of the fabric, the ease of care, how it fits and how it makes you feel when wearing it. A closer look at the overall quality will help you decide if it's worth the investment. The same applies to calories. You start out each day with a budget and like any investment it should be evaluated to ensure it is a wise one. Ask yourself the following: Was there any processing involved? How will this food impact my satiety and energy levels after eating it? Is the total amount of food worth the calories or will it leave me wanting more? Will it provide healthy nutrients to my body?



## Food Quality

It is well known that eating healthily is an important lifestyle behavior that can improve health and reduce the risk of chronic disease. Some controversy exists with respect to the ideal diet, but there are some common characteristics that underscore all healthy diets. These include:

- limited refined starches and added sugars
- limited processed foods
- limited trans and saturated fats
- rich in whole plant foods (i.e. fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes)
- with or without lean animal sources such as fish, poultry and seafood.<sup>1</sup>

Author and food journalist Michael Pollan simplifies healthy eating nicely: **Eat Food. Not too much. Mostly Plants.**

## Benefits of a Healthy Diet

Invest your calories in high quality foods that will provide benefits and “love you back.” A diet of minimally processed foods close to nature that consist predominately of plants is positively associated with chronic disease prevention and health promotion. Eating a healthy diet will help you feel more energetic, better satisfy your hunger, increase the volume of food in your diet and help you burn more calories (thermic effect of food). Eating healthily will also improve your health and reduce your risk of chronic conditions like Type 2 diabetes, heart disease and certain cancers.

<sup>1</sup> Can We Say What Diet Is Best for Health? D.L. Katz and S. Meller, Annual Reviews 2014

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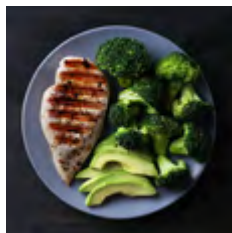
## Energy

Energy is the strength and vitality required for sustained physical or mental activity. What if you could improve your energy levels and be more productive in your day simply by deciding to make healthier choices? Many factors can impact your energy levels such as timing of meals and snacks, portion sizes and the composition of your meals.

When a balance of carbohydrates, protein and fats are consumed at the same time, this helps to improve energy levels since fat and protein slow down digestion and carbohydrates provide “clean burning” fuel to support the body’s energy needs. Refer to the Plate Balance resource for guidance on the relative distribution of foods on your plate.

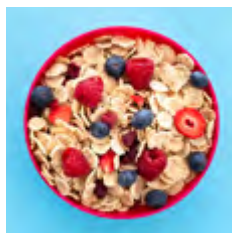
## Satiety

Satiety is a feeling of fullness or satisfaction after eating. Protein and fiber improve satiety.



### Protein

Protein is the most satiating macronutrient in the diet. Protein delays gastric emptying, meaning food stays in the stomach a bit longer where it creates a sense of fullness. Protein is the main functional and structural building block of every cell in our body and is essential for overall health. It is needed to support lean muscle mass.



### Fiber

Fiber includes all parts of plant foods that your body can’t digest or absorb. Foods high in fiber also have an effect on improving satiety since they take longer to digest. Fiber is found predominately in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts and seeds.

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## Volume

You may still be able to lose weight when eating processed foods that are calorically dense (high calorie for small amount); however, you will likely not feel satiated throughout the day and you will be at greater risk of overeating. While limiting calories for weight loss, you will feel more satisfied with the volume of foods allowed when consuming foods that have a lower calorie density and high water content (low calorie for large amount) such as fruits and vegetables.

Which plate do you think would do a better job at satisfying you physically and psychologically? A small portion of breaded and fried chicken with a few pieces of broccoli and white rice OR a large portion of grilled chicken and a generous portion of vegetables and a little rice?



## Health and Meeting Nutrient Needs

Quality food delivers maximum nutrients per calories consumed. A diet consisting mainly of whole foods leads to a greater chance of optimizing nutrition and meeting requirements for protein, fiber, phytochemicals and essential fats, vitamins and minerals. This will help to avoid nutrient-related deficiencies. Optimal eating is associated with increased life expectancy and a dramatic reduction in lifetime risk of all chronic disease.<sup>1</sup>

## Thermic effect of food

Your body burns calories when digesting and metabolizing food. It burns more calories when processing protein and high fibre, intact carbohydrate sources compared to fats, refined carbohydrates and highly processed foods. This increase in thermic effect will only have a small impact in your overall energy burning capacity, but small increases add up over time.



<sup>1</sup> Can We Say What Diet Is Best for Health? D.L. Katz and S. Meller, Annual Reviews 2014