

Beyond The Table

Each year during March, National Nutrition Month®, a nutrition information and education campaign sponsored by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, is celebrated. It invites everyone to learn about making informed food choices and developing sound eating and physical activity habits. This year's theme for National Nutrition Month® inspires us to look *Beyond the Table* when thinking about our health and the environment.

A healthy eating routine may be a new phrase to some of you. It describes a way of eating that includes nutritious foods and drinks regularly. This eating approach differs from many fad diets, which promote unnecessary restrictions or require people to eat a certain way.

Healthy eating routines vary. We have different food preferences, budgets, cooking skills, traditions, etc. Our daily choices, including what we will eat and drink, can make a big difference now and in the future.

According to the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, “a healthy eating routine is important at every stage of life and can have positive effects that add up over time.” In addition, we're never too young or too old to adopt a healthy eating routine. National Nutrition Month® is

Eat food from all varieties of food groups within calorie limits and in the recommended amounts.

It's important to remember that no one food or food group offers all the nutrients we need. So, eating various foods from each food group and within each food group regularly offers an assortment of nutrients our bodies need for good health.

Try to eat foods in various forms. Buying frozen or canned vegetables and fruits is a convenient way to include these foods when fresh produce is out of season. Remember to look for nutrient-dense forms with little added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium.

Another great resource that can assist with eating a variety of foods from all food groups is the USDA's MyPlate. MyPlate encourages us to balance our meals so that half of the plate includes fruits and vegetables, and the other half features a protein food and grain. A serving of dairy completes the meal. For more information about MyPlate, visit [MyPlate.gov](https://www.MyPlate.gov).

It may seem challenging to choose healthier foods, particularly with the increasing cost of so many goods. Staying nourished on any budget may require planning in advance to stretch your food dollars. Here are some ways to help your budget.

The most cost-efficient use of your money is to reduce the times you eat out. Meals out are usually two to three times the cost of home preparation.

Preparing foods at home allows you to control the ingredients, their amounts, and how they are prepared. By learning cooking, food preparation, and meal planning skills, you can identify ways to substitute lower-cost ingredients, use lesser amounts in some cases, and increase the nutrition of many dishes.

Plan the menus and shopping list ahead and only shop once a week. While making the shopping list, check the freezer, refrigerator, and pantry for ingredients you have on hand.

A good place to start is with planning meals and snacks. Before going to the store, check what foods you have at home, use the grocery list, and shop sales when purchasing the needed foods.

It is important to decrease the amount of food waste in a household. Make plans for all purchased food and follow through with those plans. When you don't eat all of a prepared meal, take leftovers for your lunch or plan a night when you finish all of the leftovers from the week.

March is National Nutrition Month®, but good nutrition should be year-round.