

Guide to HEALTHY EATING

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INTRODUCTION

Every year, countless people try and fail to change their eating habits. The problem isn't necessarily a lack of willpower or motivation, it's that too many people have the wrong idea about what healthy eating really means.

A healthy eating pattern should make you feel good and help your body function at its best. You don't need to go on a diet, deprive yourself, or give up all your favorite foods to eat healthy!

Research shows that the small details (low-carb vs low-fat, meal timing, specific nutrients, etc.) don't matter nearly as much as being consistent with the basic guidelines of healthy eating, which you'll learn in this eBook.

The beauty of these guidelines is that you can adapt them to whatever specific nutrition pattern works for you.

If you want to go plant-based, or low-carb, or try intermittent fasting, or any other eating style, you can do that within these guidelines.

Best of all, you can find a way of eating that you actually enjoy and can stick with forever.

When you create a healthy eating pattern that works for you and your lifestyle, you're setting yourself up for a lifetime of good health!





HEALTHY EATING PATTERN GUIDELINES

A Healthy Eating Pattern:

✓ Based On A Variety Of Minimally Processed Foods

Minimally processed foods are foods that are as close to their natural state as possible. That includes whole vegetables and fruits, whole grains, legumes, whole cuts of meat and fish, healthy fats like unrefined oils, nuts, seeds, and dairy (if you tolerate it well).

✓ Limits Ultra-Processed Foods

These are junk foods, fast foods, ice cream, cookies, cakes, pre-made microwavable meals, and anything else with a long list of ingredients that you can't pronounce.

✓ Balanced

That means you get a mix of different foods from each of the food groups, which ensures that you get all the nutrients your body needs.

✓ Controls Portion Sizes To Avoid Overeating

The types of food you eat is very important, but so is how much you eat. Many people know they should control their portions, but it's not as easy to do as you might think.

✓ Consistency And Long-Term Commitment, Not Perfection

You should aim to achieve the above goals 80% of the time, and allow yourself the freedom to include some "not-so-healthy" choices because they fill another need for you such as taste, emotion, or social connection.

WHAT ABOUT CALORIES?

You might have noticed that cutting calories isn't part of a healthy eating pattern. There's a very good reason for that.

Yes, calories are important. If you eat less calories than you burn, you lose weight. If you eat more calories than you burn, you gain weight.

Unfortunately, trying to cut calories just doesn't work for most people. It might sound counterintuitive, but **the way to control calories is not to focus on them.**

There's a better way, a way that shifts your focus away from cutting calories but still helps you eat fewer of them. It's all about changing your mindset.

The Problem With Cutting Calories



The number of calories in a food doesn't indicate whether it's "good" or "bad". A food that's low in calories isn't necessarily healthy and won't necessarily help you lose weight, and a food that's high in calories isn't necessarily unhealthy.

When your focus is only on counting (and limiting) calories, you end up feeling restricted, deprived, hungry, and stressed. That's not a sustainable way to live. If you're always feeling that way, sooner or later you'll give up and be right back where you started.

The act of eating is so much more than a math equation, and food should make you feel good and support your health and well-being. That alone is reason enough to try a different way.

Even worse, the very theory of calorie counting has serious problems. It's not nearly as simple and fool-proof as you have been led to believe.

Calorie Counting Is Very Inaccurate



People drastically underestimate how many calories they take in, often by 30% or more.

Freedman et al., 2014

When you enter a food into a calorie counting app, it asks you how much you ate. Do you know *exactly* how much you ate for lunch today? Was it a cup of rice? Half a cup? How many grams was that steak? Did you eat a “small” sweet potato, or a “medium” one?

To get an accurate idea of how much you’re eating, you would need to weigh and measure your food. The vast majority of people don’t do that when they’re counting calories.

They just take a guess, and they’re often wrong. People are really bad at estimating their food intake.

Even if you are able to track exactly how much of each food you eat, and exactly how it was prepared, your calorie numbers are still probably not accurate. That’s because food labels aren’t accurate.

The FDA allows the calorie content on food labels to be off by up to 20%.

Why spend your valuable time, effort, and energy thinking about calorie numbers when they’re probably wrong anyway?

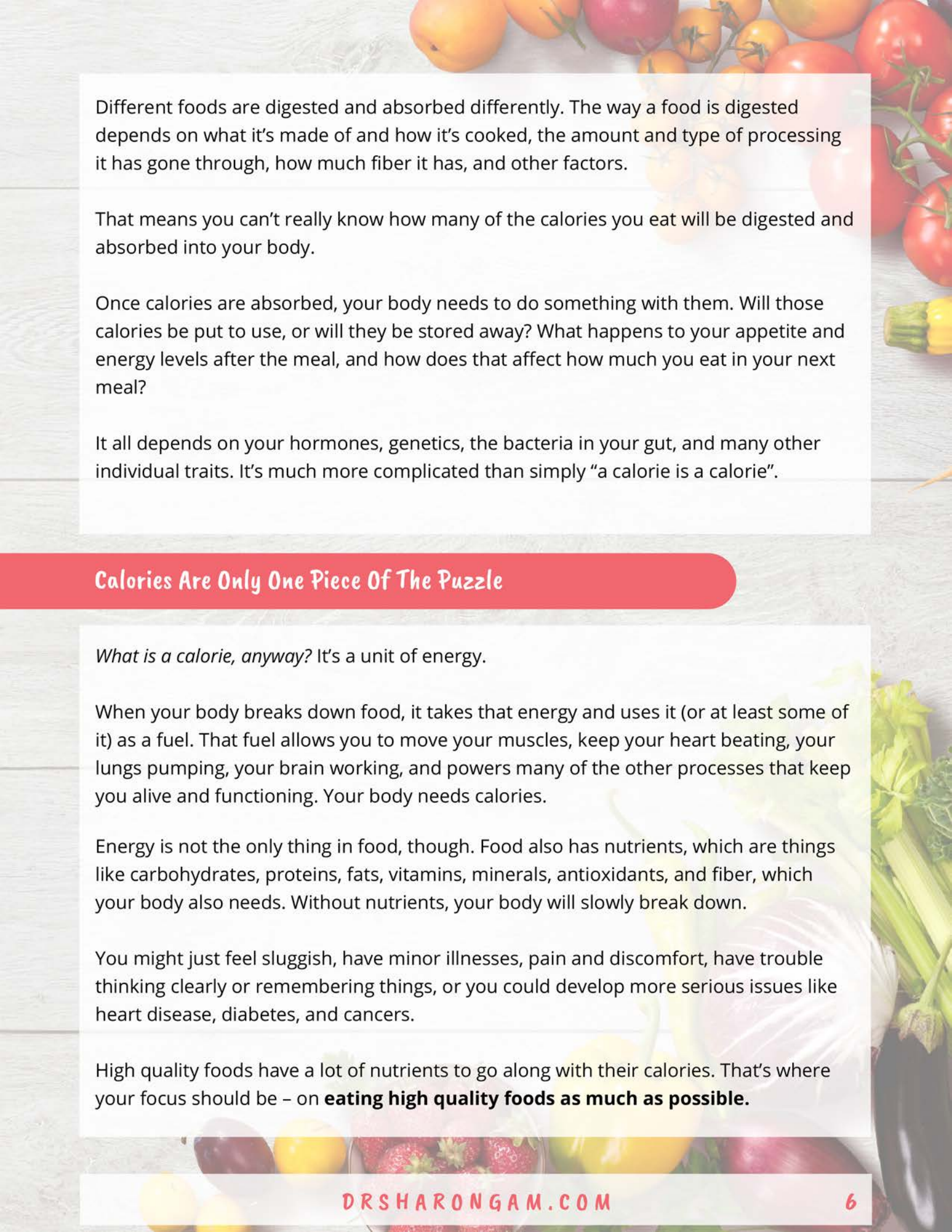


If a food says on the label that it contains 200 calories, it could actually have anywhere between 160 and 240 calories!

What Your Body Does With The Calories You Eat

If you did know precisely how many calories are in the food you eat, it still wouldn’t matter that much. That’s because all calories are not created equal.

Some people will argue that “a calorie is a calorie”, and it doesn’t matter where those calories come from. Not true. You could eat the same amount of calories in cookies and carrots, and it’s pretty obvious that those two foods would do very different things to your body.



Different foods are digested and absorbed differently. The way a food is digested depends on what it's made of and how it's cooked, the amount and type of processing it has gone through, how much fiber it has, and other factors.

That means you can't really know how many of the calories you eat will be digested and absorbed into your body.

Once calories are absorbed, your body needs to do something with them. Will those calories be put to use, or will they be stored away? What happens to your appetite and energy levels after the meal, and how does that affect how much you eat in your next meal?

It all depends on your hormones, genetics, the bacteria in your gut, and many other individual traits. It's much more complicated than simply "a calorie is a calorie".

Calories Are Only One Piece Of The Puzzle

What is a calorie, anyway? It's a unit of energy.

When your body breaks down food, it takes that energy and uses it (or at least some of it) as a fuel. That fuel allows you to move your muscles, keep your heart beating, your lungs pumping, your brain working, and powers many of the other processes that keep you alive and functioning. Your body needs calories.

Energy is not the only thing in food, though. Food also has nutrients, which are things like carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and fiber, which your body also needs. Without nutrients, your body will slowly break down.

You might just feel sluggish, have minor illnesses, pain and discomfort, have trouble thinking clearly or remembering things, or you could develop more serious issues like heart disease, diabetes, and cancers.

High quality foods have a lot of nutrients to go along with their calories. That's where your focus should be – on **eating high quality foods as much as possible.**

CALORIE-DENSE AND NUTRIENT-DENSE FOODS

Now that you know that calories aren't the most important part of the food you eat, it's time to refocus on what really matters - the quality of your food.

Some foods contain a lot of calories without much (or any) other nutritional value. Those are usually heavily processed foods like sodas, fast foods, candies, microwaveable meals, and other junk foods.

During the manufacturing process, food companies add sugar, salt, fat, and preservatives to those foods, while nutrients such as vitamins, minerals, fiber, and antioxidants are often lost. Those foods are also known as “calorie-dense” foods, or **ultra-processed** foods.

They're also what people mean when they talk about “empty calories”. Even a food that is low in calories is calorie-dense if it doesn't also have many nutrients in it.

On the other hand, “nutrient-dense” foods are packed with the things that you need to thrive – vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, amino acids, fatty acids, and fiber. Whole, **minimally processed** vegetables and fruits, whole grains, minimally processed proteins and healthy fats are nutrient-dense foods.

Eat Less!

Calorie-Dense = Ultra-Processed

Nutrient-Dense = Minimally Processed

Eat More!

Nutrient-Dense Foods Help Control Your Appetite

Nutrients are the key to your healthy eating success!

Vitamins, minerals, and fatty acids help create and regulate hormones. Some of those hormones are responsible for keeping your appetite in check and directing your body to burn fat stores. That's really important when it comes to weight control and overall health.

Many calorie-dense foods alter your hormones, and consequently your appetite. If you're constantly hungry or having cravings, you're going to have a hard time managing your weight.

Nutrient-dense foods help your body manage your hormones and your appetite effectively, so you're less likely to be starving before your next meal or have cravings for sweets.

Speaking of appetite, nutrient-dense foods increase satiety, which is a feeling of fullness and satisfaction. When your stomach senses that you've eaten enough nutrients in a meal, it sends signals to your brain to let you know that you can stop eating.

Nutrient-dense foods are also high in fiber, which fills you up and prompts you to stop eating. Try to overeat on broccoli, I bet you can't!

Calorie-dense foods don't make you feel full (at least not for long), so you're more likely to overeat. That's why it's so easy to go through a whole bag of chips in one sitting – they don't have some of those nutrients and fiber which tell your brain that it's time to stop.



Nutrient-Dense Foods Improve Your Gut Health

Nutrient-dense foods also improve your gut health and affect the bacteria in your gut, which is called the microbiome. Recent research suggests that weight control (and many health conditions) have a lot to do with the state of your gut bacteria.

Calorie-dense, ultra-processed foods tend to negatively affect those bacteria, while nutrient-dense foods are good for them. The research in this area is still emerging, but it seems that the microbiome plays a huge role in overall health and weight control, so supporting your gut bacteria by eating whole, minimally processed, nutrient-dense foods might be one of the best things you can do for your health.

Shift Your Focus To Increasing The Quality Of Your Food

As you can see, focusing on cutting calories isn't the best strategy for improving your health and managing your weight.

If you focus instead on eating mostly minimally processed foods and limiting ultra-processed foods, your body will start to work better, you'll feel less hungry, and **you'll end up eating fewer calories without having to think about it.**

This is how you can be successful while feeling full and satisfied, not restricted and deprived. You can turn this type of healthy eating into a long-term lifestyle and look and feel great forever!

In the next section, you'll find a system for identifying which foods are minimally processed and which are ultra-processed so you know what to eat more of and what to limit.





HEALTHY EATING PATTERN GUIDELINES

EAT MOSTLY MINIMALLY PROCESSED FOODS AND LIMIT ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS

The most nutrient-dense foods are the ones that have been only minimally processed.

Generally, foods that aren't made in a factory and don't come in a package are nutrient-dense, especially vegetables and fruits. Whole grains like brown rice and quinoa, beans and peas, which may come packaged but haven't been heavily processed, are also nutritious choices, as are many types of minimally processed sources of protein.



This is the most important aspect of healthy eating. If you get this right, everything else will fall into place!

These are the kinds of foods that are the most supportive of your health and your goals.

It's not always easy to identify healthy choices. Food manufacturers are smart, and they use tricky marketing tactics to convince you that their foods are "healthy" or "natural", when they are really ultra-processed.

It's important to see through the marketing gimmicks and learn to identify food processing so you can make informed choices about what to eat.

My System For Identifying Food Processing

Here's a simple system for categorizing foods based on how processed they are. This system groups foods into one of four categories:

Category 1 Foods = Least Processed

Category 2 Foods = A Little Processed

Category 3 Foods = Moderately Processed

Category 4 Foods = Heavily Processed

> Minimally Processed!

> Ultra-Processed!

Your Goal

Eat as many Category 1 and 2 foods as you can.

Eat less Category 3 and 4 foods.

FOOD CATEGORIES

1	2	3	4
Foods as close as possible to their natural state. Most nutritious and best for health and weight loss. Eat as much of this type of food as possible. <i>Example: Whole vegetables and fruits</i>	Slightly less nutritious than Category 1, but still a healthy choice. Choose this category when Category 1 foods aren't available or convenient. <i>Example: Canned vegetables</i>	Contain some ingredients that add excess sugar, salt, or unhealthy fats, and promote overeating. Have relatively few nutrients. Will not improve health or help with weight loss. <i>Example: Bottled vegetable juice with added sugars</i>	Contain a lot of ingredients that add excess sugar, salt, or unhealthy fats, and promote overeating. Have very few (if any) nutrients. Can contribute to poor health and weight gain. <i>Example: Vegetable "chips" or "straws"</i>
EAT MORE		EAT LESS	

HOW TO DETERMINE HOW PROCESSED A FOOD IS

Step 1: Read The Ingredient List!

The only way to find out which category a food belongs to is to read the ingredient list on the package.

Don't pay attention to the marketing claims and labeling on the front. Food companies can put pretty much whatever they want on the packaging to convince you that their product is "healthy" or "natural". Just because a product has a picture of a vegetable on it or is labeled "no artificial flavors", doesn't mean it is not ultra-processed.

Even seemingly simple products can be misleading. Here are two cans of tomato paste. One says it also contains Italian herbs. You might think this just means they have added some basil or oregano to the tomato paste, but you would be wrong...



The plain "Tomato Paste" has only one ingredient: tomatoes. The "Tomato Paste Product With Italian Herbs" contains a long list of additives, including high fructose corn syrup, partially hydrogenated vegetable oil, and more. It doesn't even list any "italian herbs", which means they used flavoring extracts instead of real herbs.

This is the kind of food that can have a negative impact on your health and body composition goals, even though it seems innocent enough.

There are many, many products like this on supermarket shelves and even in many restaurants. If you're not used to reading ingredient lists, you may be shocked to discover what's actually in the foods you're eating.

Step 2: Assign The Food To Category

Based on the ingredient list and the tables on the next page, decide whether the food belongs in Category 1, 2, 3, or 4.

It can sometimes be difficult to decide which category to assign to a food, and there will be some foods that don't fit easily into just one category.

[Fooducate.com](https://www.fooducate.com) is a website that grades foods based on their ingredients and other factors, and provides ingredients lists and more information for many products. You can use this website as a resource to help you make your decisions.

You will sometimes need to use your best judgement and make an educated guess. The most important thing is to get an idea of whether the food is minimally processed (Categories 1 & 2) or ultra-processed (Categories 3 & 4). If you do that, you'll be on the right track. Don't worry too much about getting the categories exactly right. Do the best you can.



GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR DETERMINING FOOD CATEGORIES

1	2	3	4
- Single ingredient foods like whole vegetables, fruits, legumes, whole grains, cuts of meat or fish, etc. Fresh or frozen. - Processed only enough to get it into a state that you can eat (beans dried & bagged, meat cut into steaks, etc.). Should have only 1 item on the ingredient list. - Home cooked meals made from scratch with whole ingredients.	- Store-bought items with very few ingredients & no added sugars, flavors, etc. - Store-bought canned items like vegetables and beans that contain only the whole food and 1 preservative. - Homemade meals cooked from scratch using refined oils and/or sugar you add yourself.	- Usually 5 or more ingredients. - Contains 1 or more ingredients you don't recognize and/or can't pronounce. - Contains added sugar, preservatives, additives, etc. - These are often marketed as "healthy" but are actually heavily processed.	- Very long ingredient list. - Contains 2 or more items you would never find in a home kitchen and/or that you don't recognize/can't pronounce. - Contains high fructose corn syrup or another highly refined sugar, or more than one type of added sugar (e.g. brown rice syrup, cane sugar, etc.).
EAT MORE		EAT LESS	

QUESTIONS TO HELP YOU DECIDE

1	2	3	4
- Is it a whole food without a label, like a vegetable or fruit? - If it does have a label, is there only one thing on the ingredient list? - Can you imagine it growing or living in nature? Example: Whole vegetables, fruit, whole grains, legumes, nuts, seeds, cuts of meat or fish	- Is it something made from a whole ingredient in a form that's more convenient for you to cook with or eat, without extra sugar or flavors added to it? - Can you imagine what the whole food it came from looks like? Example: Canned foods with no added sugars or flavors, whole grains ready to cook in a pouch, butter or cheese with very few ingredients	- Does it have a few things on the ingredient list that you wouldn't add yourself, like extra sugar, oil, preservatives, flavors? - Are you unable to imagine where all the ingredients came from or how they were made? Example: Protein bars, granola bars, boxed cereals, bottled tomato sauces, spreads, dressings	- Does it look nothing like any of the ingredients it was made out of? - Do you not know what a lot of the ingredients are or what they do? Example: Junk food, fast food, pre-made boxed meals and drinks

INGREDIENTS TO WATCH OUT FOR



***If You See Any Of
These Ingredients,
That Food Will
Almost Always Be
Category 3 or 4***

These ingredients are not dangerous and have all been deemed "safe to consume in moderation" by the FDA. They are simply indicators of ultra-processed foods.

Still, eating a lot of foods with these ingredients may be bad for your health and will undermine your ability to achieve your health goals.

- High Fructose Corn Syrup
- More than 1 Type of Sugar
- Artificial Sweeteners
- Dextrose
- Anything "Modified"
- Natural Flavors
- Artificial Flavors
- Vegetable Oil
- Hydrogenated Oil
- Vitamins and Minerals
- Sodium Nitrate & Sodium Nitrite
- Mono- and Diglycerides
- Xanthan Gum & Guar Gum
- Soy Lecithin

Why Are These Ingredients In Processed Foods?

Some of these ingredients are preservatives to make foods "shelf-stable", so they can last longer on supermarket shelves.

Some are added sweeteners, fats, or salts which are used to make manufactured foods taste better.

Vitamins and minerals are sometimes added to foods because processing strips away naturally occurring vitamins and minerals. Unfortunately, adding vitamins and minerals to processed foods does not make up for the ones that were lost.

Some of these ingredients are thickeners, stabilizers, texturizers, emulsifiers, flavors, or colors which are added to make up for the textures, flavors, or colors that are lost during processing.

For example, baking bread from scratch requires just four ingredients: flour, yeast, water, and salt.

A commercially-made sliced bread at the grocery store can have more than 20 ingredients. Why? Because traditionally baked bread also requires two more things: time and effort.

Commercial bread manufacturers want to speed up the process and make it cheaper. To do that, they take shortcuts including adding dough conditioners, preservatives, sugars, flavors, and colors.



Food manufacturers use these ingredients to increase their profits, not for your health. It's up to you to prioritize your health and well-being.

WHAT ABOUT RESTAURANT FOOD?

When you go out to eat, it's very tricky to know what's in the food you're served. You will often have to make educated guesses in this situation. Sometimes it will be clear: if you're at a fast food restaurant, almost every menu option is Category 4.

Evaluate the restaurant you're in. If it's a large national chain, chances are they will use commercially refined ingredients such as refined oils and pre-processed ingredients. A small family restaurant is more likely to use fresh ingredients.



Some restaurants advertise that they are "farm-to-table" or that they use local, fresh ingredients. The food at those restaurants will be more nutritious and more likely to be Category 1 or 2.

Restaurants, like food companies, usually have their profits in mind rather than your health. Restaurant food usually contains more sodium, fats, and sugar than you would add yourself.

For this reason, unless you know for certain that only Category 1 foods have been used to make your meal, the highest category you should assign is a Category 2.



HEALTHY EATING PATTERN GUIDELINES

BALANCING MEALS

Eating balanced meals means you get a mix of different foods from each of the food groups, which ensures that you get all the nutrients your body needs.

A balanced meal includes a **source of fiber** (from vegetables, fruits, and/or a whole grains), a source of **protein**, and a **healthy fat**. All of these components should be whole, minimally processed foods.

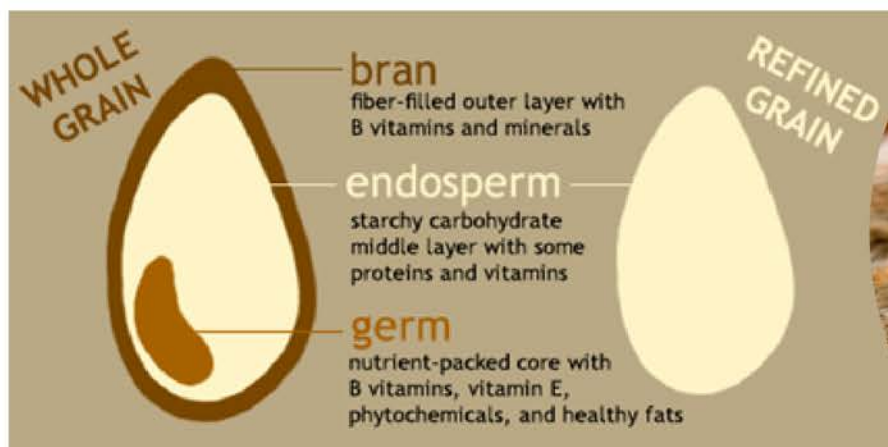
A Source of Fiber: Whole Grains, Vegetables, and/or Fruit

A diet high in fiber-rich foods such as fruits, vegetables (including beans and legumes), and whole grains has many important benefits, including:

- **Reduced risk of heart disease** by decreasing cholesterol levels.
- **Reduced risk of developing type 2 diabetes**, since fiber helps slow the body's absorption of sugar and keeps blood sugar levels steady.
- **Good overall health.** Foods that are high in fiber also tend to be rich in vitamins and other essential nutrients.
- **Healthy digestion.** Fiber is a source of fuel for your healthy gut bacteria. Those good bacteria are essential for digestion as well as reducing inflammation, which has many important health implications.
- **Weight loss.** Fiber digests slowly, so it keeps you full between meals. In fact, several studies have shown that people who eat more fiber are more likely to achieve a healthy weight.

Whole Grains

Whole grains have all the parts of the original kernel – the bran, germ, and endosperm, in their original proportions. When grains are processed and refined, the bran and germ are stripped away, and with them much of the fiber, vitamins, and minerals are lost.



White rice, for example, is the same as brown rice except that the bran and germ have been removed. 1 cup of brown rice has an extra gram of protein, 5 times the amount of fiber, 4 times more magnesium, twice as much zinc, and 4 times more folate than the same portion of white rice.

Vegetables and Fruits



Vegetables (including beans and legumes) and fruits are among the healthiest and most nutritious foods you can eat. Remember to prioritize **whole** vegetables and fruits.

When vegetables and fruits are processed (for example when they are turned into juices), they lose their fiber and some other nutrients.

Aim to eat a variety of different colored vegetables and fruits. The color of a vegetable or fruit is a reflection of the nutrients in it, so “eat the rainbow” to make sure you’re getting everything your body needs.

Saturated fats fall somewhere between the “good” and “bad” fats. They are found in red meat, whole milk, cheese, coconut oil, and many commercially processed foods.

While saturated fats have historically been considered “bad” fat, the evidence for the negative health effects of saturated fat is murky.

A diet high in saturated fats can increase your cholesterol, which is why it’s generally recommended that you limit saturated fats. However, the link between saturated fats and heart disease isn’t clear, with some studies finding that saturated fat doesn’t necessarily increase your risk.



Aim for most of the fat you eat to be “healthy fat” but more importantly, consider the source of the fat. Saturated fat that comes from a minimally processed food like cheese or butter without additives, preservatives, and other commercial ingredients is much less likely to be a health risk than if it comes from an ultra-processed food.

Even unsaturated fats can be more or less nutritious depending on how processed they are. Vegetable oils are mostly unsaturated fat, and if you didn’t understand how food processing works you might think all vegetable oils are considered healthy fats. That’s not the case.

A minimally processed vegetable oil, like Extra Virgin Olive Oil or another cold-pressed unrefined oil is a good choice for a balanced meal. On the other hand, “RBD” oils (“Refined, Bleached, and Deodorized”) are highly processed and lose many of their nutrients. Many cheap cooking oils, like canola or soybean oil, are RBD oils. They would not be considered a “healthy fat”.

Components Of A Balanced Meal

To create a balanced meal, choose at least one food from each category
(Protein, Source of Fiber, and Healthy Fat).

Notice that some foods are in more than one category, including beans, nuts, and dairy

	Fiber				
Protein	Vegetable	Fruit	Whole Grain	Healthy Fat	
• Meat such as chicken, beef, turkey, pork, etc. • Fish and shellfish • Beans & legumes • Soy products such as tofu & tempeh • Nuts & seeds (including nut butters) • Dairy products like yogurt, cheese, milk, etc.	• Eat a variety of colorful vegetables including dark green, red, orange, yellow, purple, & starchy vegetables. • Beans and legumes are also considered part of the vegetable group, so you could count them as a protein and a vegetable.	• Eat a variety of colorful fruits. • Eat whole fruits rather than drinking fruit juice, since juicing removes the fiber.	• Whole grains have all the parts of the grain, so they are full of fiber and nutrients! • Brown rice • Whole grain bread • Whole grain pasta • Oats • Quinoa • Barley • Amaranth • Bulgur	• Unrefined oils like extra virgin olive oil, avocado oil, coconut oil, etc. • Avocados • Fish • Nuts & seeds (including nut butters) • Dairy products like yogurt, cheese, milk, etc.	

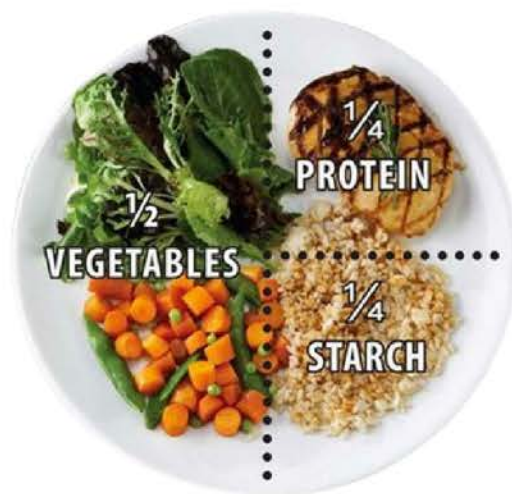
EXAMPLE LUNCHES:

	Protein	Fiber			Healthy Fat
		Vegetable	Fruit	Whole Grain	
1	Grilled chicken breast	Broccoli	Apple (on the side)	Brown rice	Olive oil to cook the chicken in
2	Sliced turkey breast	Lettuce, tomato		Whole grain bread	Hummus
3	Canned tuna	Corn, beans, onions, spinach			Olive oil for dressing
4	Black beans	Lettuce, tomato, onions	Orange (on the side)	Whole grain tortilla	Avocado
5	Steak	Sweet potato		Quinoa	Coconut oil to cook the beef in

Focus On The Proportions

To get the proportions right, think about a standard dinner plate. Fill up half your plate with vegetables, a quarter with whole grains, a quarter with a protein source, include a healthy fat such as olive oil to cook your protein in or to drizzle over your vegetables, and you have a balanced meal.

If you don't have a plate to fill up (let's say you're packing a snack to take to work), keep those same proportions in mind. If your balanced snack includes carrots with hummus (made from garbanzo beans - protein source and healthy fat), the carrots should make up most of your snack, with the hummus making up about a quarter of it.



Complete Your Meal

While the base of your meals should be made up of minimally processed ingredients, it's ok to add a little bit of less-healthy (but tasty) ingredients to make your meals more enjoyable.

A healthy eating pattern is useless if you don't stick to it for the long-term, and adding some mayo or cheese to your sandwich or a sauce to your stir-fry can make you less likely to feel deprived. As long as you have your main balanced meal ingredients in place, you'll be getting the nutrients you need.

Don't go overboard though, by slathering your salad with creamy dressing, croutons, and bacon or dousing your whole-wheat pasta with a store-bought sauce that's full of added sugar and preservatives. Too many less-than-healthy ingredients can derail your overall eating pattern.

Create your balanced meal, then add only one or two other ingredients in small amounts, if you need to. When choosing those other ingredients, make the healthiest choices you can by reading labels and choosing the least processed options available.



HEALTHY EATING PATTERN GUIDELINES

CONTROLLING PORTION SIZES

What you eat is important, but so is how much you eat. Learning to regulate your portions is a skill, and it's not as straight-forward as many people think.

Part of this skill is listening to your body's natural hunger signals. Your body has a built-in system for regulating how much you eat and telling you when to stop eating. For a variety of reasons, many people have lost touch with that system and can't depend on it to help control their food intake anymore.

There's not one single reason why you might overeat, and unfortunately there is not a simple solution to prevent overeating. Many aspects of modern life have converged to challenge your natural appetite regulation system.

The best place to start with portion control is first to learn what an appropriate portion size is, then to learn to get back in touch with your hunger signals and let your hunger and satisfaction guide how much you eat.



To find out more about the many factors that affect overeating and what you can do about it, read my full article [HERE.](#)

How Big Should Your Portions Be

Everyone's energy and nutrient needs are a little different. How much you should eat really depends on your individual metabolism and your activity levels. You don't need to take precise measurements to know how much you should eat, though.

A simpler way is to use your hands as a guide when serving yourself a meal.

Since your hands are proportional to your body size and they're always with you, you can use them to visualize the appropriate portion size for each of the main parts of your meal.

<u>Meal Component</u>		<u>Size of 1 Portion</u>
Protein	→	Your Palm
Vegetables/Fruits	→	Your Fist
Carbs (Grains)	→	Your Cupped Hand
Fats	→	Your Thumb

Eat one or two portions of each component at each meal. If your goal is to lose weight or build muscle, emphasize protein and vegetables at each meal, eating at least two portions of each.



Eat According To Your Hunger

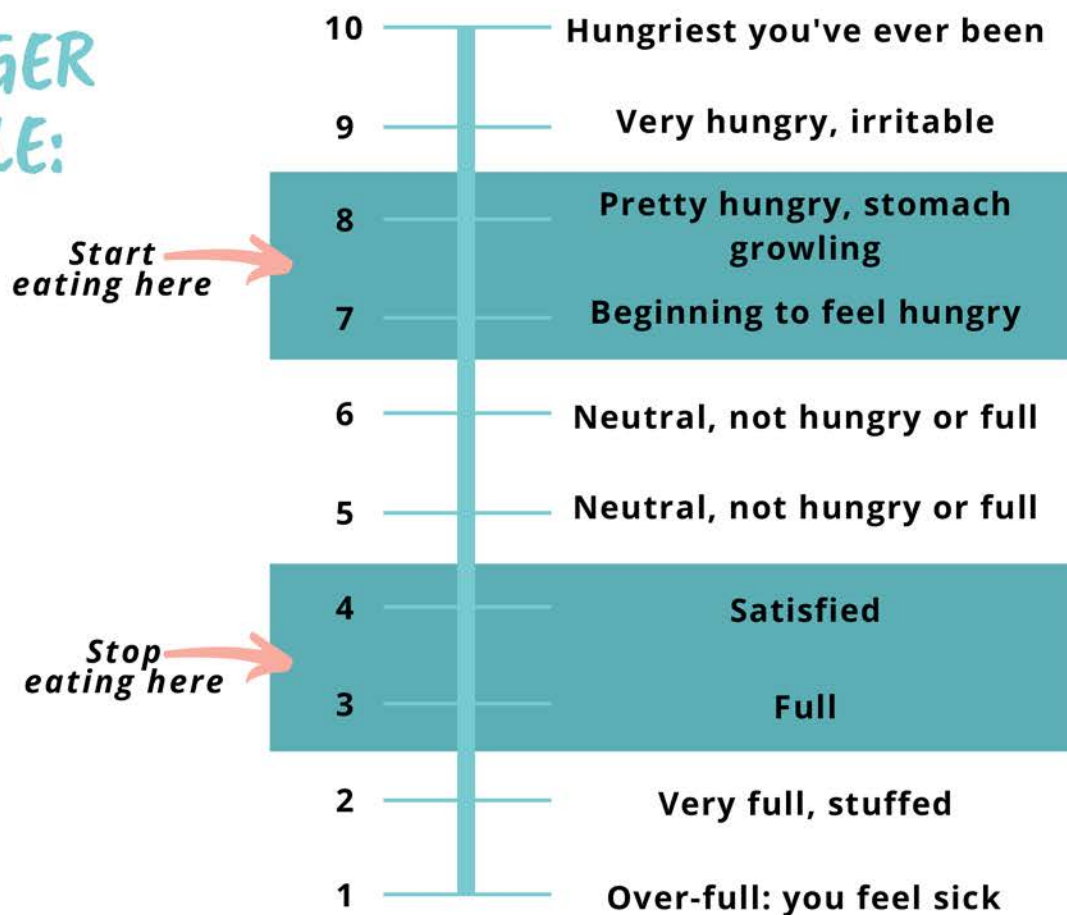
Once you're used to visualizing the appropriate portion sizes (using your hands as a guide), you should start using your hunger cues to make sure you're not eating too much or too little.

Learn to recognize when you're truly hungry and stop when you're satisfied but not stuffed. Use the scale below to gauge your hunger level throughout the day.

Eat when your hunger is at a 7 or 8 out of 10. If you feel like eating but your hunger level is a 6 or lower, stop and figure out why you feel like eating. Are you bored, sad, exhausted, or lonely? Find another way to address that need. Go for a walk, do a quick meditation, call a friend, listen to music, read a book, wait a minute and see if the feeling passes.

While eating, take a break every few minutes and assess your hunger level. Stop eating when you're satisfied but not stuffed, which is a 3 or 4 on the hunger scale.

HUNGER SCALE:





HEALTHY EATING PATTERN GUIDELINES

CONSISTENCY

There are no quick fixes when it comes to weight loss and good health. True success means developing a healthy eating plan that you can (and want to) stick with for the rest of your life.

Many people have an "all-or-nothing" mentality when it comes to their eating. They are either "all in" - eating nothing but "healthy" food, or they're "all-out" - eating anything and everything they want.

This is the exact wrong mindset to have if you want to be successful. This mindset drives people to suffer through weeks of eating foods they hate and depriving themselves of foods they love, then giving up altogether when they inevitably "slip up" and eat something they think they shouldn't. It's a recipe for failure.



Along with eating mostly minimally processed foods, consistency and long-term commitment are the keys to a healthy eating pattern.

To avoid the "all-or-nothing" mentality, you need to be flexible with your eating habits. This will allow you to be consistent because you won't feel like you are missing out or depriving yourself.

The 80% Rule

Each day, you should aim to eat a combination of Category 1 and 2 foods 80% of the time.

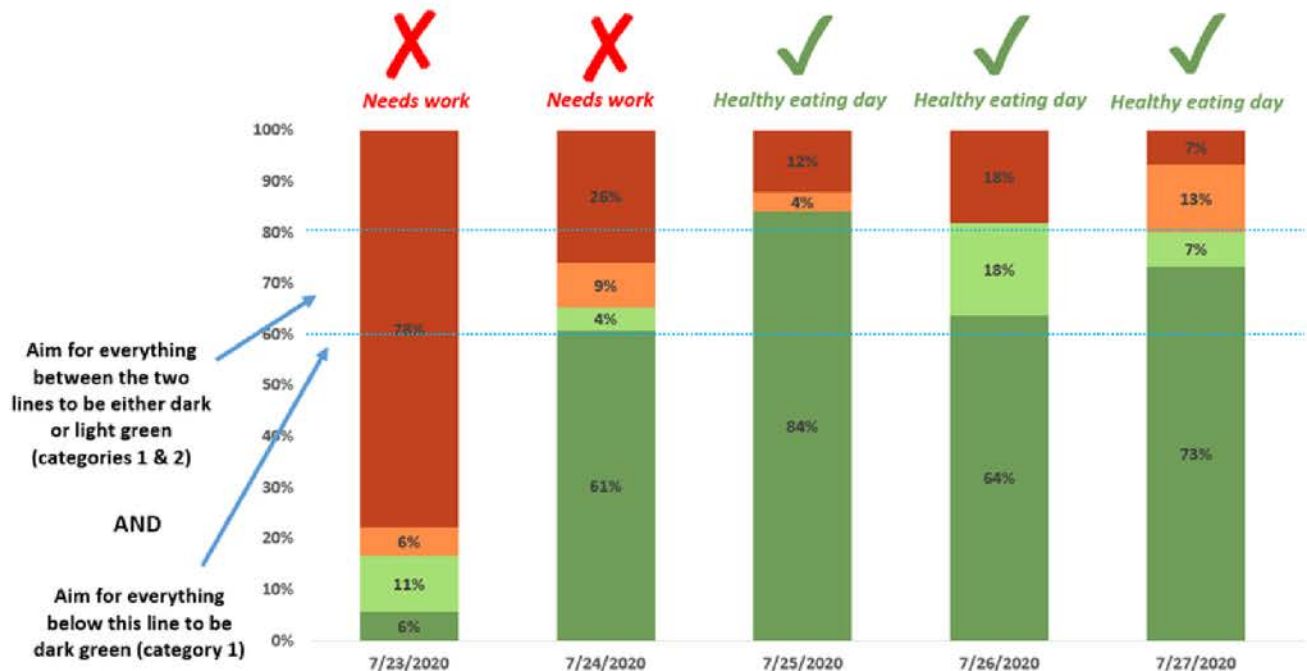
80% of your meals should be balanced (If you eat 3 meals and 1 snack per day, at least 3 of those meals/snacks should be balanced).

You should be controlling your portion sizes about 80% of the time (at least 3 out of 4 meals/snacks per day).

You should be achieving these things about 80% of the time (at least 6 days a week).

Here's What An "Ideal" Healthy Eating Day Looks Like:

If you were to track your eating by food category, here's an example of what healthy and unhealthy eating days might look like.



You can still enjoy your favorite Category 3 and 4 foods! Just aim for them to make up less than 20% of your eating choices each day.

Here's What An "Ideal" Week Of Portion Control, Balancing Meals, And Category Choices Looks Like:

Notice that you don't even need to eat "perfectly" for an entire day!

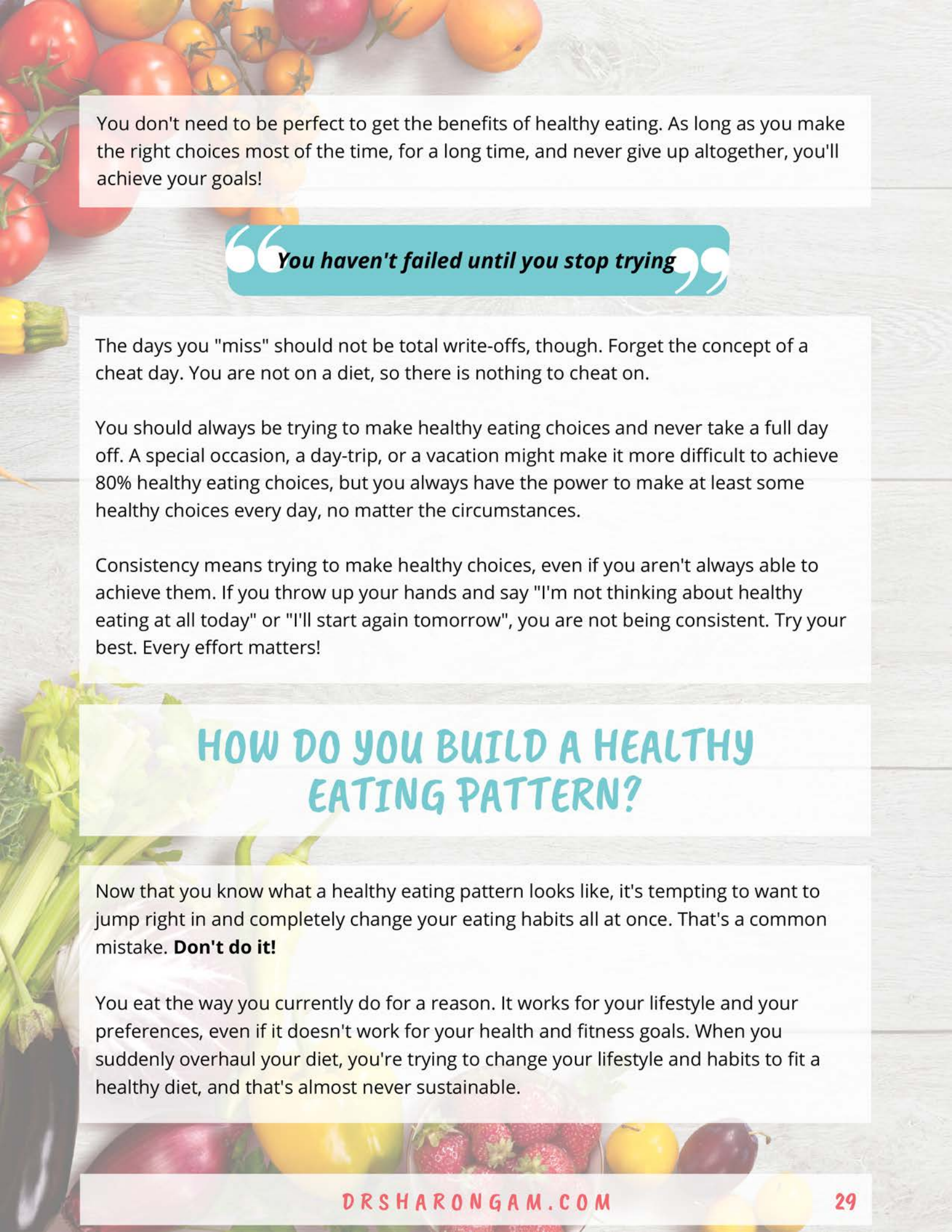
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Breakfast	✓ Balanced ✓ Portion	✗ Balanced ✓ Portion	✓ Balanced ✓ Portion	✓ Balanced ✗ Portion	✗ Balanced ✓ Portion	✗ Balanced ✗ Portion	✓ Balanced ✓ Portion
Lunch	✓ Balanced ✓ Portion	✓ Balanced ✗ Portion	✓ Balanced ✓ Portion	✗ Balanced ✓ Portion	✓ Balanced ✓ Portion	✓ Balanced ✓ Portion	✓ Balanced ✗ Portion
Dinner	✗ Balanced ✓ Portion	✓ Balanced ✓ Portion	✓ Balanced ✓ Portion	✓ Balanced ✓ Portion	✓ Balanced ✗ Portion	✓ Balanced ✓ Portion	✓ Balanced ✗ Portion
Snack	✓ Balanced ✗ Portion	✓ Balanced ✓ Portion	✗ Balanced ✗ Portion	✓ Balanced ✓ Portion	✓ Balanced ✓ Portion	✓ Balanced ✓ Portion	✓ Balanced ✓ Portion
80% Cat. 1 & 2?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓

You don't need to be perfect every day, but you do need to continue your effort day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year. **Consistency and time are the main ingredients for success.**

Here's What 80% Consistency Looks Like Over The Course Of A Year:

Notice how many days you can "miss" and still achieve 80% consistency.

JANUARY	FEBRUARY	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE
JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER



You don't need to be perfect to get the benefits of healthy eating. As long as you make the right choices most of the time, for a long time, and never give up altogether, you'll achieve your goals!

“You haven't failed until you stop trying”

The days you "miss" should not be total write-offs, though. Forget the concept of a cheat day. You are not on a diet, so there is nothing to cheat on.

You should always be trying to make healthy eating choices and never take a full day off. A special occasion, a day-trip, or a vacation might make it more difficult to achieve 80% healthy eating choices, but you always have the power to make at least some healthy choices every day, no matter the circumstances.

Consistency means trying to make healthy choices, even if you aren't always able to achieve them. If you throw up your hands and say "I'm not thinking about healthy eating at all today" or "I'll start again tomorrow", you are not being consistent. Try your best. Every effort matters!

HOW DO YOU BUILD A HEALTHY EATING PATTERN?

Now that you know what a healthy eating pattern looks like, it's tempting to want to jump right in and completely change your eating habits all at once. That's a common mistake. **Don't do it!**

You eat the way you currently do for a reason. It works for your lifestyle and your preferences, even if it doesn't work for your health and fitness goals. When you suddenly overhaul your diet, you're trying to change your lifestyle and habits to fit a healthy diet, and that's almost never sustainable.

Instead, you need to build your healthy diet into your existing lifestyle, habits, and preferences. To do that, you should slowly adapt your current way of eating as you build new habits and come up with strategies you can use to stick to this new way of eating for the rest of your life.

Don't aim for perfection, aim for progress. Any and all effort you make to improve your eating habits will have a benefit!

Small Steps To Sustainable Healthy Eating

- 
- 1. Start Where You Are**
 - 2. Make Small Changes**
 - 3. Develop Strategies To Support Those Changes**
 - 4. Make It Enjoyable**

Start Where You Are

The first step in changing your eating habits is to find out what you're currently eating. Many people don't pay enough attention to their eating choices, so tracking your eating will help you discover your starting point and determine where you could make improvements.

You will not need to continue tracking forever (although you can if it helps you), but you do need to get objective baseline data. The system of categorizing food may be new to you, and you may be surprised at your current eating habits.

Make Small Changes

Once you know your usual eating habits, take a good look at them and decide on one or two small changes you can make to move yourself in the right direction. It only takes a tweak to a meal you're already eating.

For example:

- Switching from white rice to brown rice in a stir-fry you already enjoy
- Switching from flavored yogurt to plain yogurt and sweetening it yourself with fruit
- Replacing one of your daily sodas with water
- Adding a side salad to your family pizza night
- Adding a couple of veggies to your usual morning ham and cheese omelet

Those small changes add up, and can make a big difference in your overall eating pattern without causing much disruption in your usual routine or food preferences.

Develop Strategies To Support Your Changes

Depending on willpower and motivation doesn't work for behavior change. Change is hard, and successful change takes extra strategies. These strategies don't have to be difficult or time-consuming. All you need to do is be aware of possible obstacles to healthy eating and make plans to avoid or overcome those obstacles.

For example:

- **Change your environment:** the things and people around you have a much bigger impact on your behaviors than you might think.

You can engineer your environment to make it easier to make healthy choices and harder to make unhealthy ones.

It can be as simple as keeping unhealthy options out of your house and putting healthy options in your line of sight.



- **Set up reward systems:** Every habit is reinforced with a reward. The best rewards are immediate and emotional ones, so set up a system by which you get a reward (like watching your favorite tv show) only while cooking or eating a healthy meal.

Make it Enjoyable

If you're going to stick with an eating pattern, consistently and forever, you need to enjoy what you're eating. Many people associate dieting with restriction, deprivation, and bland, tasteless "health foods". No wonder so few people can maintain a diet.



Remember, this is not a diet. You can (and should) eat anything you want. The key is to *want* to eat healthy, minimally processed foods. When you like the healthy foods you're eating and value the time and effort you spend preparing them, consistency becomes easy and effortless.

Try different cooking methods and recipes, and find minimally processed foods that you actually like to prepare and eat. There are plenty of ways to make healthy food delicious, you just need to find the right ones for you.

Changing your eating habits isn't easy, but you can do it. With a little effort and some simple mindset shifts, you can achieve your healthy eating goals! Good luck!

ABOUT ME



Sharon Gam, PhD

Personal Trainer and Strength Coach

I earned my PhD in exercise physiology from the University of Western Australia, and am a Certified Strength and Conditioning Coach and Certified Health Coach. In my more than 17 years of experience in the fitness industry, I've worked in many different roles and gained expertise in coaching, exercise science, and behavior change.

I specialize in helping busy, professional women build strength and confidence and achieve happier and healthier lives!

I know that achieving your goals isn't easy. I can help! **Contact me today** to find out about personalized, one-on-one coaching options!

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