

# Body Fuel

Healthy nutrition is  
the gateway to living  
your best life.



Food sustains life. Everyone knows food and hydration supplies the energy needed to perform our daily activities. But access to proper nutrition and adopting a healthy diet can prove to be challenging for many.

There is no one diet that works for everyone's nutritional needs. People have specific alimentary choices that vary based on personal preference, culture, religion, allergies or intolerances and nutritional goals. It's also important to consider cost and availability of different foods throughout seasonality and geographical locations as factors impacting one's diet.

In general, an ideal diet includes vegetables, fruits and whole grains, but limits the consumption of red and processed meats, unhealthy fats, excess sugar and salt and alcohol. Making small changes, such as choosing whole grains versus refined grains and eating more protein can really make a difference over time.

The overall goal of a healthy diet is to support one's vitality and to reduce the risk of developing serious health conditions. A healthy diet plays a key role in weight management and is directly linked to improved health-related quality of life and a decreased risk of illness in children and older adults.<sup>1</sup> Proper nutrition promotes longevity, enabling people to live full, productive lives.

## Global Health Benefits

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## Global concerns

Healthy diets are essential for young children. Lack of proper nutrition raises the risk of poor brain development, weak learning, compromised immunity, increased infections and, in many cases, death.<sup>2</sup>

Overnutrition leading to unhealthy weight and obesity is the single most important dietary factor associated with poor health outcomes. It is associated with premature mortality as well as increased incidence of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, hypertension, cancer and other serious health issues. The 2022 *State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI)* report, jointly published by health and nutrition organizations, presented updates on the food security and nutrition situation around the world, including the latest estimates of the cost and affordability of a healthy diet.



The overall goal of a healthy diet is to improve one's health, and to reduce risk of specific conditions. A healthy diet plays a key role in weight management and is directly linked to improved health-related quality of life and a decreased risk of illness.

– Dr. Lior Baruch, Medical Principal, International Health, Cigna Healthcare<sup>SM</sup>

### Findings included:

- As many as **828 million** people were affected by hunger in 2021 – up **46 million** since 2020 and **150 million** more than reported in 2019.<sup>3</sup>
- Almost **3.1 billion** people could not afford a healthy diet in 2020, up **112 million** from 2019, reflecting the effects of inflation in consumer food prices stemming from the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures put in place to contain it.<sup>3</sup>
- An estimated **45 million** children under the age of five were suffering from wasting (low weight for their height), the deadliest form of malnutrition, which increases children's risk of death by up to 12 times.<sup>3</sup>
- **149 million** children under the age of five had stunted growth and development due to a chronic lack of essential nutrients in their diets, while **39 million** were overweight.<sup>3</sup>

## Red flags

It's safe to say that few people strictly adhere to a healthy diet every day of their lives. Special occasions, vacations, and other celebratory moments can tempt even the most disciplined individual to indulge in sugary, fatty foods or consume alcohol. While an occasional deviation from an otherwise healthy diet is not usually cause for concern, adopting an unhealthy way of eating as your normal routine can pose serious causes for alarm.

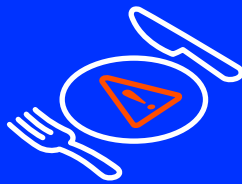
A poor diet contributes to the development of many chronic conditions. But you can actively

participate in helping safeguard your health and longevity by making healthy dietary choices, like choosing low fat protein and adding salads to your evening meals.

The “Western” (American) diet is marked by consumption of red and processed meats, full-fat dairy products, refined grains, high-sodium foods and sugar.<sup>4</sup>

Healthy diets (fruit, vegetables, whole grains, lean meats, low-fat milk) help you remain fit and reduce the risk of serious illness.





### Trans fats

Eating foods rich in trans fats increases the amount of harmful LDL (low-density lipoproteins) cholesterol in the bloodstream and reduces the amount of beneficial HDL (high-density lipoproteins) cholesterol. Even small amounts of trans fats can be harmful: **for every 2% of calories from trans fat consumed daily, the risk of heart disease rises by 23%.**<sup>5</sup>



### Saturated fats

Common sources of saturated fat include beef, pork, lamb, cream, butter, cheese and ice cream.<sup>6</sup>

Is saturated fat bad for you? A diet rich in saturated fats can drive up total cholesterol and tip the balance toward more harmful LDL cholesterol. For that reason, most nutrition experts recommend limiting saturated fat to **under 10%** of calories a day.<sup>5</sup>



### Sugar and non-sugar sweeteners

Added sugars and sugar-sweetened beverages are key contributors to weight gain and obesity. Their consumption is also associated with lower intake of key nutrients because they can replace nutrient-dense foods in the diet. A healthy, low-cost alternative to sugar-sweetened beverages is water.

Reducing the consumption of free sugars or added sugars to **below 25 g/day** (approximately six teaspoons/day) and limiting the consumption of sugar sweetened beverages to less than one serving/week are recommended to reduce the adverse effect of sugars on health.<sup>7</sup>

But it's not just sugars and sugar-sweetened beverages that can pose risks to your health. Guidelines from the World Health Organization recommend against the use of non-sugar sweeteners (aspartame, sucralose, stevia, saccharin) for weight loss or the reduction of chronic disease risk.<sup>8</sup>



### Processed foods

Ultra-processed foods account for **58%** of total energy in the average United States (U.S.) diet, but that's something you can alter to stay healthy. A study published in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology* revealed that higher consumption of ultra-processed foods is associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, with each additional daily serving found to further increase risk.<sup>10</sup>

It may surprise you to learn that examples of ultra-processed foods include soda and sports drinks, chips, chocolate, candy, ice cream, sweetened breakfast cereals, packaged soups, chicken nuggets, hotdogs, bacon and sausage.<sup>11</sup>



### Red and processed meats

Meat is a useful source of protein, vitamins and minerals in your diet. Red meat (beef, pork, lamb, venison) provides us with iron, zinc and B vitamins. Processed meat refers to meat that has been preserved by smoking, curing, salting or adding preservatives (i.e., sausage, bacon, ham and salami).

Some meats are high in fat and can raise cholesterol levels in the blood, raising your risk of heart disease. A healthy balanced diet can include protein from fish, eggs or non-animal sources such as beans, as well as from meat.<sup>9</sup>



### Alcohol

Drinking too much can harm your health. Excessive alcohol use led to **more than 140,000 deaths** in the U.S. from 2015-2019.<sup>12</sup>

Although moderate alcohol use may have beneficial effects on older adults, an increased risk of serious illness offsets such benefits. Choosing not to drink, or by limiting intake to two drinks or less a day for men and one drink or less a day for women can reduce long-term health risks.<sup>13</sup>

## Compromised system

A balanced diet consisting of vitamins and minerals, combined with adequate sleep, exercise and low stress, most effectively primes the body to fight infection and disease.

Eating enough nutrients as part of a varied diet is needed for the health and function of all cells, including immune cells. Diets consisting primarily of ultra processed foods, (like that frozen pizza sitting in your refrigerator), can negatively affect a healthy immune system.<sup>14</sup>

It is also believed that a Western diet can promote disturbances in healthy intestinal microorganisms, resulting in chronic inflammation of the gut, and associated suppressed immunity.<sup>15</sup> You can support a healthy immune system by eating a balanced diet of whole fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, whole grains and plenty of water.<sup>16</sup>



Understanding that current intake of foods may be unhealthy is a crucial step in dietary re-education. Calibrating a healthy diet takes important and mindful steps, with amazing outcomes when embraced. Small changes can result in huge impacts.

– Dr. Lior Baruch, Medical Principal, International Health, Cigna Healthcare<sup>SM</sup>

## Positive measures

It has been said that Rome wasn't built in a day. Similarly, adjusting one's diet to promote health and longevity may take time and patience, especially if it entails curtailing years of habit and behavior.

Understanding that your current intake of foods may be unhealthy is a crucial step of dietary re-education. Calibrating a healthy diet takes important and mindful steps, with amazing outcomes when embraced. Asking for help is also crucial. Confer with a dietitian or nutritionist who can help make recommendations specific to your individual needs. And while it may be frustrating or overwhelming to alter eating patterns practiced for decades, it's important to know small changes can result in huge impacts to your health.

Adopting a healthy diet doesn't require Herculean efforts.

You can simplify things by making use of:

- Precooked whole grains<sup>17</sup>
- Frozen vegetables –used in salads, added to soup or with brown rice<sup>17</sup>
- Precooked chicken strips (lean, grilled)—in salad or with vegetables and/or whole grains<sup>17</sup>
- Rotisserie chicken (low sodium)<sup>17</sup>
- Low sodium soup—add vegetables, brown rice, or chicken<sup>17</sup>
- Canned salmon<sup>17</sup>
- Boiled eggs for a quick snack<sup>17</sup>
- Precut raw vegetables –add hummus, salsa or savory yogurt dip<sup>17</sup>
- Apples with nut butter or added to oatmeal<sup>17</sup>
- Bean salad—mix green, cannellini, garbanzo or kidney beans<sup>17</sup>
- Prepared meal services—choose healthy precooked meals<sup>17</sup>



## Action plan

The good news here is that there are ways to improve your diet, and as a result, improve your chances for a long, productive life. Substituting healthier foods into your diet can make you feel better, boost your immune system and reduce the risk of serious illness.

The following tips may help you make positive changes to your diet:

Add fruit to oatmeal or whole-grain cereal (bananas, raisins or dried cranberries)<sup>18</sup>

Add fruit to low-fat or fat-free yogurt or cottage cheese<sup>18</sup>

Add vegetables to every meal, as fresh as possible, and prepare extra so you can easily have them for another meal<sup>18</sup>

Add vegetables (onions, peppers, spinach) to eggs<sup>18</sup>



Eat fruit instead of sugary snacks<sup>18</sup>

Eat crunchy vegetables (carrots, celery) as a snack<sup>18</sup>

Prepare grab-and-go snacks of dried fruit, grapes, cherries, oranges, etc.<sup>18</sup>

Whenever possible, include whole grains in your diet<sup>19</sup>

Choose chicken, fish, beans and nuts over red and processed meats<sup>19</sup>

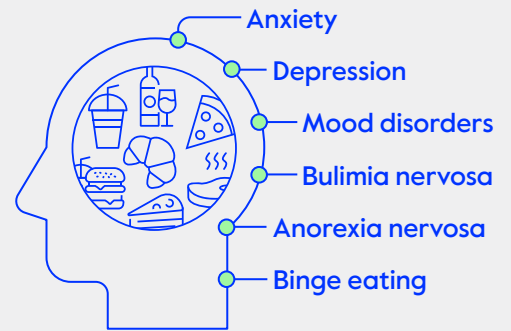
Use corn, olive, peanut, canola, soy or sunflower oil<sup>19</sup>

Drink water, coffee, tea over alcohol and sugary drinks<sup>19</sup>

## Cautionary tale

Recently there has been a surge in research on the effects of nutrition on mental status, which may play an important part in understanding, preventing and reducing the number of people suffering from certain mental disorders.<sup>22</sup>

Common disorders linked to diet<sup>23</sup>:



## Next steps

While regular exercise and getting enough sleep are essential to overall health, it's important to remember what you eat and drink are key components in helping maintain good health. Access to and consuming healthy food choices can help control and prevent the onset of serious health conditions.

Cigna Healthcare, Global Health Benefits is your partner for total well-being. Our International Employee Assistance Program (IEAP) resources help customers achieve and maintain a healthy diet. This includes fitness center memberships, alternative medicine practitioners and nutrition counseling.<sup>20</sup>

In addition, the Cigna Healthcare [Omada Diabetes Prevention Program \(DPP\)](#) can provide digital behavioral counseling to assist our prediabetic customers residing in the U.S.<sup>21</sup>

Making healthy choices and changes to your diet can help you lead your best life. For more information about staying healthy and how it can impact your ability to live your best life, please visit our [Health Blog](#) for additional articles.



## Hot Topic: Weight loss research

New research points towards developing effective weight loss and management medication to combat obesity and help prevent serious chronic conditions.

Current studies point towards promising results in losing and keeping unwanted weight off. Scientists have learned that people able to maintain their weight/weight loss for 12 months can essentially “reset” their fat cells’ “memory” – enabling them to more likely keep the weight off.<sup>24</sup>



# Global Health Benefits



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21. Cigna Healthcare offers the Omada Diabetes Prevention Program as a covered program for all eligible global customers residing in the U.S. Omada helps members manage weight and create healthier habits with one-on-one personal coaching and the tools needed to make long-lasting health changes. The program – a \$700 value – is no additional cost to you if you're eligible to join. Check with your benefits administrator if you are eligible for Omada. The Omada program is administered by Omada Health, Inc., an independent third party service provider. The Omada program is not administered by Cigna Healthcare. It is administered solely by Omada Health, Inc. which is responsible for the program.
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