

# Healthy Eating for Busy People

You're serious about healthy eating. You've made real changes in your home and kitchen. Your fridge is full of fruits, veggies and low-fat dairy foods. The cupboard is stocked with whole-grain cereals and low-sodium canned beans. You've mastered a handful of healthy recipes that the whole family enjoys. There's a big mixed green salad on the dinner table every night.

But outside your home, it's a different story. Half the time, you're too busy to seek out healthier lunch and snack options. And half the time, healthier options just aren't available.

## In the Office

Is your workplace a virtual "food desert"? Does it lack access to fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy products and other foods that make up the full range of a healthy diet? What can you do to change the situation and make healthier options available to you and your co-workers?

Glazed donuts, cruellers and sticky buns aren't the only choices at staff meetings anymore. Organizers across the country are responding to requests for healthier meeting fare. Whole-grain muffins, scones and bagels are now staking out territory on the conference room table. While these options are somewhat healthier, their jumbo size often translates into too many calories.

Maybe it's time to become a healthy advocate in your workplace. Talk to your manager about including these healthy choices at the next meeting. Healthy suggestions include:

- Small whole-grain muffins and scones
- Small whole-grain bagels with reduced-fat cream cheese
- Granola bars
- Fresh fruit
- Low-fat or fat-free milk, and
- 100% fruit or vegetable juices.

When your energy lags during the workday it's easy to make a trip to the nearest vending machine. But the choices behind the little windows are often too high in fat, sugar or salt to qualify as "good-for-you." Vending machine companies are usually open to suggestions from their customers.



Suggestions include:

- Trail mix
- Nuts such as peanuts, or almonds, or sunflower seeds packed in 1-oz pouches
- Pretzels
- Baked whole-grain crackers or chips
- Low-fat cheese sticks
- Unsweetened iced tea
- Low-fat milk and smoothies

Smart snackers tend to avoid the temptations of the vending machine or coffee shop altogether. They've learned to stock their work stations with healthy choices such as:

- Ready-to-eat cereals (preferably with a whole grain as the first ingredient)
- No-oil-added microwave popcorn
- Vanilla wafers, fig bars or ginger snaps (without trans fats)
- Whole-grain crackers and natural peanut butter
- Instant oatmeal
- Dried fruits, and
- Nuts.

Remember that even the healthiest foods come with calories. Nut calories, for example add up fast. For instance, a handful of walnuts or approximately 15 walnut halves contain nearly 200 calories. Pre-packaging these snacks into individual serving size containers will help you control over-eating.

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## Coffee

Do you rely on a tall coffee drink to keep you going throughout a hectic day? More and more, research is identifying health benefits associated with coffee consumption. But the calories in the added cream or milk and sugar are another matter. A 16-ounce latte made with whole milk has 260 calories and 14 g fat. (Remember too, that every packet of sugar you stir in adds another 16 calories.) Flavored coffee drinks are often made with a sugar syrup to give it flavor and sweetness. To save 100 calories and cut the fat altogether, request fat-free milk for your next latte. Over the course of the workweek you'll consume 500 fewer calories but will still be getting more than 50% of your daily calcium. You can also ask for sugar-free flavored syrups to further cut the calories of your coffee drink.

## Fast Food and Deli

The bulk of America's excess calories come from food eaten outside of the home, where fried foods rule and portion sizes grow to extra large. But pressure from consumers and policy makers is effecting change in the food service industry. Most fast food chains now include healthier choices on their menus. For example:

- At McDonald's, a Grilled Chicken Ranch Snack Wrap has only 270 calories.
- Ask your Burger King server to hold the mayo and your Tendergrill Chicken Sandwich will have only 360 calories or your Veggieburger will only have 320 calories.

Nearly all fast-food restaurants list their nutrition information at the store or on their Web sites. Scout for lower calorie, lower sodium options at the fast food restaurants near your workplace so you can make a healthier choice.

For many of us, "lunch" equals "sandwich." Unfortunately, many lunchmeats, full-fat cheeses and sodium-loaded condiments turn a deli sandwich into a nutritional nightmare. But healthy choices are available if you know what to order:

- Choose lean turkey or chicken, and lean ham and beef only rarely. Avoid salami and other cured sausage meats

- Ask for a single slice of reduced-fat cheese such as Jarlsberg Lite. If reduced-fat cheese is not available, skip it altogether.
- Opt for whole-grain or rye bread.
- Hold the mayo and go with mustard.
- Pile on the lettuce, tomato and any other fresh veggies at hand. Sliced peppers and cucumbers add flavor and crunch with hardly any calories.

## Prepared Meals from the Supermarket

More and more people are using the supermarket as a place to grab lunch or dinner. Often, prepared meals do not stack up nutritionally to home-cooked meals. Like many meals prepared outside the home, they can be high in fat and sodium, and are less likely to come with vegetables. In-store prepared foods don't come with a standard Nutrition Facts panel like packaged foods. If you have a question about ingredients, ask the counter person.

Finding healthy options at the supermarket deli counter isn't as hard as you might think. When selecting prepared foods from your supermarket's deli display, you'd be wise to avoid anything fried and anything described as "cheesy". After that, steer toward grilled or roasted foods.

A rotisserie chicken is the busy person's ace in the hole. This affordable (\$7-\$8), lean protein can be the foundation of quick and easy meals:

- Serve chicken with baked potatoes or sweet potatoes and a salad of mixed greens. Or:
- Shred the chicken meat (discard the skin) and toss with salsa fresca, cooked black beans and grated low-fat jalapeño cheddar. Roll this up into soft tortillas and top with guacamole or fat-free sour cream. Or:
- Try combining shredded chicken with a bag of broccoli slaw, sliced almonds and light Asian sesame dressing.

Sources: [American Dietetic Association www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)