



## Healthy Eating

Nutrition is important for everyone, but if you are living with mental illness, eating well is especially important for you. The foods you eat can affect your daily life, mood and energy level.

Healthy eating is not about being thin or deprivation. The word “diet” refers to eating habits. A healthy diet is about feeling good, having more energy, participating in your recovery and mapping out your future. A poor diet equals poor health, contributing to obesity, metabolic syndrome and diabetes—conditions that many people living with mental illness are at high risk of developing.

### What’s a Portion Size?

- **Woman's fist or baseball** = 1 serving of vegetables/fruit.
- **A rounded handful** = about 1/2 cup cooked or raw veggies or cut fruit, a piece of fruit or 1/2 cup of cooked rice or pasta. This is also a good measure for a snack serving, such as chips or pretzels.
- **Deck of cards** = 1 serving of meat, fish or poultry.
- **Golf ball or large egg** = 1/4 cup of dried fruit or nuts.
- **Tennis ball** = about 1/2 cup of ice cream.
- **Computer mouse** = 1 small baked potato.
- **Compact disc** = 1 serving of a pancake or small waffle.
- **Thumb tip** = about 1 teaspoon of peanut butter, butter or margarine.
- **Six dice** = 1 serving of cheese.
- **Check book** = 1 serving of fish (approximately 3 oz.).

### What Is a Healthy Diet?

A healthy diet emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains and fat-free or low-fat milk products. A healthy diet should also include lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs and nuts. Be sure to limit saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, sodium and added sugars.

Here is a list of healthy foods. Visit [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov) to see the recommended balance for a good diet as suggested by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

### Whole grains

The benefits of a high-fiber diet are well-known. Besides fiber, whole grains provide B vitamins, folic acid, iron and magnesium. Look at the nutrition facts panel for at least two grams of dietary fiber per slice of bread. The first ingredient should say “whole wheat” or “100 percent whole grain.”

### Fats

Foods that are high in saturated fats can increase our cholesterol levels. It is important to limit foods such as fatty meats, whole milk, butter and tropical oils such as coconut and palm.

Trans fats should be eliminated, so look at the nutrition facts panel and avoid foods that contain partially hydrogenated oils. Foods such as margarine, shortening, commercial french fries and pastries are often high in trans fat. When choosing cooking oil, use canola or olive oil whenever possible.

Omega-3 fats, which have health benefits, are found in fatty, deep-water fish such as salmon, tuna, bluefish, sardines and herring. Some studies show that Omega-3 fats provide protection against heart disease, stroke and may also be useful for depression and other health issues. Omega-3 fatty acids are a source of ongoing research in psychiatric conditions.



### Milk and Milk Products

Milk products are our main source of calcium and vitamin D, both of which are essential for healthy bones and teeth. Milk and milk products are also a good source of riboflavin, potassium, protein and magnesium.

The recommendation for calcium is 1,000-1,200 mg per day. One serving of milk contains about 300 mg. Other sources of calcium include yogurt, cheese, dark green vegetables and calcium-fortified orange juice. If you cannot tolerate milk products, try lactose-reduced

products. If you are dairy-free or vegan, go for calcium-fortified soy or rice milk.

## Vegetables

Vegetables are low in calories but high in fiber, potassium, vitamins A, C and E and phytonutrients. Benefits of eating vegetables include reduced cancer risk, reduced risk of heart disease, lower blood pressure, diabetes prevention and help with weight control. Choose a wide variety of colors when selecting your vegetables each day for the most health benefits.

## Fruits

Apart from vegetables, fruits are the most colorful foods on the pyramid. They provide fiber, folic acid and a variety of other nutrients such as vitamin C, potassium and health-protective phytonutrients. Also, they are relatively low in calories and make a healthy, filling snack.

## Nuts and Seeds

Nuts can provide a powerhouse of nutrients. Each type of nut offers its own health benefits. For example, walnuts contain plant-based Omega-3 fatty acids, almonds are high in vitamin E and Brazil nuts are high in selenium (an antioxidant). Since nuts and seeds are high in calories, be sure to watch your portion size.

## Beans

All beans are inexpensive, low-fat, nutrient powerhouses. They contain protein, fiber, B vitamins, iron, folic acid, potassium, magnesium and phytonutrients.

## Protein

All red meat choices should be lean, and poultry should be skinless. Choosing white meats over red meats is a good general strategy. Fish should be eaten at least twice a week. Beans, tofu and nuts can substitute for meat in meals.

## Tips for Eating Well on a Tight Budget

- Bring a list to the grocery store, and stick to it.
- Eat a light snack before you shop to reduce impulse buying—don't shop hungry.
- Choose fruits, vegetables and meats that are on sale and use coupons. You can freeze anything extra that you pick up on sale.
- Buy produce in season because it is priced to sell.
- Consider buying generic store brands because they are generally the same quality as national brands but with a different label.

- Avoid buying individually bottled drinks.
- Look up recipes that use specific ingredients that you know you can get cheaply.
- Stock cupboards with quick, easy, cheap items: beans, brown rice, pasta, low sodium soup, frozen produce, condiments, canned fish and eggs.
- Buy nonperishables in bulk when they are on sale.
- Beans are an inexpensive and healthy source of protein.

## Dining Out

Restaurants may be able to make healthier versions of their dishes, and there's nothing wrong with asking. Most restaurants just want to make customers happy. Ask if you can get your food baked, roasted or steamed instead of fried. Ask for fat-free milk rather than whole milk. Ask for salad dressing on the side. Part of eating healthy is making minor decisions like these, and you may not even notice the difference in taste.

## Food Journals

Keeping a food journal will help you uncover patterns relating to what, when, why and how much you eat and aid you in deciding what changes to make. It is also a surefire way to determine whether you are deducting the correct amount of calories from your diet if you are trying to lose weight.

Get started on your journal today by using an old-fashioned paper and pencil or an online program like the [www.my-calorie-counter.com](http://www.my-calorie-counter.com), [www.fitday.com](http://www.fitday.com) or the [www.myfooddiary.com](http://www.myfooddiary.com).



NAMI Hearts & Minds program is an online, interactive, educational initiative promoting the idea of wellness for individuals living with mental illness. This Fact Sheet is offered for informational purposes only. It does not intend to recommend specific treatment or strategies. Individuals should always engage with their health care provider before addressing diet.

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For more information about healthy eating or the NAMI Hearts & Minds program, visit

