

6 Easy Ways to Eat Healthier

If you're trying to improve your diet, whether it's to lose weight or simply get healthier, you can be overwhelmed with information and advice—sometimes to the point that you give up before you even get started. But choosing a healthier diet doesn't have to be complicated.

Following six simple tips can get you on the right path without complicated and confusing rules:

1. Go vegetarian, at least part of the time. While you don't have to shun meat completely, your diet should focus on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts and seeds. When you do eat meat, choose wild-caught fish and poultry and meat that's free of hormones and antibiotics. According to the American Dietetic Association, vegetarians have lower risks for cardiovascular disease, obesity, diabetes and several forms of cancer.

2. Count fingers. Read labels and lists of ingredients, and if a product has more ingredients than you have fingers, leave it sitting on the grocery shelf. It's been overprocessed and is low on nutrients. The fewer fingers needed, the better.

3. Test yourself. If a product includes ingredients you can't pronounce or spell, chances are it contains chemicals and additives that can be harmful—and may even be linked with cancer, allergies and other health problems.

4. Opt for organic. Organic growers use natural fertilizers instead of chemicals, natural compounds to kill weeds, pesticides from natural sources to control insects instead of dangerous chemicals, and organic feed instead of antibiotics and growth hormones. A study from Stanford University found that eating organic produce and meat lowers the levels of pesticides detected in consumers, and a Brazilian study found that organic tomatoes contained more vitamin C and plant

phenols than conventionally grown tomatoes.

5. Color your meals. Chuck white foods (bread and rice) and replace with 100 percent whole-grain breads, cereals and brown rice. Make sure whole-grain products contain at least 2 grams of fiber per serving. Pick the brightest, most deeply colored fruits and vegetables. Richly colored purple (eggplant), red (cherries, cranberries) and blue (blueberries) fruits and vegetables are rich in anthocyanins—a powerful type of flavonoid.

6. Ditch sugary drinks. Most beverages are high in calories and contain artificial coloring and other questionable ingredients, and artificially sweetened drinks contain chemicals such as aspartame that some experts believe raise your risk for many health problems, including Alzheimer's disease, metabolic syndrome, cancer and cardiovascular disease. Instead, choose water. Tea and coffee are also good choices and contain many beneficial antioxidants. When buying fruit juice, be sure the label says "100 percent juice."

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