

BETTER NUTRITION FOR INCREDIBLY BUSY PEOPLE

Improving Diet and Energy Balance When You Literally Have No Time

Introduction

The [2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#), published by the USDA, provide basic guidelines for a healthy diet. On whole, it is nothing new. It is the same advice most of our grandmothers told us. Make sure to include all the main food groups: Fruits, Vegetables, Grains, Proteins, and Dairy. Focus on variety. Make at least half your grains whole-grain. Keep your dairy low fat and your meats lean. Limit sodium, saturated fats, and sugars. Did we really need someone to tell us this? Probably not. What we need to know is:

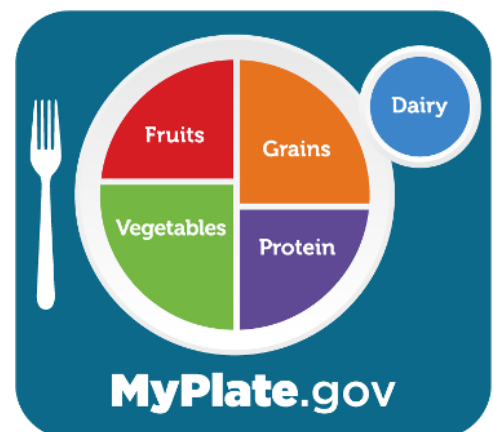
How do we make ourselves do it when we're all so busy?

Below is some advice for improving your diet without derailing your life.

Diet Quality

The MyPlate Food Groups

To ensure we're all on the same page, it helps to take a look at the MyPlate diagram. MyPlate is a visual plan for ensuring we include enough of each food group. While there is a lot of nutritional overlap between food groups, each group excels in a different set of vitamins and minerals. Including all groups ensures we get all the essential nutrients we need to function. These are the rough proportions of food groups you should be eating at every meal are at least within an entire day. In

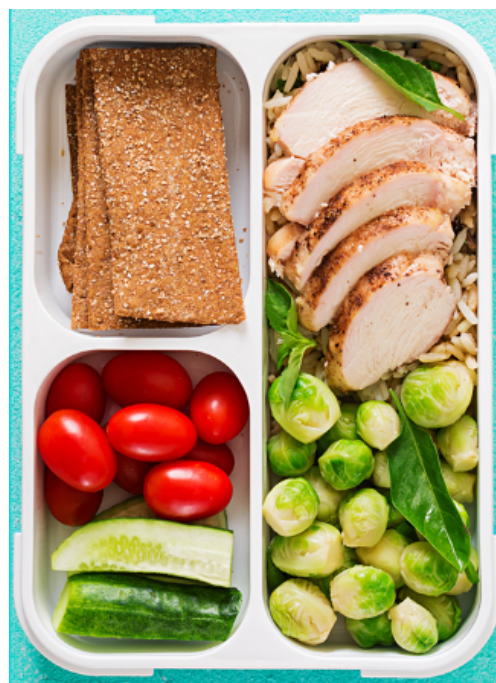


Better Nutrition for Incredibly Busy People

practice, this looks like filling half your plate with fruits and vegetables. Fill the other half with grains and a modest amount of protein, and then try to drink 3 cups of dairy or dairy-substitute per day.

Too busy? Many of us have fallen away from sit down meals where we can meaningfully arrange a plate of food. This is fine. The idea is to keep these food groups in mind when you're planning your day. Decide right now that you are going to keep the right kinds of foods in your home and do simple food prep on your day off.

- Fill a large Tupperware container with different vegetables. Cover them in water and throw them in the fridge.
- Keep apples, bananas, plums or any other fruits you like in your kitchen. Buy different assortments of nuts and seeds.
- Buy healthy grains, like rice, quinoa, buckwheat, or oats. Buy your favorite lean proteins (chicken, legumes, tofu, etc...).
- Cook large batches of grains and protein in advance to keep in your fridge for the week.
- Buy different premade sauces and dressings to quickly flavor your food. Keep some of these in your work fridge.



Now, on your way out the door, you will grab a few baggies and fill them with snacks of nuts and veggies. Bring a few pieces of fruit. Throw some grains in a travel bowl with your protein and your favorite sauce. You now have a baseline of healthy food to eat throughout the day. This doesn't mean you can't still visit the vending machine at work or grab something from a fast-food restaurant. But these choices will no longer be the bulk of your meal.

Diet Quantity: Energy Balance in a Busy Workday

Weight loss is not the purpose of this article, but we need a sense of how much to eat. There is no formula that can accurately determine the caloric needs of everyone. The best gauge for how much to eat is to track your own body. Track your calorie intake and your exercise for a period of time and weigh yourself once per week. If you are gaining weight, you are eating more calories than you are spending. If you are losing weight you are spending more calories than you are eating. For the most part, we want to remain in

energy balance, where caloric inflow equals caloric outflow. This will give us the most energy for our day. If you need to gain or lose weight, altering that balance is easy through increased activity and decreased caloric consumption. The best way to make dietary changes is slowly. Add or subtract 500 calories per day from your normal intake. If you act conservatively like this, you will find you can control your weight without feeling a sense of loss.



Too busy to obsess over energy balance?

Mostly, we don't have to obsess over calorie intake, or become an athlete to stay in energy balance. There are easy ways to gently push the balance in your favor without altering the flow of your work day.

- Stop Drinking your calories. This includes soda, fruit juices, lattes, and any drink that contains a significant amount of calories. Instead, drink sparkling and flavored waters.
- Beverages are a source of calories that do not provide any satiety. This can have massive consequences over time. For example, once you have met your calorie needs for the day, a single additional 12 oz can of cola or orange juice per day will add over 15 pounds of fat per year.
- Fill up on healthy food first. The foods you just packed and brought to work are less calorie dense than what is typically available at work. The more you eat of the healthy food, the less room you leave for the more calorie dense foods
- Take the stairs instead of the elevator, even if only for a few floors.
- Propose a walking meeting instead of sitting in an office.
- Keep small hand weights by your desk and use them from time to time to shift your focus and improve blood flow.

In the beginning, it won't feel like you're doing much, but these small changes add up over time. Ideally, we should all exercise 30 minutes per day, but don't let your life become an all or nothing proposition. Something is better than nothing and these small changes will add up over time and train your mind to enjoy a healthier lifestyle.