

Making Everyday Choices for a Healthy, Sustainable Diet

Fact Sheet

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Introduction

Use your food, and food-related, purchases to reinforce what you value. Food choices affect health, and good health can lead to large savings on medical expenses. The effect of your food-related practices on environmental resources is also significant. For instance, current food choices in the United States create a carbon footprint that is one-fourth larger than that created by Americans' driving habits. (Visit www.ksre.ksu.edu/HumanNutrition/SustainableDiets for lists of references and resources.)

“Sustainable” diets meet present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. But what can you do to help achieve this goal? This fact sheet offers dozens of ideas for simple everyday ways to have a tasty, healthful, and sustainable diet. As you read and think about the suggestions, **write an A next to those you are already acting on. Put an S next to those you'll start very soon. Write a G next to the ones you are gradually going to add.** While many of the proposed routines would be simple to do, you could also choose to adopt more complex strategies.

Don't wait, expecting the government or big food companies to solve the world's sustainability problems. Consumer choices help shape the food supply. People — you, for example — can make many small changes over time. Starting with at least one today, you can make a big difference to maximize health (how you look and feel) for yourself, your children, their children, and so on; save money; increase the well-being of the environment; and improve the vitality of local communities (increase their food production capacity and food security).

The suggestions are grouped into seven categories:

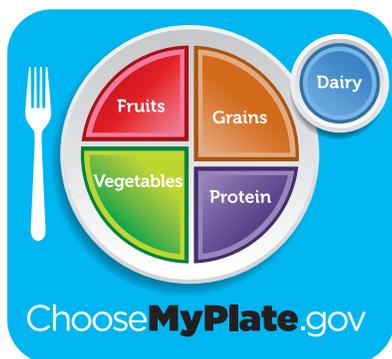
1. Choose nutrient-rich foods.
2. Eat locally produced foods when available.
3. Buy from businesses with sustainable practices when possible.
4. Minimize avoidable food losses and waste.
5. Limit energy use.
6. Limit water use.
7. Minimize packaging and wrapper waste.

1. Choose nutrient-rich foods. This change will maximize health while limiting your use of natural resources. It will reduce the amount of food required, for most people, which will also save money. The following recommendations are from the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans and are based on a 2,000-calorie-a-day diet. What can you do?

— Base most of your meals and snacks on whole grains, fruits, legumes, and dark-green, red and orange vegetables. The guideline for these foods is at least double the current average U.S. intake. Currently, food products from just two plants — refined wheat and refined corn — make up almost one-third of Americans' calories. Recommended amounts per day are 3 ounce-equivalents of whole grains, 2 cups fruits, and 2½ cups vegetables (with weekly amounts as 1½ cups of legumes, 1½ cups of dark green vegetables, and 5½ cups of red and orange vegetables).

Vary your protein

- _ Eat 8 ounces (cooked weight) of seafood (fish and shellfish) each week. This recommendation is double the current average U.S. intake.
- _ At least three times a week, opt for meals with fish or shellfish (which are low in unhealthy solid fats) instead of eating red meat, chicken, or turkey (which are higher in saturated fats).
- _ Eat 10 ounces (cooked weight) of poultry, three eggs, and 4 ounces nuts, seeds, or soy products every week. This guideline is similar to the current average U.S. intake.
- _ Eat 12 ounces (cooked weight) of lean red meat (beef, pork, processed meat, and lamb) per week. This recommendation is 25 percent less than the current average U.S. intake. Plant foods require fewer natural resources to produce compared to animal foods. Of the greenhouse gases created from raising food, half come from producing red meats and animal-based dairy foods, even though these foods represent just 20 percent of the current average U.S. calorie intake.
- _ At least two meals a week, replace beef, pork, processed meat, or lamb with cooked dry beans, peas, lentils, soy foods, unsalted nuts, or some combination of these foods.



Visit www.choosemyplate.gov to learn more about a balanced diet.

- _ Learn how to cook meals using many kinds of whole grains, fruits, cooked dry beans, and brightly colored vegetables.
- _ Eat and drink 3 cups of low-fat dairy products per day. This recommendation is double the current average U.S. intake.
- _ Choose fat-free or 1% fat dairy products, lean red meats, and poultry without skin to reduce your calorie and saturated fat intake, yet maintain the nutrients (such as calcium, potassium, several B vitamins, iron, and zinc) these foods contain. Full-fat cheese is the main single source of unhealthy saturated fat in the U.S. diet.
- _ Replace some of the animal-based dairy foods in your diet with plant-based dairy products, such as calcium-fortified soy beverage, calcium-fortified rice milk, tofu made with calcium-sulfate, and calcium-fortified soy yogurt. This change will reduce your environmental footprint, while the calories and other nutrients are similar.
- _ Choose water as your beverage most of the time.
- _ Limit foods and beverages with added sugars, syrups, or sweeteners; refined starches, added starches; added lard, tallow, palm, or other tropical oils, trans fats, or partially hydrogenated oils; or added salt or sodium. Read the ingredients labels. The guidelines for solid fats and added sugars are less than half of the current average U.S. intake. These foods and beverages are less healthful for both people and the environment, and require much more non-renewable energy to produce, compared to minimally processed foods without the added ingredients listed above. Palm oil, in addition to being high in unhealthy saturated fats, is also linked with global deforestation.
- _ Cook at home often. You will be in control of ingredients and serving sizes. On average, eating one meal away from home each week for a year translates into about two extra pounds of body weight. Having excess body weight is not healthful for you, and it requires additional use of natural resources. This change will save you money, too, since on average it costs at least twice as much to eat out as to prepare a meal at home.
- _ Prepare at least two meals and two snacks each week that contain only minimally processed foods.

2. Eat locally produced foods when available. This practice can increase the capacity of your local community to produce food, increase biodiversity, and improve the environmental impacts of your food choices. Buying directly from local producers allows them to keep a much larger percentage of the food dollars spent, rather than having most of your money for food go out of town to large corporations. Currently, the farmers' share of money spent on non-local foods is less than 14 percent. What can you do?

- _ Vary the foods you eat throughout the year. Choose foods that are available "in-season" in your region. This practice will reduce your use of the fuel required to grow out-of-season foods in greenhouses, or to chill and then ship them by air across the globe to a store near you.
- _ Learn which foods (plants and animals) are produced in your community and when they are available or "in-season."

More suggestions for eating locally

- _ Commit to spending either 5 percent or a certain dollar amount of your food budget on foods raised in your locale or region.
- _ For foods that you buy often, read the package or your store's signs to find out where the product came from. When you have a choice, choose foods grown closer to home.
- _ Drink tap water instead of bottled. Tap water is not only local, it is also less expensive. In addition, safety standards for tap water are often more stringent than those for bottled water. If the tap water in your locale does not taste good, try using a water filter. For those times when you must drink bottled water, buy one that's bottled close to your region.
- _ Substitute one or two locally produced choices for non-local foods or beverages you often eat or drink.
- _ Ask the local owners and managers of your community's restaurants and food markets to add some locally produced foods to their menus and stock.
- _ Preserve some locally produced foods to use later in the year by freezing, canning, or drying them when they are seasonally available.



- _ Eat a variety of locally produced, seasonally available foods. For example, in Kansas these include fruits, vegetables, legumes, cereals, flours, breads, popcorn, sunflower seeds, nuts, oil, honey, syrup, culinary herbs, condiments, apple cider, wine, beer, milk, cheeses, butter, wild game, chicken, turkey, eggs, pork, fish, lamb, goat, buffalo, beef, and sausages.
- _ Throughout the growing season, regularly shop at your community's farmers markets, roadside stands, or orchards, if available. Be sure to ask where the plant or animal foods were grown before buying.
- _ Grow something to eat. Do container gardening by growing culinary herbs on a windowsill, or leaf lettuce or tomatoes on your patio. Start a larger garden to save on food costs, get physical activity, and enjoy really local fresh fruits and vegetables. You might choose a community garden close to your home or office, or contribute labor in exchange for food with a community supported agriculture (CSA) group. Perhaps you could plant fruit trees in your yard, or use edible landscaping designs for an existing flower bed or a small patch of lawn. Gardening is a healthful, moderately intense physical activity that also promotes mental health.

3. Buy from businesses with sustainable practices when possible. Who you buy food from can affect both the environment and your local community's economic vitality. As the capacity to distribute foods locally in sustainable ways increases, so will agricultural resiliency (its ability to thrive in the presence of multiple challenges), protection of natural resources, quality of life in local communities, and your own food security and nutritional well-being. What can you do?

- _ Buy directly from family farmers and ranchers in your community and region. Talk with them about their sustainability practices.
- _ Join a community supported agriculture (CSA) group or a food cooperative.
- _ Learn which food markets and restaurants are locally owned or independently managed in your community.
- _ Put your food dollars into companies, food markets, and restaurants with sustainable practices. For example:
 - _ When buying fish and shellfish, choose at least some that are certified sustainable seafood products. Buy mostly plant-eating fish caught locally or raised in the United States.
 - _ When buying coffee, tea, chocolate, or cocoa, select at least some that is fair-trade certified. With fair-trade products, you're investing in sustainable conditions for the families and the environment where those foods are produced. If local shops don't carry these products, ask them to start, stock up if you find them when you're away from home, or buy them online.

4. Minimize avoidable food losses and waste. More than one-third of the food produced in the United States is discarded. Households in the United States throw away 14 percent of food purchases. Three key facts about avoidable food waste are: 1) It results in the loss of monetary and natural resources and our time. For example, avoidable food waste is like leaving the water faucet running, since it is responsible for the loss

More ways to prevent food waste

- _ Eat the food you have on hand in your refrigerator, freezer, and pantry in a timely fashion, instead of buying new food for your meals.
- _ Place food to use first in the most readily accessible positions of your refrigerator.
- _ Serve “fragile” fresh fruits and vegetables within a few days of buying them, such as for a snack, in a salad, or as dessert.
- _ Pack leftovers from supper into reusable containers to eat for lunch the next day at work or at school.
- _ Use foods left over from one meal in a different recipe for a second meal.
- _ If you won't use an unspoiled food before its “best used by” date, donate it to your local food pantry or soup kitchen.
- _ Reduce plate waste by serving appropriately sized portions. Get a second helping if hunger persists after eating what you initially served.
- _ Cook at home often (for instance, two extra meals each week) instead of dining out or ordering take-out food. For many reasons, restaurants create a lot of food waste.



of about 25 percent of all freshwater consumption. 2) It is the single largest portion of the solid wastes in landfills and incinerators. Less than 3 percent of food waste is composted or otherwise recycled. 3) As it decomposes, food waste is a major source of methane (a greenhouse gas that warms the climate 21 times more than carbon dioxide) that lasts for decades. What can you do?

- _ Buy only the amount of food you will use before it spoils or by its “best used by” date. Fresh fruits and vegetables, drinks, bread and bakery products, dairy products, eggs, meat, and fish are the most likely foods that are avoidably wasted by consumers.
- _ Store perishable foods appropriately. For example, promptly refrigerate or freeze all perishable foods after purchase, and leftovers after serving.
- _ Preserve your foods in a timely way. If within several days you won't eat all of the perishable foods that you have bought or prepared, freeze them. For example, freeze extra servings of meat, poultry, or cooked dry beans after a meal. Or if you won't drink it all before the “best used by” date, pour excess milk into a container and place it in the freezer for future use. Freeze some of your fresh bread if it will mold or become stale before you can use it.
- _ Buy canned, frozen, and dried foods for use until you shop for fresh perishable foods again. Select those with a distant “best used by” date. (Store pantry foods separated by close versus more distant “use by” dates to easily track which ones to use first.)
- _ Instead of peeling fruits and vegetables that have edible skins, such as potatoes and apples, scrub them to get rid of any dirt, then eat the skins and all. This practice will not only give you the health benefits of eating those extra nutrients, it will minimize food waste going into a landfill. Or use them, along with meat bones, to make soup stock.
- _ Compost plant-based food scraps as appropriate to convert them into soil amendments that will improve your garden or yard.

5. Limit energy use. Of the energy consumed in the U.S., nearly 20 percent is used for food production, transport, processing, packaging, distribution, storage, sales, and household food handling. What can you do?

- _ Brew coffee at home instead of driving to a coffee shop.
- _ Limit how often you shop for groceries. Even better, stop and shop when you are already driving by a food market — if you can keep your frozen and refrigerated purchases cold until you get home. Plan your menus in advance so you know what you need to purchase.
- _ Shop at stores that are close to your home, or are along one of your routine driving routes, to reduce the “food miles” that you add to your grocery purchases.
- _ Walk or bike to your food markets when possible, instead of driving. This will save on fossil fuels, while increasing your fitness level.
- _ Limit your purchases of foods that require refrigeration or frozen storage.
- _ Unplug electrical appliances between uses, whenever possible.

Use energy efficient cooking methods

- _ On hot days, serve cold meals or use an outside grill or microwave oven, instead of heating a conventional oven, to minimize heating your home.
- _ Steam or sauté foods often, instead of roasting them. Conventional ovens use more energy than a microwave or stovetop cooking.
- _ Minimize the pre-heating time when using an appliance or stove.
- _ When boiling water, heat only the amount that you need and cover the pan.
- _ When using your stovetop, match the burner size to the size of your pan.
- _ Use small appliances when cooking small amounts of food.
- _ Use flat-bottomed (not warped) saucepans and glass or ceramic (not metal) baking pans.
- _ Bake more than one food at a time when using a conventional oven.
- _ Cook more food at once than you need for a meal. Freeze the extras in one-meal portion sizes in reusable containers with tight-fitting lids. This change will not only save energy, it will also give you almost-instant home-cooked meals on other nights. Thaw frozen perishable foods in the refrigerator.
- _ Prepare foods that require long cooking times in energy-efficient ways, and in large batches. For example, pre-soak dry beans before cooking them to reduce the amount of time that they must be boiled, or pressure cook them.



- _ Wash with hot water, but rinse with cool water. Use concentrated liquid cleaning products (for reduced weight, packaging, and energy used to produce it), preferably those with the EPA's Design for Environment (DfE) label, or that contain certified-biodegradable and USDA-certified biobased ingredients.
 - _ Let your dishes air-dry instead of using the heated drying cycle of your dishwasher.
 - _ Air-dry your reusable kitchen cloths on a clothesline instead of using a clothes dryer.
 - _ Use energy-efficient lighting in your kitchen and dining areas. Shut off lights when not in use.
 - _ Minimize air-conditioning your kitchen and home in the summer and heating it in the winter by adjusting the thermostat up or down a few degrees.
 - _ Defrost your freezer whenever it has ice built up on the walls or shelves.
 - _ Increase your freezer's and refrigerator's efficiency by checking that the door seals are airtight. Keep food in them covered. Turn off the icemaker if you don't use much ice. Open the doors as few times as possible. If you do not have much in your refrigerator or freezer, put in some partially filled jars of water to increase their energy efficiency. (Keep them at least $\frac{2}{3}$ full, but not so overcrowded that air cannot circulate around the food items.) Follow the instruction manual regarding keeping the condenser coils clean.
 - _ Buy energy-efficient kitchen appliances, especially your refrigerator, freezer, and dishwasher. Of the energy used for food-related tasks in the United States, almost 30 percent is used in households, and much of this is spent on household cold food storage, preparation, and cleanup. If buying new appliances, ask the retailer or a recycling center about recycling your old ones.
- 6. Limit water use.** The number one use (70 percent, worldwide) of freshwater is for food production. You can reduce your household's use (or your "water footprint") and save money at the same time. What can you do?
- _ Conserve water when preparing meals. For instance, keep a pitcher of drinking water in the refrigerator instead of letting the faucet run until the water is cool. Capture the water while waiting for it to get hot, too, for later use in the coffee pot, to water plants, and other uses. Defrost food in the refrigerator rather than under running water. Use the trash can or a compost pail for solid food wastes instead of putting them into a garbage disposal with running water.
 - _ Conserve water when washing dishes. Scrape food residue into a trash can. When using a dishwasher, try not rinsing the dishes first or using the pre-wash cycle, and wash only full loads. When hand-washing dishes, soak them first in a washbasin. Shut the faucet off between rinsing batches of washed dishes.
 - _ Use water-efficient kitchen appliances and water flow restrictors on faucets. Repair leaking faucets promptly.
 - _ Prevent water pollution by not flushing your unwanted dietary

Prepare and serve trash-free meals

- _When heating food in a microwave oven, use a ceramic or glass bowl or plate to cover it, rather than using disposable paper or plastic.
- _When storing leftover food in the refrigerator, cover it with a lid, bowl, or saucer rather than with disposable paper or plastic.
- _Use washable reusable food storage and beverage containers, utensils, and tableware, as well as cloth napkins and washcloths, to reduce your use of all disposable products.
- _Use reusable coffee filters or metal loose-leaf tea balls.
- _If you use disposable products, buy chlorine-free brands made mostly from post-consumer recycled materials.
- _If you need a packaged product, buy one with the minimum amount and weight of packaging that you must have. Opt for packaging made mostly from post-consumer recycled materials and that is recyclable or biodegradable. Paper, cardboard, glass, steel, and aluminum are the best choices, if you will recycle them, while plastic packaging is made from fossil fuels. The most readily recycled plastics are PET/PETE #1 and HDPE #2, while PLA plastics can be composted.
- _Reuse, then compost or recycle packaging materials, as much as possible. Talk with local officials about supporting community recycling and composting efforts.



- supplements or medications down the drain or toilet, nor throwing them directly into the trash. Instead, drop them off during a local Drug Take-back Day. If this program is not available, mix them with used coffee grounds, kitty litter or any unpalatable substance, place in a sealed plastic bag, and put the bag with your other household trash.
- _Use water-conserving practices if you have a food garden, such as mulch or drip irrigation.

- 7. Minimize packaging and wrapper waste.** Trends in convenience, health, and food safety have resulted in an excess of packaging, such as with the offering of single or small servings, limited-calorie packs, meal kits, and other ready-to-eat products. While recycled packaging uses fewer natural resources than that made with virgin materials, it still represents a drain on energy and water resources. What can you do?
- _Carry a durable reusable water or juice bottle instead of drinking from small packaged juice containers or using packaged bottled water.
 - _Place your purchases into clean reusable bags instead of disposable ones. After laundering, store them in your car or backpack so they will be at-hand whenever you go shopping.
 - _For small shopping trips, forego bags altogether. Have your purchased items put into a grocery cart, and transfer them in the parking lot into crates or boxes that you keep handy for that purpose in the trunk of your car.
 - _Eliminate packaging whenever possible. For example, purchase wholesome unprocessed foods, such as fresh fruits and vegetables sold by the piece, without any disposable packaging at all, and place them in clean reusable bags instead of disposable ones.
 - _Instead of buying many small packages of a food, buy a large one and portion out single-size portions of the food into reusable containers. For example, buy a large container of yogurt and spoon the amount that you plan to eat at each meal or snack into containers with tight-fitting lids. Not only will you conserve natural resources, you will have convenient servings of a healthy snack ready to go when you want them.
 - _Cook at home often (for instance, two extra meals each week) instead of dining out or ordering take-out food. Even fine-dining restaurant meals generate lots of trash.
 - _When eating in a restaurant, take along a reusable food storage container so you won't need a disposable "to-go" box.

Enjoy the process of examining many of your everyday food-related practices. Learn how (read, attend classes, or watch videos) and then practice doing the more complex suggestions, if desired. Act now to maximize your own health, save money, help your community and the environment, and benefit upcoming generations.

Resources

For references and resources, visit the K-State Research and Extension Human Nutrition website at www.ksre.ksu.edu/HumanNutrition/SustainableDiets. Your local K-State Research and Extension office can help you locate other resources.

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Participant Survey for Making Everyday Choices for a Healthy Sustainable Diet

We appreciate your opinions! Please take a few minutes to answer the following questions. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you may skip answering one or more questions if you wish. The information that you share will be held in the strictest confidence. Thank you!

Date: _____ County/State where program was offered: _____

Instructor: _____

1. My age: 17 years or younger 18-24 years 25-34 years
 35-44 years 45-54 years 55-64 years 65 years or older
2. My gender: Male Female
3. My race: American Indian/Alaska Native Asian White
 Black/African American Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
4. I am Hispanic or Latino: Yes No Don't know/not sure
5. The number of suggestions in the fact sheet that I am **already acting on** (that I put an A next to): _____
6. The number of suggestions in the fact sheet that I plan to **start very soon** (that I put an S next to): _____
7. The number of suggestions in the fact sheet that I am **going to gradually add** (that I put a G next to): _____
8. As a result of this program, I improved my knowledge.
 Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
9. As a result of this program, I intend to make at least one healthy change in my eating habits.
 Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
10. As a result of this program, I feel more motivated to follow healthy eating recommendations.
 Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
11. As a result of this program, I plan to cook more meals at home.
 Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
12. As a result of this program, I intend to make at least one change to buy food that is locally produced or from businesses with sustainable practices more often.
 Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
13. As a result of this program, I intend to make at least one change to reduce avoidable food losses.
 Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
14. As a result of this program, I intend to make at least one change to reduce energy use in my food-related habits.
 Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

15. As a result of this program, I intend to make at least one change to reduce water use in my food-related habits.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

16. As a result of this program, I intend to make at least one change to reduce food packaging or wrapper waste.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree

17. As a result of this program, the main action or change I plan to do (if any) is:

18. My biggest challenge to making a change towards a more sustainable diet likely will be:

19. As a result of this program, I have learned:

20. Additional comments:

21. A K-State representative may contact me later to talk about this program (*We are asking for your contact information so that we may follow-up with you about what you learned from this program*):

Yes (provide contact information below) No

My name:

Phone number:

Email address:

Street address:

City, state, zip code:

For office use only: Coded identification number = SD _____

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