

Chapter 1

Keep Your Balance

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Balance is what a healthy body is all about. Every system within your body constantly strives for balance, and it's this balance that keeps your health stable and your systems functioning.

We bet you're no stranger to the phrase *balanced diet*. However, do you have any idea what that phrase really means? This chapter takes a stab at defining it for you. It also features tips for healthy eating when dining out so you can find balance even at your favorite restaurant.

Balancing Act

So what exactly is a balanced diet? There's no one perfect diet, but a balanced diet is one that includes a variety of foods from each basic food

group every day. Eating different foods from each food group guarantees you're getting adequate carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins, and minerals. A balanced diet also infers that energy needs are balanced with physical activity; that is, you take in the exact amount of calories your body needs to function and maintain a healthy weight.



Of course, most people can't eat perfectly at every meal of every day. To really succeed in achieving a balanced diet, consider your diet through the week, not necessarily at only one meal.

Strive for a little variety

Nobody likes to eat the same thing all the time. One of the ways you can help yourself eat a balanced diet on a daily basis is to really make an effort to choose a variety of foods. By *variety* we mean you should pick different types of foods within each food group. So even if you love bananas, you should try to mix things up and eat an apple, a plum, some melon, or berries every week. Hey, go crazy: Try a kiwifruit or mango once in a while too!

Eat fruits and vegetables

Fruits and vegetables are nutritional powerhouses, and they play a vital role in a balanced diet. When you're on the go, bring fruit to work or school with you, or grab an apple on your way out the door. This behavior strategy helps round out your diet by providing important vitamins and minerals, thereby balancing out the higher-fat, higher-calorie

choices you may make at other times. It also adds fiber to your diet, and fiber helps control hunger, aiding in weight control.



Eat at least two servings of fruit daily, gradually increasing this amount to three or four.

And what about those pesky vegetables? Well, they're very low in calories and rich in vitamins and fiber, plus they add color and healthy *phytochemicals* (nonnutritive plant chemicals that have protective or disease-preventive properties). And despite what you may recall from childhood, vegetables can be delicious if prepared properly.



Grilling is a really quick and easy way to prepare vegetables as a side dish or pasta topping. Vegetables such as bell peppers, eggplant, zucchini, onions, potatoes, and portobello mushrooms all do well on the grill.

Adding more fruits and vegetables to your diet when you eat at home is important because choices are slim and sometimes nonexistent in many restaurants, especially the fast-food variety. If you can choose a fruit or vegetable when dining out, do so, but in some restaurants, your best bet is simply to make lower-calorie, lower-sodium choices. Doing so gives you a better shot at balancing out nutrients to meet your body's needs overall.

Embrace exercise and sleep

The diets of people who are overweight are usually unbalanced. Being overweight is a risk factor for

Type 2 diabetes and heart disease. If you need to lose weight, check with your physician and do the following:

- ✓ **Exercise regularly.** Including physical activity (also known as exercise) with a balanced diet is a great way to stimulate weight loss.
- ✓ **Get more sleep.** Research has shown that getting adequate sleep helps with weight control. When you're well rested, you're able to make reasonable decisions, thereby passing up that 460-calorie sweet potato casserole in favor of the 60-calorie steamed vegetables.



Losing weight is all about finding balance. (There's that word again.) Make exercise a habit, but also make sure you get enough rest.



Perhaps you're on a high-protein diet in an effort to lose weight. Although this type of diet can lead to successful weight loss, fast-food restaurants aren't the place to stick to it because most of the high-protein foods offered there are also high in fat. So, please, no "double bacon cheeseburger without the bun" orders.

Basic Tips When Dining Out

Dining out can be an enjoyable experience, but it can also be a high-calorie one. However, with a bit of planning ahead, you can manage to enjoy your dining experience without the worry of eating too many calories or sacrificing health. Consider these tips to save calories the next time you dine out:

- ✔ Ask for dressings or sauces on the side, or skip the mayo.
- ✔ Consider an appetizer or side dish as an entrée, or choose the regular, small, or kid-sized portion. (Skip anything that's extra-large or supersized.)
- ✔ Choose nonfat or lowfat milk and coffee drinks (pick the small or "tall" size for the latter).
- ✔ Select grilled or oven-roasted items and skip the deep-fried foods.
- ✔ Drink more water with your meals.
- ✔ Review beverage sizes and calories. You can rack up several hundred calories a day in liquid if you don't monitor your intake.
- ✔ Watch out for salads; they aren't always the low-calorie choice.
- ✔ Include as many vegetable toppings as possible on your sandwich, in your omelet, or on your pizza.
- ✔ Skip the butter on breakfast items such as waffles or pancakes and use smaller amounts of syrup.
- ✔ Enjoy your eggs with toast, but skip the extra meat item.
- ✔ Skip the extra cheese on anything whatsoever.
- ✔ Choose pastas with marinara or olive oil-based sauces rather than cream or Alfredo-type ones.
- ✔ Consider splitting an item with a friend and ordering a side salad to round out your meal (unless of course you're splitting dessert).
- ✔ Bring this guide with you and choose wisely!



If you currently eat out daily, consider cutting back to eating no more than three meals per week away from home (not counting packed lunches). Ideally, you should limit dining out to two or fewer times a week.