

## 10.1 Nutrition and Weight Control

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Explain why good nutrition is important.
2. List health problems related to being overweight and obesity.
3. Explain the general principles of good nutrition.
4. Make good choices about foods to emphasize in meals and snacks.

Most Americans have a real problem with food. Overeating causes health problems, but what and how you eat can also affect how well you do as a student.

### Why Are So Many Americans Overweight?

Americans are eating too much—much more so than in the past. One-third of all Americans twenty years or older are obese. Another third of all adults are overweight. That means that two-thirds of us are not eating well or getting enough exercise for how we eat. There are many intertwined causes of this problem in American culture.

Why are being **overweight** and **obesity** a problem? Obesity is associated with many medical conditions, including diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and some cancers. Although some health problems may not appear until later in life, diabetes is increasing rapidly in children and teenagers. Worse, the habits young adults may already have or may form during their college years generally continue into later years.

But it's not just about body weight. Good nutrition is still important even if you don't have a health problem. What you eat affects how you feel and how well you function mentally and physically. Food affects how well you study and how you do on tests. Doughnuts for breakfast can lower your grades!

### Why Do Students Find It So Tough to Eat Healthily?

If Americans have trouble eating well in an environment that encourages overeating, college students often have it even worse. It seems like food is everywhere, and students are always snacking between classes. Fast food restaurants abound. There may not be time to get back to your dorm or apartment for lunch, and it's just so easy to grab a quick pastry at the coffee spot as you pass by between classes.

It's the eating by habit, or mindlessly, that usually gets us in trouble. If we're mindful instead, however, it's easy to develop better habits. Take the Nutrition Self-Assessment to evaluate your present eating habits.

### NUTRITION SELF-ASSESSMENT

Check the appropriate boxes.

	Usually	Sometimes	Seldom
1. I take the time to eat breakfast before starting my day.			

2. I eat lunch rather than snack throughout the day.			
3. When I'm hungry between meals, I eat fruit rather than chips or cookies.			
4. I consciously try to include fruit and vegetables with lunch and dinner.			
5. There is food left on my plate at the end of a meal.			
6. I try to avoid overeating snacks at night and while studying.			
7. Over the last year, my eating habits have kept me at an appropriate weight.			
8. Overall, my eating habits are healthy.			

## Eating Well: It's Not So Difficult

The key to a good diet is to eat a varied diet with lots of vegetables, fruits, and whole grains and to minimize fats, sugar, and salt. The exact amounts depend on your calorie requirements and activity levels, but you don't have to count **calories** or measure and weigh your food to eat well. Following are the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) general daily guidelines for a two-thousand-calorie diet.

- **Grains (6 ounces)**

- Eat whole grain cereals, breads, rice, or pasta.

- **Vegetables (2.5 cups)**

- Eat more dark green veggies like broccoli and spinach
- Eat more orange vegetables like carrots and sweet potatoes
- Eat more beans and peas

- **Fruits (2 cups)**

- Eat a variety of fruit
- Minimize fruit juices

- **Milk (3 cups)**

- Choose low-fat or fat-free milk, yogurt, and other milk products
- If you don't drink milk, choose lactose-free products or other calcium sources such as fortified foods

- **Meat and beans (5.5 ounces)**

- Choose low-fat or lean meats and poultry
- Roast, broil, or grill the meat
- Vary protein sources, including more fish, beans, peas, and nuts

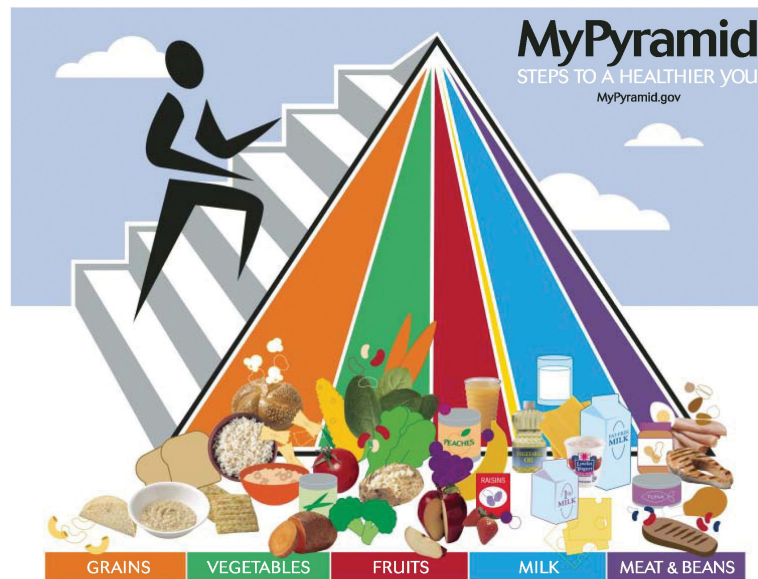
- **Minimize these (check food labels):**

- Solid fats like butter and margarine and foods that contain them (avoid saturated and trans fats)
- Watch out for high-sodium foods
- Minimize added sugars

- **Exercise**

- Be physically active for at least thirty minutes most days of the week.

Figure 10.2 The USDA MyPyramid emphasizes healthful food choices. United States Department of Agriculture, "MyPyramid: Steps to a Healthier You," <http://www.mypyramid.gov/downloads/MiniPoster.pdf> (accessed July 13, 2010).



## If You Need to Lose Weight

If you need to lose weight, don't try to starve yourself. Gradual steady weight loss is healthier and easier. Try these guidelines:

1. Check your **body mass index (BMI)** to see the normal weight range for your height (see "Additional Resources" below for more information).
2. Go to <http://www.MyPyramid.gov> for help determining your ideal caloric intake for gradual weight loss.
3. Set your goals and make a plan you can live with. Start by avoiding snacks and fast foods. Try to choose foods that meet the guidelines listed earlier.
4. Stay active and try to exercise frequently.
5. Keep a daily food journal and write down what you eat. Simply writing it down helps people be more aware of their habits and motivated to eat better.
6. Visit the student health center on your campus and ask for more information about weight loss programs.
7. Remember, no one plan works for everyone. Visit the online resources listed later for a variety of approaches for weight loss.

## Avoiding the Freshman Fifteen

The "freshman fifteen" refers to the weight gain many students experience in their first year of college. Even those whose weight was at an appropriate level often gained unwanted pounds because of changes in their eating habits.

Start by looking back at the boxes you checked in the Nutrition Self-Assessment. Be honest with yourself. If your first choice for a snack is cookies, ice cream, or chips, think about that. If your first choice for lunch is a burger and fries, have you considered other choices?

**Tips for Success: Nutrition**

- Eat a variety of foods every day.
- Take a multivitamin every day.
- Take an apple or banana with you for a snack in case you get hungry between meals.
- Avoid fried foods.
- Avoid high-sugar foods. After the rush comes a crash that can make you drowsy, and you'll have trouble paying attention in class. Watch out for sugary cereals—try other types with less sugar and more fiber.
- If you have a soft drink habit, experiment with flavored seltzer and other zero- or low-calorie drinks.
- Eat when you're hungry, not when you're bored or just because others are eating.
- If you find yourself in a fast food restaurant, try a salad.
- Watch portion sizes and never "supersize it"!

## Eating Disorders

The most common eating disorders are anorexia, bulimia, and binge eating.

**Anorexia** is characterized by excessive weight loss and self-starvation. The individual usually feels "fat" regardless of how thin she or he becomes and may continue to eat less and less. If your BMI is lower than the bottom of the normal range, you may be developing anorexia.

**Bulimia** is characterized by frequent binge eating followed by an attempt to compensate for or "undo" the overeating with a behavior such as self-induced vomiting or laxative abuse.

**Binge eating** disorder is characterized by frequent binge eating without compensatory behavior to "undo" the overeating. Binge eating usually leads to weight gain and eventual obesity.

More than ten million Americans suffer from an eating disorder. The causes are complex, and the individual usually needs help to overcome their obsession. Eating disorders hurt one's health in a variety of ways and can become life threatening. The signs of a possible eating disorder include the following:

- Eating secretly when others can't see
- Having a strong fear of being overweight or gaining weight
- Only eating a limited number of foods
- Exercising obsessively
- Lacking a monthly menstrual period

## Getting Help for Eating Disorders

Don't feel ashamed if you obsess over food or your weight. If your eating habits are affecting your life, it's time to seek help. As with any other health problem, professionals can provide help and treatment. Talk to your doctor or visit your campus student health center.

## Additional Resources

**BMI calculator.** Find out how your weight compares with normal ranges at <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/assessing/bmi>.

**Diet planning.** How much should you eat to maintain the same weight? What if you want to lose weight? Find out at <http://www.mypyramid.gov>.

**Calorie counter, nutritional database, and personal diet log.** If you're really serious about losing weight and want to keep a daily log of your progress, try this online tool: <http://www.caloriecount.about.com>.

**Eating disorders.** For information about causes and treatment of eating disorders, go to <http://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org>.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Good nutrition and an appropriate body weight are important for health and wellness. You're also more successful academically.
- Eating well does not require counting calories or obsessing over everything you eat. Focus on whole grains, lots of fruits and vegetables, and low-fat meats and dairy products. Minimize processed snacks and foods high in saturated fats, trans fats, sodium, and sugar.
- If you need to control your weight, a variety of healthful plans are available to help you eat foods you like and still lose weight without suffering unduly.

## CHECKPOINT EXERCISES

1. What health problems may result from obesity?  
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2. List three or more snacks that are healthier than cookies, chips, ice cream, and doughnuts.  
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3. How many cups of fruit and vegetables should you eat every day?  
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