

# Healthy Eating for a Hectic Lifestyle

Andi Bennett, Extension Agent, Mercer County

## Educational Objectives

1. Learn to make healthier food choices when shopping.
2. Learn about balanced meals and healthy snacks.
3. Gain healthy cooking tips.

It seems that everyone is living life on the run and going in one hundred directions. Living this way often leads people to make unhealthy choices in eating. We tend to multitask, eat on the run and rely on convenience foods. Going through a drive-thru or eating a frozen dinner seems easier than planning and cooking a healthy meal, but what is this kind of lifestyle doing to our health? We all have only 24 hours in a day, but we can make better choices and break bad habits in the time we have. Making healthier food choices at the store, eating out or snacking at home does not take any additional time; it takes willpower to make a better decision.

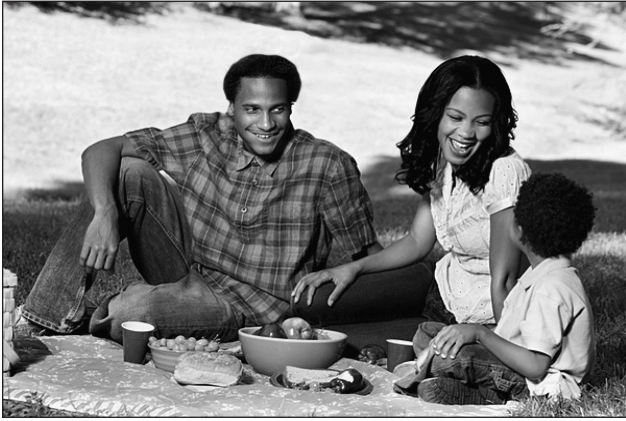
## What Can We Do to Eat Healthier When Busy?

The first thing you must do is make the choice to do something healthy for you and your family. You have total control of what you eat; therefore, it is your choice to make changes and choose healthier options. It doesn't matter how busy we are, we can always choose to be healthy. Talk with your doctor regarding your overall health and how food choices will affect medications or diet plans you may currently be on. Set a healthy weight goal and see if eating healthier will reduce the amount of medications you may currently take for things such as high blood pressure, diabetes, cholesterol or heart disease.

Once you have decided to make healthier choices, you need to educate yourself on healthy eating habits. What does eating healthy mean? Begin to think of food as fuel for your body. Ask yourself these questions: "What is this particular food doing for my body?"; "Is it giving me vitamins to help my vision, memory or bones? Or is it adding unwanted sugar, fat and weight to my body?"; "What benefit am I getting by eating this?"



– continued –



According to [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov), we need the proper portions of five food groups. Within a 24-hour period, we should eat 3 servings of low-fat dairy, 5 servings of fruits and vegetables, 3 servings of lean protein and 3 servings of whole grains. The Mayo Clinic suggests we should drink eight 8-ounce glasses of water a day (64 ounces or about 2 liters).

When eating a balanced meal of proper portion sizes, it may be easier to eat three small meals and three small snacks. This will help ensure that you are eating all the food groups and not feeling too hungry in between meals. Here is an example of a healthy and balanced meal plan for one day:

*Breakfast:* yogurt, strawberry, granola

*10 a.m. snack:* celery with peanut butter

*Lunch:* salad, grilled chicken, wheat crackers

*3 p.m. snack:* reduced-fat cottage cheese, peaches in juice

*Dinner:* turkey, green beans, sweet potato, fat-free milk

*8 p.m. snack:* grapes

64 ounces of water throughout the day

Although you have a busy schedule, the above meal plan is simple to make or to purchase if eating out.

When eating healthy, you must plan and cook healthy meals. Once a week, take an hour to plan meals for the week – this will keep you from making bad decisions. When thinking about your meals, focus on what vegetables you can make first, then add lean protein and whole grains. What type of fruits and

vegetables could you snack on? Keep it simple. Make a menu and grocery shop using your menu. Fresh vegetables do not have a long shelf life, so only buy what you will eat in a couple days. When returning home, cut up fruits and vegetables for easy “grab and go” snacks. Don’t buy unhealthy foods and snacks. If you don’t have chips, you are more likely to eat an apple or banana when hungry.

Cook when you have time and cook enough for leftovers. Once done with your meal, package leftovers in “grab and go” portion sizes. You can freeze leftovers as well for an easy meal later in the month. There are several websites that teach how to “cook once eat for a week or month” and “freezer meals for a month.” Slow cookers are also an easy way to have a healthy dinner ready when you walk in the door. Use caution with slow cooker recipes; many call for cream sauces and cheese. Use your slow cooker to cook lean meats in broth, which is a healthier option.



Here are a few other quick meal planning and cooking tips:

- Cook using a fast method: broil, stir-fry, steam.
- Remember to add a quick lean meat to salads.
- Buy skinless meat that is low-fat.
- Always chose low-fat milk and cheese.
- Substitute plain Greek yogurt for mayonnaise and/or sour cream.
- Use whole-wheat pasta and rice.
- Use herbs and spices instead of salt to flavor foods.



- Focus on vegetables and making your plate colorful.
- Use fruit as a sweet treat.

When hungry, we often grab the first thing we see to eat. This can be a bag of chips, cookies on the counter or ice cream in the freezer. Here are a few healthy “grab and go” snacks to have on hand:

- Hard-boiled eggs
- Frozen grapes
- Almonds
- Fruit; fresh or canned in juice
- Low-fat cheese sticks
- Low-fat yogurt
- Mini peppers
- Fruit/nut snack mix
- Hummus and salsa
- Fruit-infused water
- Whole-grain/wheat crackers, cereal, granola



When eating out, be mindful of making healthy choices. It is easy to stay in the habit of ordering the same thing, which is often a “#1 combo.” It’s hard to remember there are healthier choices on the menu. Most restaurants now have the calories listed on their menus. Pay closer attention to the healthy options most places are now offering. *Fitness Magazine’s* article “30 Surprisingly Healthy Fast Foods” ([www.fitnessmagazine.com/recipes/healthy-eating/on-the-go/healthy-fast-foods](http://www.fitnessmagazine.com/recipes/healthy-eating/on-the-go/healthy-fast-foods)) lists healthy options at several fast-food establishments. Below are a few tips to remember when eating out:

- When in a drive-thru, choose apples instead of fries, grilled instead of fried and salad options.
- Choose water instead of soda or sweetened teas.
- Eat your vegetables first.
- Choose items on the menu with these words: steamed, baked, poached, roasted, broiled or grilled.

- If it’s not whole-wheat bread, skip it.
- Get the salad dressing on the side and dip your fork in it instead of pouring it on the salad.
- Order the appetizer, lunch or kids’ smaller portion sizes.
- Split your plate in half and box up half of it for later.

Choosing to eat healthy is often a different way of thinking for many of us. We are in the habit of eating in the car while driving (impossible to eat a salad this way), or grabbing a bag of chips or a candy bar at the gas station. We often cook unhealthy foods, because that is how we learned to cook from our parents. We eat in front of the TV and don’t think about what we are eating or if we are full.

- Pay attention to what you are eating; use your senses. Take time to enjoy the smell of it cooking, how it looks on your plate and the texture when eating it. Ask yourself how many of the food groups you’ve eaten today. Have you eaten 5 servings of vegetables?
- Pay attention to when you are eating. Are you really hungry or are you bored? Are you stress eating or is it time to eat?
- Pay attention while eating. Focus on the joy of a family meal. Focus on the food in front of you, not the TV screen. It takes 20 minutes for the stomach to tell the brain you are full. Take time to chew your food and enjoy it.



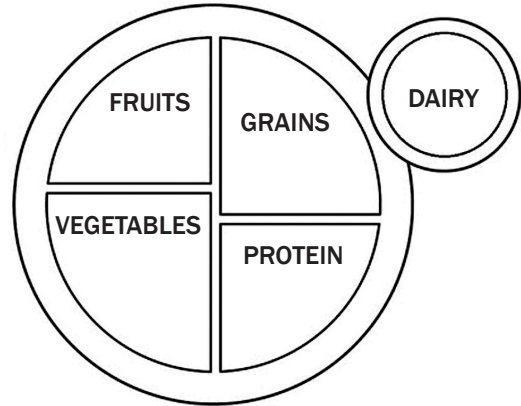
---

## Make a Plan and Start Today!

What changes are you willing to make? Start off by breaking habits and making small changes in the beginning, then every few months make an additional change. It takes time to change bad habits, but it can be done. For example, if you drink whole milk and want to change to skim, you may need to switch to 2 percent for a few months, then to 1 percent. You could also cook with skim milk. Over six months you could baby step your way to skim milk. These types of changes do not take any additional time in your busy schedule. Remember, we need all food groups and can have everything in moderation. There will be times you need to eat a hamburger driving down the road, but you can then make healthier choices for the rest of the day. Making healthy food choices does not require any change to your hectic lifestyle, it just requires a conscious choice to be healthier and do something for yourself.

### Activity:

Give everyone a paper plate. Have them draw the MyPlate food groups on the plate. Have participants write foods they like in each food group. This will allow participants to see foods they can eat and help to plan a healthy, balanced meal.



## Resources

[www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov)

[www.mayoclinic.org](http://www.mayoclinic.org)

[www.fitnessmagazine.com/recipes/healthy-eating/on-the-go/healthy-fast-foods/](http://www.fitnessmagazine.com/recipes/healthy-eating/on-the-go/healthy-fast-foods/)

2015

---

*Programs and activities offered by the West Virginia University Extension Service are available to all persons without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, veteran status, political beliefs, sexual orientation, national origin, and marital or family status. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Director, Cooperative Extension Service, West Virginia University.*

*The WVU Board of Governors is the governing body of WVU. The Higher Education Policy Commission in West Virginia is responsible for developing, establishing, and overseeing the implementation of a public policy agenda for the state's four-year colleges and universities.*

FH15-286

