

What is a "Healthy" Food?

It is tempting to describe individual foods as "good or bad"; it's straightforward and simple. Yet, while some foods are more nutritious than others, labeling foods as simply "good" or "bad" may lead to restrictive eating or negative attitudes about food.

A more healthful approach to eating is one that focuses on the positive components of food and the importance of eating a balanced and sensible diet. A balanced diet means choosing a variety of nutrient-rich foods as the foundation of what you eat.

Making your calories count

"Healthy" foods are those that are nutrient-rich – or have a large amount of key nutrients, like vitamins and minerals, for their calories.

Nutrients - such as vitamins A, C and E, zinc, calcium, complex carbohydrates, potassium, iron, fiber, B-vitamins and protein - are needed at all ages to promote healthy growth, fuel activity and prevent chronic diseases.

As people watch calories to reduce their waistlines, it's critical to make each calorie count by selecting foods with more essential nutrients in fewer calories. To obtain these important nutrients, nutrient-rich foods are the ideal choices, including:

- Low-fat and fat-free dairy
- Whole grains
- Colorful fruits and vegetables
- Lean meats, seafood, eggs, beans and nuts

The more nutrients you can include in your diet from these foods, the more balanced and healthy your overall diet will be.

What if your favorite foods are not nutrient-rich?

You don't have to entirely give up your favorite foods to eat a healthy diet. If your core choices are nutrient-rich, you can round out the rest of your diet with less nutrient-rich foods as calories and exercise levels permit.

Nutrient-rich choices

A focus on nutrient-rich, or nutrient-dense, food choices provides positive messages of what people **can** eat, not what is forbidden.

Positive attitudes about food that take into account personal tastes and the enjoyment of food will encourage sensible eating patterns that can be maintained long term – and that is the best strategy for maintaining a healthy weight and lifelong good health.