

Guidance by Food Category

Beverages

- Water (plain, sparkling and flavored) – no more than 10 calories per serving
- Fat-free (skim) or low-fat (1%) milk and milk alternatives (soy, almond, etc.) – no more than 130 calories per 8 fl. oz.
- Juice – 100% fruit or vegetable juice (or juice and water)
 - No added sugars/sweeteners (except non-nutritive sweeteners)
 - No more than 120 calories per 8 fl. oz. (preferred serving size), 150 calories per 10 fl. oz., or 180 calories per 12 fl. oz.
- Other beverages – no more than 10 calories per serving

Cheese

- Limit cheese, as it's usually high in sodium and saturated fat. Compare nutrition information; varieties such as mozzarella and Swiss may be better choices.
- Cheese should be served in small quantities and thinly sliced (for sandwiches), grated or crumbled (as a garnish), or served in small cubes (for a reception). Don't serve whole blocks or wheels of cheese.
- Substitute part-skim Mozzarella for queso Oaxaca and reduced-fat Monterey Jack for queso Chihuahua.

Chips

- Snack chips should not be served. Small amounts of whole-grain chips served with salsa or hummus (along with veggies) are OK.

Condiments

- Traditional condiments (ketchup, mayo, mustard, soy sauce) can be high in sodium, sugars and calories.
- Serve on the side or in individual packets.
- Healthier alternatives may include: fruit relish or chutney, guacamole, horseradish, hummus, pesto, salsa.

Dairy

- Milk, cheese, cottage cheese and sour cream should be fat-free (skim) or low-fat (1%).
- Yogurt should have no more than 20 g Total sugars per 6 oz. serving.

Fruit

- Fruit can be served as a side or for dessert (if dessert is needed at all). Suggestions include seasonal fruit, fruit medley, fruit kabobs and mixed berries.

Meat, Poultry & Seafood

- Portions ideally should be 3 oz. and no more than 6 oz. (cooked weight).
- Healthier cooking methods include: baked, broiled, braised, grilled, poached (fish), roasted, stir-fried or sautéed in broth or with a small amount of healthier oil.

Beef & Pork

- Beef and pork labeled "loin" and "round" usually have the least fat.
- "Choice" or "select" grades of beef are healthier choices than "prime."
- Fat should be trimmed before cooking.
- Ground beef should be at least 95% extra lean.

Poultry

- Use skinless chicken and turkey or remove the skin before cooking. (Most of the fat is in the skin.)
- Use lean ground turkey and chicken, but check the nutrition information, if available. It can have excess fat.

Fish & Seafood

- Oily types of fish are better choices because they tend to be rich in omega-3 fatty acids.
- Fish higher in omega-3 fatty acids include: bass (striped bass, freshwater bass, sea bass), herring, mackerel, pompano, salmon, swordfish, trout, tuna.
- Other acceptable fish and seafood include: catfish, cod, crawfish, flounder, grouper, halibut, orange roughy, perch, pollock, scallops, shrimp, sole, snapper, tilapia.

Nuts

- Better choices are almonds, hazelnuts, peanuts, pecans, pistachios and walnuts.

Oils

- Cook foods with liquid vegetable oil instead of butter, lard or shortening.
- Healthier oils include canola, corn, olive, peanut, safflower, sesame, soybean and sunflower. Canola, corn, olive and safflower contain the least amounts of saturated fat.
- No partially hydrogenated oils or *trans* fats.

Pastas

- Use whole-grain pasta – it's a better source of dietary fiber.
- Serve with tomato-based sauce, not cream sauce.

Salads

- Prepare salads with interesting ingredients such as various types of greens, dried fruit, fresh fruit, avocado, nuts, seeds, red and yellow peppers, corn, beans, peas, and whole grains such as corn, quinoa or bulgur.
- Cheese is OK when a small quantity is used as a garnish on a plated salad. Avoid serving cheese on a buffet.
- Avoid high sodium ingredients such as bacon, croutons, olives and capers.
- Avoid heavy, creamy dressings. Vinaigrette-type dressings are typically a healthier choice. Always include oil & vinegar made with a healthier oil as an option.
- Serve dressings on the side.

Sauces**(including Gravy)**

- Sauces don't need to be avoided completely. Sauces add flavor and may help keep meats and vegetables from getting too dry.
- Avoid heavy sauces that contain whole milk, heavy cream, butter and egg yolks as key ingredients.
- Pasta/Italian dishes should be prepared with tomato sauces, not cream sauces.
- Serve sauces on the side when possible.

Soups

- Soups can be high in sodium. For premade soup, check nutrition information if available and offer varieties with the lowest amount of sodium. Soup made from scratch is typically a better choice because you can control the amount of sodium. Use lots of vegetables, whole grains, beans and legumes.
- "Cream" soups should be made with fat-free (skim) or low-fat (1%) milk.

Vegetables

- Should be prepared and served without butter. Acceptable sauces should be served on the side.
- May be enhanced with herbs, spices, salt-free seasonings, a small amount of healthier oil, a flavored vinegar or a squeeze of citrus.
- Healthier cooking methods: grilled, marinated, roasted, steamed, stir-fried or sautéed in broth or with a small amount of healthier oil.

Yogurt

- No more than 20 g total sugars per standard 6 oz. serving.
- Offer fruit and/or nuts as toppings.

Nutrition Standards for Meals

- No more than 700 calories
- No more than 800 mg sodium (preferably no more than 525 mg)
- No more than 5 g saturated fat
- No more than 105 mg cholesterol
- Less than 0.5 g *trans* fat and no products containing partially hydrogenated oils
- At least 2 servings (1–1.5 cups) of vegetables and/or fruits

Nutrition standards are provided as a benchmark to use if nutrition information is available.

Following this guidance does not guarantee specific nutritional levels or health outcomes and does not constitute compliance with any specific American Heart Association program requirements.

