

## Food Connects Us

The path to wellness often begins at our plates. National Nutrition Month® is a testament to the profound impact of making informed food choices and developing sound eating habits. This annual observance promotes nutritional knowledge and emphasizes a balanced lifestyle.

The National Nutrition Month® campaign, held annually in March, seeks to educate individuals about the importance of making informed food choices, developing consistent eating habits, and undertaking regular physical activity. The National Nutrition Month® 2025 theme is *Food Connects Us*, which highlights the connection between health, access, traditions, and food across all stages of life.

One way to connect with food is by learning cooking, food preparation, and meal planning skills. Preparing foods at home allows you to control the ingredients, their amounts, and how they are made. 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 by including more fruits and vegetables.

Eating healthy is good for your overall health. The USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025, encourages individuals to focus on healthy eating patterns from birth through older adulthood.

The foods and beverages you consume in combination make up your eating pattern. Healthy eating patterns include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein foods, and dairy or fortified soy versions while limiting saturated fat, sodium, and added sugars.

The most recent government recommendations are to fill half your plate with vegetables and fruits, a quarter with protein, and the last quarter with grains. Consider this the baseline healthy eating pattern. It includes making half of your plate of fruits and vegetables. Focus on whole fruits. Vary your veggies with a variety of vegetables from all of the subgroups – dark green, orange, red; legumes; and starchy. Fill one-fourth of the plate with grains. Make at least half your grains whole grains. The remaining quarter of the plate is for protein. Eat a variety of quality proteins, including lean meats, seafood, poultry, eggs, soy foods, nuts, and seeds, plus legumes, which may be considered part of the protein group as well as the vegetable group. Move to low-fat or fat-free dairy milk, cheese, or yogurt. If necessary, substitute lactose-free dairy or fortified soy versions. In addition, choose foods and beverages with less added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium.

The key to building a healthy eating pattern is to choose various nutritious foods in the right amounts for you and make these choices part of your everyday routine. Focus on what you can add to your plate instead of taking away something. Healthy eating does not have to be complicated.

Take a look at your current eating routine. Pick one or two ways you can switch to choices rich in nutrition. Think about how your food choices combine over your day or week to help you create a healthy eating routine. Start with small changes to build healthier eating styles.

National Nutrition Month® is a good time to reflect on how you're eating and how you could improve. Try improving your overall eating pattern with tips from the Dietary Guidelines. We should aim to meet our nutritional needs mainly from foods and beverages, choose a variety of foods from each food group, and pay attention to portion size.

A healthy eating pattern can be adapted in many ways to fit your lifestyle. The benefits of healthy eating add up over time, bite by bite. Remember, small changes in your food and drink choices can make a big difference!