

TOP 5 HEALTHY EATING TIPS



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the importance of **NUTRITION**

Nutrition is one of the most foundational aspects of health.

Your food is broken down into building blocks that are used throughout your body to:

- repair damaged tissues
- synthesize enzymes, hormones and other messenger compounds (eg. neurotransmitters for mood)
- and provide energy to run the many processes a functioning body requires.

While diet is not often the sole cause of sickness, **the food you eat can work for or against you, either fostering health or furthering sickness.**

Your body needs optimal fuel and nutrients to build strong tissues and keep systems running smoothly. Most every health condition can be helped by a nutrient-rich diet.

But of course, just as you are unique, so are your dietary needs. There is no diet that is best for everyone. So here, I list some foundational guidelines and encourage you to pay attention to how your body feels with different foods and discuss this with your clinician, then develop your personalized diet as needed.



DR. ANNIE'S TOP 5
healthy eating
RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Eat **whole, fresh foods.**
2. **Prepare your own food** as often as you're able.
3. **Read labels** when you do eat processed/packaged foods.
4. **Limit your sugar** intake.
5. Practice **mindful eating.**

These seemingly simple recommendations can have tremendous impacts on your health! Now, let's break them down into more detail.

1

eat

WHOLE, FRESH FOODS

Eating **foods in their natural, whole-food form** increases the **nutrient-density of your diet.**

eg. an avocado has 7g of dietary fiber compared to 5g in some fiber bars, **PLUS** the avocado is rich in healthy fats, potassium, and many vitamins (Bs, C, K) with much less sugar and no preservatives

A nutrient-dense diet is desirable because you get **more vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients** (eg. amino acids and fatty acids) from your food, to be incorporated into your body. At the same time, you're getting **less food additives found in processed foods** that do little to support your body and can even cause some problems. In addition, the processing removes many of the nutrients from the food (fiber, vitamins and minerals) and allows the sugars contained in the foods to be more easily accessible, so they cause more dramatic blood sugar spikes!

Fresher foods tend to have higher nutrient content. **Eating locally and seasonally** is beneficial since the food spends less time in transit from the farm to your plate. This limits the food breakdown and **increases the nutrient content of your food. Plus, it's often easier on your wallet.**

Doing the majority of your **grocery shopping around the store's perimeter** will help you buy more whole, fresh foods and less packaged/processed foods. (Be sure to read the label on any packaged foods you do buy. More on this later.)

2

prepare **YOUR OWN FOOD**

Preparing your own food will help ensure you're getting the most **nutrient-dense, pure forms of food without unwanted additions**. Restaurant meals or packaged foods often have surprising and undesirable ingredients, added to preserve the shelf-life, reduce costs, or improve taste. But they can do more harm than good in your body. By making the majority of your own meals and snacks, you'll avoid most of these.

If this sounds like it won't fit into your schedule, consider **services that cut down prep-time**.

- Online grocery shopping with quick pick-up or even home delivery
- Meal delivery services (for meal components that you assemble and prepare, or ready-to-eat healthy meals)

Making your own food will also improve your digestive function (which begins before you eat your first bite). Thinking about, working with, and smelling your food while it cooks gets your digestive juices flowing so your body can break the food down effectively as soon as you start eating.

When you eat on-the-go, your body doesn't have time to prepare for digestion. It can have trouble switching into the right mode ("rest and digest") or making enough digestive juices and enzymes. This can lead to a heavy feeling in your stomach, acid reflux, or worsened bloating. (More on this a little later.)

3

read

FOOD LABELS

When you do eat packaged foods, reading (and understanding!) the label is incredibly important, especially if it's a food you eat often. **Being aware of what you're eating will help you make informed choices.**

Pay attention to:

- **Ingredient names** - you should recognize the items listed as foods, and be able to pronounce their names (except maybe quinoa!)
- **Ingredient order** - items listed earlier are present in higher amounts (by weight) so look for healthier ingredients earlier in the list
- **Serving size** - the rest of the information on the label is only valuable when interpreted in the context of the serving size
 - Is the serving size realistic?
 - Are you eating that amount? More? Less?
- **Percentage of Daily Value (DV)** - the percentage of daily value (DV) should be interpreted using these guidelines:
 - Based on recommended dietary intake for an average adult
 - **5% DV or less** = a little (in other words, it's a poor or marginal source of that nutrient)
 - **15% DV or more** = a lot (in other words, it's a good source of that nutrient)

4

limit **SUGAR**

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends eating **no more than 25g of added sugars per day.**

It's important to **limit refined sugars and carbohydrates to support: healthy blood sugar levels, weight management, and balanced mood.***

Naturally occurring sugars and carbohydrates (eg. in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains) do NOT need to be limited as aggressively since they come packaged inside the whole food along with fiber, protein, nutrients, and fats that slow sugar absorption and reduce the negative effects of high sugar intake.*

Sugars to limit include: fruit juices, syrups, white breads, cookies, pastries, brown and white sugar, candies, granola bars, etc.

Sugars can hide behind other names too. Watch out for:

- High fructose corn syrup
- Technical Terms (-ose or -ide ending): dextrose, fructose, lactose, maltose, galactose, sucrose, ribose, saccharose, glucose, monosaccharide, disaccharide, polysaccharide
- Natural Sugars: agave, coconut nectar, coconut sugar, date sugar, maple sugar, maple syrup, honey, fruit juice, fruit, cane juice, molasses, rice malt, sorghum syrup, brown rice syrup, treacle
- Sugar Alcohols: erythritol, glycol, glycerin, iditol, isomalt, lactiol, maltitol, mannitol, ribitol, sorbitol, xylitol
- Artificial Sweeteners: aspartame, acesulfame-L, Nutra-sweet, Equal, Saccharin, Splenda, Stevia, Sucralose, Sweetleaf, Sweet-n-Low, Truvia

Reading labels of processed foods will help determine sugar content. Be sure to pay attention to serving size when reading the label too.

*Patients with issues regulating blood sugars (eg. those with diabetes) will have different sugar needs and should consult their healthcare provider for an individualized plan.



5

practice **MINDFUL EATING**

HOW you eat is just as important as WHAT you eat.

Let that sink in because it's a powerful message in our go-go-go lives. **Even without changing the foods you eat, you can improve your digestion by adjusting your mealtime routine.**

Your body has two nervous system settings:

- a. **Sympathetic = Fight or Flight**
- b. **Parasympathetic = Rest and Digest**

It needs to be in parasympathetic mode to digest efficiently and fully. And this can't happen if you're eating in the car, in front of the TV, or at your desk while you write emails. Work towards meals where you **sit down (even better amongst friends or family), take a deep breath, then enjoy your food slowly.**

This sets your body up to **make enough digestive juices (stomach acid and enzymes), encourages more mechanical digestion (chewing)** so a lot of the work is done by the time your food reaches your stomach, and **gets your intestinal waves (peristalsis) moving in the right direction to reduce bloating and keep you regular.**

It's also helpful to **pay attention to how your body responds** to certain foods/meal timing/eating out vs eating in. Look for more than just digestive symptoms (gas, bloating, constipation or loose stools), including: energy level, sleep quality, and mood.

BONUS

healthy digestion **GOALS**

So, what does normal and healthy digestion look like? What are you aiming for? If all is well with your digestive structure and function, you should:

- **be free of bloating and abdominal pains**
- **experience minimal gas**
- **have 1-3 well-formed bowel movements daily that are easy to pass**
- **absorb nutrients well as indicated on lab work and via other health markers (energy, hair/nail quality, skin health, etc.)**

If you're **considering a specific diet (eg. ketogenic, paleo, FODMAPs)** - consult your healthcare provider, especially your ND since we take nine nutrition courses during our training and often devote time to learning and experimenting in this area on our own.

If you are experiencing **significant digestive issues or believe nutritional guidance could improve your health, consult your naturopathic doctor** for proper assessment.

And finally, if you're interested in further reading, check out:

- my **blog posts** for more details on how to incorporate healthy eating in your life
- and a favourite book of mine, **In Defense of Food** by **Michael Pollan**

HAPPY EATING!