

Healthy Eating Made Simple

Congratulations! By taking a critical look at your diet you have taken an important step towards improving your health.

The food we eat can have profound effects on our wellbeing – both in good and bad ways. While there is no “one-size-fits-all” dietary prescription, I have summarized here some broad nutritional principles that apply to all humans. In addition, I am making some personalized recommendations (below) for additional ways in which you can optimize your diet.

Once you have had time to read through this handbook and the accompanying PowerPoint presentation, I invite you to start making dietary changes. While you may be tempted to make major changes overnight, a more gradual approach tends to yield better long-term results. (For instance, adopting one new dietary measure each week, such as eating an additional serving of vegetables a day; eating a fermented food each day; cutting out soda; etc.) Take heart: While it may take time to un-learn bad advice you have received over the years, discovering new foods and new ways of eating can be a fun adventure with incredibly rewarding results.

If you need help optimizing your diet or have health problems that require more than one nutrition consultation to address (e.g., metabolic syndrome, (pre-)diabetes, imbalanced blood lipids, obesity, IBS, etc.), I would be happy to support you. Please see the last page of this handbook for a brief overview of my coaching services. (Also found on www.modernmediterranean.com.)

Based on your Nutrition Evaluation, I recommend that you:

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And now for my more general recommendations...

1. Eat a Modern Mediterranean Diet

The Mediterranean diet comprises olive oil, nuts and other sources of healthy fats, emphasizes fruits, vegetables, legumes, unprocessed grains and fish, and includes moderate amounts of dairy (generally fermented) and high-quality meat. It has been eaten for 5,000 years and has been shown in more than 3,500 articles published in peer-reviewed medical journals to promote health by balancing blood lipids and blood glucose, reducing inflammation, lowering cancer risk and supporting the immune system.

A meta-analysis published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* in 2016 found that a Mediterranean-style diet lowered the risk of heart attack, stroke, and heart-related deaths by 29%. The diet also reduced the risk of developing type-2 diabetes by 3%, breast cancer by 5%, and overall cancer death by 14%. The Mediterranean diet has even been found to [alleviate major depression](#).

The “Modern Mediterranean” diet goes a step further: It adapts traditional Mediterranean eating patterns – characterized by a high intake of carbohydrates and calories that our ancestors needed to keep warm and fuel often intense physical activity – to modern, sedentary lifestyles where most of us have cars and central heating and therefore need fewer calories and carbs. Moreover, the Modern Mediterranean diet simplifies food preparation to accommodate people who don’t have as much time to spend in the kitchen as our ancestors did.

For more information about the Mediterranean diet, please refer to your copy of [Zest for Life](#).

Anti-inflammatory: One of the strengths of the Mediterranean diet is the large volume of anti-inflammatory foods it contains, such as green, leafy vegetables, herbs, spices, nuts, seeds, legumes, oily fish, fermented foods and olive oil.

Systemic inflammation (which you can’t see or feel, but which simmers away imperceptibly) is involved in many chronic health problems, including heart disease, cancer, Alzheimer’s disease and depression. (See [this article about inflammation and diet](#).)

Try to eat at least one anti-inflammatory food at every meal; e.g., berries for breakfast, spinach and walnuts in a salad at lunch, and kale with salmon for dinner. Probiotic-rich foods (e.g. yogurt, kefir, fermented vegetables, kombucha – see below for more details) can also lower inflammation, so eat these every day, ideally several times a day.

Meanwhile, minimize inflammation-promoting foods such as alcohol, sugar, refined grains/white flour and industrially processed oils (corn, soybean, sunflower, cottonseed, etc.), and foods that contain these (many processed foods).

Optimizing sleep, lowering stress, reducing belly fat (which produces inflammatory chemicals) and avoiding exposure to pollutants can also help to lower systemic inflammation.

2. Healthy Weight/Waist

Where you carry body-fat is more predictive of disease risk than *how much* you carry. Fat around the waist, for instance, is riskier than fat carried on the hips or thighs. (Read [this article](#).)

Indeed, research shows that excess belly fat increases the risk for type-2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, depression, Alzheimer’s and death. According to a study of older adults published in the August 2010 *JAMA Internal Medicine*, this increased risk occurs regardless of body mass index (BMI): those with the largest waist measurements had double the risk of dying over a nine-year period than those with the smallest waist measurements.

I use the “waist-to-height ratio” (or WHtR) to assess your weight, as it is a more reliable indicator of cardio-metabolic disease risk than your weight in pounds or body-mass index (BMI). The WHtR is calculated by dividing your waist measurement by your height (in inches) and multiplying this number by 100. Here are the WHtR ranges:

Females	Males
Under 35% – Underweight	Under 35% – Underweight
35% – 42% – Extremely Slim	35% – 43% – Extremely Slim
42% – 49% – Healthy	43% – 53% – Healthy
49% – 54% – Overweight	53% – 58% – Overweight
54% – 58% – Very Overweight	58% – 63% – Very Overweight
Over 58% – Obese	Over 63% – Obese

Based on the waist measurement we took when we met (____ inches), your WHtR is _____, which puts you in the “ _____ ” WHtR range. Losing ____ inches (to ____) would bring you to the “ _____ ” range at a WHtR of _____.

While the thought of losing several inches around the waist (1 inch = roughly equivalent to 2 to 2½ lbs) may feel daunting, the good news is that abdominal adipose tissue responds well to lifestyle modifications. A Mediterranean diet comprising...

- a moderate intake of minimally processed carbohydrates
- adequate protein intake,
- plenty of healthy fats,
- vegetables or low-sugar fruit at every meal,
- pro- and prebiotics and
- appropriate portions combined with
- time-restricted eating (e.g., eating in an 8-12-hour time window)

... can be effective at reducing your waist circumference and improving your cardio-metabolic health. Regular physical activity, restful sleep and low levels of stress can further help in attaining – and maintaining – a healthy waist circumference. Please ask me for details.

3. Nutritional Rule of Thirds

Every meal and snack you eat should include some healthy fat, some high-quality protein and some low-glycemic carbohydrate, each macronutrient making up roughly 1/3 of your calories (e.g., 30-35% carb, 20-25% protein, 40% fat). Here are some examples of meals containing a balance of healthy protein, low-glycemic carbohydrate and healthy fat:

Meal	Dish	Protein	Fat	Low-GL carbohydrate
Breakfast	Berry-protein smoothie	1 scoop protein powder, 1½ cups kefir	1 tbsp almond butter	1 cup mixed berries, 1-2 tsp maple syrup
Snack	Medium apple, cut into wedges, served with 1 tbsp peanut butter	Peanut butter	Peanut butter	Apple
Lunch	Large mixed salad topped with protein (e.g., chicken, beef, shrimp, tuna, salmon, hard-boiled eggs) and, if desired, a handful of sourdough bread croutons roasted in olive oil.	Meat (chicken breast / roast beef) / shrimp / smoked salmon / hard-boiled eggs / feta crumbs	Olive oil, nuts, feta cheese, avocado	Salad vegetables (e.g., lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers, tomatoes, asparagus, etc.), cranberries, blueberries, bread croutons, beans.
Snack	Trader Joe's Whole Grain Crackers with tuna salad or hummus	Tuna / hummus (chickpeas –lower in protein than tuna)	Mayonnaise in tuna salad / olive oil in hummus	Cracker, celery and onions in tuna salad / carbs in hummus (chickpeas)
Dinner 1	Steak with fajita vegetables, guacamole and refried beans	Steak (ideally grass-fed)	Cooking fat for steak & veg's; beef fat, avocado	Fajita vegetables, refried beans
Dinner 2	Grilled salmon with roasted sweet potato (tossed in olive oil) and steamed broccoli (ditto)	Salmon	Olive oil (to toss vegetables), fish oil (salmon)	Sweet potatoes, broccoli

A great way to track your macro-nutrient balance is to use a food-journaling app like [MyFitnessPal](#). I would be happy to help you set it up, evaluate your eating patterns and advise you on ways to optimize them.

4. Know Your Carbs

The nutrient that most directly influences blood glucose levels is carbohydrate – i.e., the sugars and starches found in sugar, honey, grains, flour, pasta, rice, potatoes, vegetables, fruits, soda, beer, etc. Whole, unprocessed carb-rich foods like vegetables, beans and fruits are fine within reason, but a high intake of sugar and refined carbohydrates can contribute to:

- Dyslipidemia (elevated LDL-C and LDL-P; small, dense LDL particles; low HDL (“good” cholesterol); elevated triglycerides)
- High blood pressure
- Insulin resistance, (pre)diabetes
- Abdominal weight gain (see WHR)
- Fatty liver disease
- Certain types of cancer
- Mood issues (depression, anxiety)
- Age-related cognitive decline
- Irritable bowel syndrome

Optimal carbohydrate intakes vary, depending on your age, activity levels, sex, height, weight and cardiometabolic health. At most, you should get about a third of your daily calories from carbs. Thus, a person eating 2,000 calories daily and seeking to maintain their weight should aim for roughly 150g of carbs a day. If you have prediabetes, dyslipidemia or high blood pressure, or are trying to lose weight, you should aim for less than that (no more than 100g/day coupled with regular exercise and, where indicated, weight loss). Heavy exercisers should eat more (200g+).

In some cases – for example, people with type-1 or type-2 diabetes or seizure disorders – a very low-carb/high-fat (a.k.a. ketogenic) diet can be helpful; I can assist you in adopting this way of eating. However, very low-carb diets should only be followed under close medical supervision as they can affect drug dosages. *Please discuss this with your doctor.*

The *quality* of the carbohydrates you eat matters as much as the quantity. Choose low-glycemic carbs (GL 0-10) that don’t spike your blood sugar, like vegetables, low-sugar fruits (like berries, apples, oranges), legumes (beans, lentils, etc.), and whole grains (quinoa, oats, etc.). Sourdough bread is OK in small quantities (maximum 1 slice/day). Minimize refined carbs (GL 20+) like boxed cereal, pasta, white rice, candy, cookies, and sugar-sweetened foods and drinks.

Even when you don’t eat added sugar, you may unwittingly be eating *hidden* sugars. Sugar is added to 74% of packaged foods sold in supermarkets, many of which – like fruit yogurt, smoothies or breakfast cereals – claim to be healthy! Limit these. Also avoid artificial sweeteners: Not only do they perpetuate your sweet tooth; by altering your gut bacteria, they may raise your risk of [weight gain](#), [diabetes](#), [stroke and dementia](#).

“Natural” low-caloric sweeteners like stevia, xylitol, erythritol or monk fruit sweetener are slightly healthier alternatives to aspartame or sucralose, but ultimately, I encourage you to wean yourself off sweet tastes as much as possible, as these perpetuate sugar cravings. Many people report that, as they reduce sweeteners, they rediscover the natural sweetness of fruits, vegetables and whole grains and no longer enjoy the taste of sugar.

5. Fat is Back

Dietary advice for cardiovascular health has undergone a huge shift over the last 10 years. Whereas it used to be thought that saturated fat and cholesterol in food caused heart disease, researchers now acknowledge that it's much more complicated than that, and that factors like inflammation, oxidation, stress, nutrient deficiencies, blood glucose and insulin (resistance) all play important roles in the causation of cardiovascular disease.

Meanwhile, it's worth remembering that dietary fat is essential for health. Fats are needed for healthy brain and nervous-system functioning, energy and blood-sugar balance, satiety, balanced reproductive hormones, to manage inflammation, for the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins (A, D, E, K1 and K2), and for many other functions. About 35-40% of your daily calories should come from fat.

Not all fats are healthy, however, and some should be minimized, such as:

- Industrially processed seed oils (e.g. canola, soybean, corn, sunflower, safflower, grapeseed and cottonseed oils)
- Processed foods made with these seed oils (e.g., margarines and “healthy” spreads, mayonnaise, salad dressings)
- Trans fats (in processed or deep-fried foods),
- The fats of industrially reared animals fed corn-rich diets high in omega-6 fatty acids. (The meat, eggs and dairy products from pastured or grass-fed animals contain a healthier fatty-acid profile than those of conventionally reared animals.)

High-quality extra-virgin olive oil, fatty fish, nuts/nut butters (incl. coconut and MCT oil), seeds, avocado and green leafy vegetables, on the other hand, provide many health benefits and should be eaten regularly.

Since saturated fats and dietary cholesterol are no longer considered to increase the risk of cardiovascular disease, these can be included too. High-quality eggs (omega-3-enriched or pasture-raised) contain healthy fats, too, as well as a [wide range of other essential nutrients](#), and are not associated with increased coronary heart disease or stroke risk. (Though people with familial hypercholesterolemia or a gene type called ApoE4 may want to minimize or avoid eggs.)

Don't worry about gaining weight by eating more fat. Studies have shown that – in conjunction with low-glycemic diets and provided you don't exceed your daily calorie requirement – higher fat intakes don't cause weight gain and can even help you shed excess weight.

Low-carb, high-fat diets can also produce other benefits, such as increased HDL (“good”) cholesterol, lower triglycerides, lower blood sugar and insulin levels, abdominal fat loss, an improvement in the size and number of LDL particles, and improved brain function.

6. Protein Power

Protein helps keep you satiated, curbs carbohydrate and sugar cravings, balances blood glucose, and supports healthy muscle mass and steady energy levels. Protein can also help with weight-loss: In [one study](#), participants eating about 30% of their calories as protein lost about a pound a week over several weeks because it decreased their appetite/calorie intake and lowered their food cravings. Most of us should get at least 20% of your daily calories from protein.

Most people should eat about 70-90g protein a day, which translates roughly into 25-35 g protein per meal. Animal protein supplies the full spectrum of amino acids your body needs. It's a little harder to get all your amino acids from most plant proteins. Nonetheless, plant foods have many health benefits, so eat them regularly, too (about 50% animal and 50% plant protein).

Getting enough protein at breakfast can be a little difficult, which is where protein powders can be useful -- it's easy to get 30g of high-quality protein from a homemade protein smoothie. I recommend using unflavored, unsweetened protein powder – either egg-white or whey (type “unflavored, unsweetened, grass-fed whey/egg white protein powder” into the Amazon search field), or plant-based (e.g. *Garden of Life's* Raw Organic Protein Powder - unflavored, unsweetened). You can buy these on Amazon or at any good health store.

Here are some examples of ways to spread protein across your day:

Breakfast	Bircher muesli (overnight oats) : ½ cup kefir (6g), ½ cup Greek yogurt (11g) with 2 tbsp oats (3g), 1/3 cup berries, 2 tbsp pecan nuts (1g) TOTAL: 21g	2 Wasa crackers (4g) topped with ½ avocado (1g), 2 scrambled eggs (12g) and 3 oz smoked salmon (22g) TOTAL: 39g	Berry-protein smoothie made with 1½ cups kefir (16g) and 1 serving whey protein powder (25g), berries, 2 tsp almond butter (2g) TOTAL: 43g
Lunch	Chicken Greek salad: 4 oz chicken breast (34g) on a bed of lettuce, tomatoes, cucumber, olives, 1 oz feta cheese (4g), olive oil dressing TOTAL: 38g	Bean salad: 3 oz tuna (22g) with ½ cup white beans (10g), 1 hard-boiled egg (6g) TOTAL: 38g	Middle-eastern lentil stew (2 cups = 18g) with arugula topped with 1oz feta cheese (5g) TOTAL: 23g
Snack	1 apple with 1 tbsp peanut butter (7g) TOTAL: 7g	1 glass kefir (1½ cups) on ice TOTAL: 16g	½ cup steamed/ micro-waved edamame beans (shelled) TOTAL: 9g
Dinner	6oz salmon (34g) with braised vegetables TOTAL: 34g	4 oz bison meatballs (34g) with minty yogurt dressing (6g) in tomato sauce on spaghetti squash TOTAL: 40g	Mediterranean fish stew (3 oz salmon & cod (22g) and 1/3 cup shrimp and mussels (20g) per serving) TOTAL: 42g

7. Food Quality

Make every calorie count. We post-industrial folks need fewer calories than our cave-dwelling ancestors, but we need just as many nutrients (vitamins, minerals, fiber, protein, fat, etc.), and when we don't get enough, the resulting deficiencies can cause health problems. Thus, it's important to eat foods that provide a high concentration of nutrients per calorie (called "nutrient-dense" foods). The most nutrient-dense foods include vegetables, beans, fruits, nuts and seeds, whole grains, fish, grass-fed meat, pastured eggs and grass-fed dairy.

Conversely, limit "empty calories" from foods and drinks that are high in calories but low in nutrients, such as baked goods made with white flour (bagels, bread, donuts, cookies, crackers, etc.), pasta, white rice, processed oils (e.g. canola, soybean), ultra-processed foods and alcohol.

Eat your greens (and your reds, pinks, purples, yellows...): Most health authorities recommend that we eat nine to 10 servings of vegetables and fruits a day; most of these should come from vegetables, which are very nutrient-dense. Non-starchy vegetables are particularly nutrient-dense, e.g., green, leafy vegetables, all members of the cabbage family, tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuces, peppers, eggplant, asparagus, mushrooms, etc. In summer, eat these raw wherever possible, but during the winter months it's fine – even preferable – to cook them.

Fruits are very healthy, too, and are often a better source of fiber than vegetables. However, they also contain more sugar than vegetables, so limit to one to two a day and choose low-glycemic fruits like berries, apples, pears, oranges and grapefruit. Minimize high-sugar fruits like dates, grapes and dried fruits, especially if your blood glucose is elevated. Avoid fruit juices – even freshly pressed ones – as they are high in sugar. (A 12oz glass of apple juice contains 10 teaspoons of sugar – as much as a 10oz glass of Coca Cola!)

Variety, variety, variety: Studies show that people eating a wide variety of healthy foods are healthier and live longer than people eating only four or five of the same healthy foods over and over. Thus, when choosing, say, vegetables, don't just eat spinach or tomatoes, but also asparagus, bell peppers, zucchini, mushrooms, cabbage, etc. When choosing nuts, don't just eat almonds; also have Brazil nuts, hazelnuts, walnuts, pecans, cashews, etc. And when eating meat, don't just eat chicken and turkey; also include grass-fed beef or bison, lamb, goat, pork, duck, elk and kangaroo!

Eat "Real Food" and limit/avoid processed foods like meal-replacement bars and drinks; boxed breakfast cereals and instant oatmeal (replace with "actual" whole grains like rolled oats); artificially sweetened yogurt, sodas, sauces, etc.; low-fat/fat-free salad dressings or mayonnaise; commercial weight-loss shakes & meals (NutriSystems, Weight Watchers, Lean Cuisine, etc.); "mock" meats (e.g., bacon or sausages made from soy or wheat gluten); frozen meals (unprocessed, single-ingredient frozen foods, such as vegetables, fruits, fish, shrimp, meat, are fine); canned or boxed soups or meals (high in sodium and non-nutritious additives, low in protein and fresh vegetables).

8. Microbiome Health

A healthy gut flora is essential for good digestion, a strong immune system, blood sugar control, healthy bones, cancer prevention, optimal blood pressure, healthy blood lipids, weight loss, low levels of inflammation and brain health. (Read this article: “[Why the Gut Microbiome Is Crucial for Your Health.](#)”) Gut health can be supported in various ways:

- **Avoiding microbiome-disruptors, such as**
 - A high intake of sugar and refined carbohydrates
 - Artificial sweeteners
 - A lack of dietary variety
 - Drinking too much alcohol
 - Antibiotics (if you need a course of antibiotics, take probiotics and prebiotics during and after the treatment)
 - Chronic stress
 - Sleep deficiency
 - Sedentary lifestyle, infrequent exercise
 - Unhealthy fats (trans fats, refined seed oils)
 - Known or suspected food allergens (e.g. gluten, soy, dairy).
- **Consuming foods and drinks containing healthy microbes** (ideally at every meal), e.g.,
 - **Kefir** (unsweetened, unflavored); read [this article](#) and/or [watch this video](#) on the health benefits of kefir. My favorite brands are [Wallaby](#) and [Lifeway](#). If you find it too tart, you can add a smidgen of maple syrup to sweeten it.
 - **Yogurt** – regular or Greek (Greek contains more protein). Ideally unsweetened, though a smidge of maple syrup is fine; my favorite brand is [Wallaby](#).
 - **Raw, fermented vegetables** (sold in most supermarkets and health-food stores – chiller section – e.g., Bubbie’s, Ozuke, etc.)
 - Drinks like **kombucha** or **water kefir**. These fizzy, tangy drinks make a delicious, lower-sugar alternative to sodas. Although made with tea, kombucha contains little caffeine.
 - **Miso paste** (chiller section) – delicious stirred into hot chicken stock for a warming, nourishing beverage.
- **Eating foods that nourish your gut flora**, called “prebiotics” (e.g. green vegetables, onion-family vegetables, beans & lentils, intact grains, seeds, nuts, coffee, cocoa, seaweed, cooked, cooled & reheated potatoes, cooked, cooled & reheated brown rice, potato starch, etc.)

There is a close connection between **our gut bacteria and our emotions**, so supporting your gut microbiome in the ways described here may have a positive impact on your mood. Check out [this article](#) from Harvard University about “nutritional psychiatry,” which discusses the crucial role of gut bacteria in emotional and mental health, and recommends eating a Mediterranean diet. See also the [website of Dr. Kelly Brogan](#), a NYC-based psychiatrist who mainly uses “psychobiotics” and many other dietary approaches in her practice.

9. Hydration & Alcohol

Hydration. Our bodies consist to about 60% of water, which makes it our number-one nutrient. Our brains are particularly thirsty; even when you are only 2% dehydrated, your brain function is diminished.

The well-known “8x8” recommendation (to drink eight 8-oz glasses of water a day), while not based on scientific foundations, is a great starting point, though is only a rough rule of thumb. Interestingly, research has found that when people drink 8 x 8 oz of water, brain function improves by 30%!

Hydration needs vary from one person to another, depending on their height and weight, activity levels, how much they sweat and urinate, the prevailing temperatures and air humidity levels, etc. Elderly people sometimes have less reliable thirst mechanisms, which is why they are more prone to dehydration; regular reminders to drink (via Post-It notes or prompts from another person) can help. For most people, however, there probably isn’t any need to worry about water intake; the thirst instinct is very reliable and has managed to keep us humans alive for a very long time.

If you don’t like drinking “plain old” water, try non-caloric drinks like unsweetened iced tea (green or black tea with a squirt of lemon juice, if desired), iced coffee (no sugar), lemon/lime/cucumber water, Bai (a low-sugar, sparkling drink that contains caffeine), Lacroix (flavored but unsweetened sparkling water), or club soda. When exercising strenuously, choose electrolyte-rich coconut water, rather than drinking highly processed commercial products. Incidentally, tea, coffee and herbal infusions (drunk hot or cold), juice, smoothies, soups, fruits, vegetables and any other foods that contain water count towards “hydration.”

Kombucha, water kefir and dairy kefir provide hydration *and* probiotics, so try to drink some of these every day (they contain calories, so enjoy sparingly). Apart from these, avoid caloric drinks (soda, juice, sweetened coffees and teas, etc.); with the exception of people who are following liquid diets for medical reasons, we should eat our calories and drink our water.

Limit alcohol consumption: The health effects of alcohol depend on many variables, such as the type of alcoholic beverage, the amount consumed, a person’s sex and their genetic make-up, and the health outcomes you’re looking at (for instance, red wine is neutral-to-protective in the context of cardiovascular health and diabetes, but not protective against most cancers).

Women should limit their alcohol consumption to one unit a day and men to two units, ideally not drinking alcohol daily but limiting it to weekends and special occasions. When you do drink alcohol, choose drinks that are low in carbohydrates. Wine – esp. dry, white wine – is generally quite low in carbs (1-2g per serving) whereas beer is high in carbs (10-15g per serving). Because alcohol is high in calories (a 5oz glass of wine has around 120 calories), people who are watching their weight should avoid it or drink it infrequently.

10. Ready, Steady – Cook!

Cook as often as you can – if only on weekends (making extra so you can enjoy the leftovers later in the week). People who cook most of their meals from scratch eat fewer carbohydrates, less sugar, less fat and fewer calories than those who eat out frequently, and consequently, tend to be slimmer. Moreover, food that’s cooked from scratch usually contains more nutrients and fewer empty calories than restaurant food. Not to mention the money you save!

If you don’t have the time or energy to cook, more and more fast-food restaurants serve healthy options, such as Chipotle, Modern Market, Mad Greens, Panera and Tokyo Joe’s. These are suitable for quick, healthy lunches. Avoid fast food meals that are high in refined carbs (pasta, French fries, subs, pizza, etc.); when ordering a hamburger, omit the bun. Avoid deep-fried foods, too – they contain inflammatory trans fats, are hard to digest and high in empty calories. Lastly, even when eating fast food, savor it slowly by sitting at a table and paying attention to your meal, rather than eating it in the car while driving, at your desk while working, or at the movies. This will aid your digestion and will help you eat less.

Another way to eat healthily without spending hours in the kitchen is to use a service that delivers ingredients and instructions to your home. I particularly like [Sunbasket](#), whose meals are every bit as delicious as restaurant meals. I recommend Sunbasket’s “Paleo” plan; all the dishes on it are packed with flavor and nutrients – not one empty calorie in sight!

If you want to eat at home but don’t have time to cook a Sunbasket meal, I recommend [Freshly](#), a service that delivers ready-made meals to your home that can be frozen and reheated in a microwave. Most of their dishes provide 30-40g protein, rarely more than 40g carbs and moderate amounts of healthy fats, making them healthier than most restaurant/take-out meals.

Avoid grazing: Eating three “proper” meals that contain healthy protein, fat and carbohydrate is healthier than snacking throughout the day. The foods we snack on (crackers, candy, chocolate, cookies, protein or granola bars, etc.) are less nutritious than the foods we eat at mealtimes. Studies have found that people who eat fewer meals have better glucose control than people who graze. Moreover, not snacking helps with weight loss, as longer periods without eating prompt your body to dip into its fat stores. Lastly, in people with delicate digestive systems (e.g., GERD, IBS), eating frequently can exacerbate their digestive problems.

If you do snack, choose raw nuts, a little Greek yogurt, low-glycemic fruits or a high-quality protein bar (ask me for recommendations), which are more nutritious than most other snack foods. Don’t skip meals; it’s fine to delay a meal (e.g. eating breakfast at 9.30 or 10 rather than at 7 am), or to compress your meals into a time window of 8 to 10 hours (this is called “intermittent fasting” and can be healthy), but if you skip an entire meal, you miss out on calories and nutrients and risk succumbing to snack-attacks in the evening because you didn’t eat enough during the day. Eating late – especially sweet, calorie-dense foods like cookies or ice cream – can contribute to indigestion, weight gain, blood sugar fluctuations and sleep problems.

11. Sleep & Exercise

Nutritional health is heavily affected by the quality of your sleep and by physical activity.

Restorative sleep – ideally 7-8 hours per night – is the cornerstone of good health; without it, we lack the energy to exercise, make poor food choices (when we are tired, we often crave sugar, refined carbohydrates and caffeine), and have trouble staying alert and energetic throughout the day. Lack of sleep also contributes to weight gain, inflammation, depression and cognitive problems.

Certain foods can help improve sleep quality, such as almonds, turkey, kiwi fruit, tart cherry juice, oily fish, walnuts, milk, bananas, cottage cheese, and passionflower and chamomile tea. Foods that can interfere with sleep include alcohol, caffeinated drinks, sugar, refined carbohydrates, and rich or spicy meals that may cause indigestion. Supplements can help too, such as magnesium or valerian. (Ask me for my list of “Sleep Hacks.”)

Exercise. Regular physical activity (ideally, a mixture of cardio, strength and flexibility/balance training at least five times a week) is essential to health. Regular exercise can lower your risk of many diseases, including heart disease, diabetes, dementia, osteoporosis and some cancers. In fact, people who work out on a regular basis have been found to be 50% less likely to die from these illnesses. Exercise is also incredibly good for your mental health and can help you manage stress and unwind.

Contrary to widespread belief, however, exercise does not promote weight loss – at least, not on its own. That’s because exercise increases appetite, and after a strenuous cardio workout, many people eat to replace the calories they burned. Coupled with dietary measures, however, exercise can support weight loss. Strength-training – ideally, done two to three times a week – can provide an additional weight-loss boost as it helps to increase lean muscle mass, which in turn boosts your metabolic rate (causing you to burn more calories).

Often, the hardest part is knowing what type of exercise to do, for how long, how often, and at what level of intensity (indeed, [too much exercise can be bad for your health!](#)). If you want to exercise more but don’t know where to begin, I recommend you book two or three sessions with a personal trainer who can design a personalized fitness plan for you, including for exercise you plan to do at home or when you travel.

At a minimum, simply increasing the amount of *movement* in your life – even if you do not adopt a formal exercise regimen – will benefit your health. For instance, a mere ½-hour walk every day can have important health benefits, as [this great little video](#) shows. And dancing not only keeps your body, but also your brain young, as [this article](#) describes.

Moving our bodies more in our daily lives – for instance, by using standing/treadmill desks, sitting on the floor, walking up and down stairs instead of taking elevators, walking while making phone calls, and walking barefoot – can increase your movement in subtle ways.

12. Stress

Chronic stress is associated with increased risks of (pre-)diabetes, high blood pressure, elevated blood lipids and heart disease, sleep and memory problems, depression and anxiety, inflammation and autoimmune conditions, weight gain, dementia, cravings (for sugary/starchy and salty foods), bone loss, fatigue, imbalanced gut bacteria, weakened immunity, allergies, etc.

Unfortunately, we can't just make the stressors in our lives go away. We can, however, try to change the way we react to stress, setting boundaries to limit its impact on our health. Sustainable stress management is usually achieved through a series of gradual changes in lifestyle and requires time and patience. Below, I list some ways that may help you to better handle stress.

- **Meditate or do relaxation exercises.** I like the smart phone app "[Calm](#)," which offers guided meditations, or [HeartMath](#), an app-based tool that is thought to improve sleep and calmness and reduce stress, anxiety and depression.
- A "**Gratitude Journal**" can help put life into perspective and increase a sense of optimism.
- **Try to sleep 7-8 hours a night.**
- **Do something pleasant every day -- just for you!** This could be watching a funny YouTube video or TV program, meeting a friend for a walk or a cup of coffee, a dance class, etc.
- **Manage your to-do list.** Take a long hard look at your calendar and see if you can reduce your load. Over-commitment is often self-inflicted and can create unnecessary stress that negatively affects your diet, sleep, personal relationships and overall health.
- **Are you an HSP ("Highly Sensitive Person")?** Some 20% of humans have a genetic trait that makes them "highly sensitive." This is not a disorder or a disease, but rather, a genetic predisposition that makes people susceptible to stress-related conditions like IBS, insomnia, allergies, anxiety, depression, etc. To find out if you might be an HSP, take [this online quiz](#).
- **Put yourself first:** Many people invest inordinate amounts of energy in keeping others happy (family, clients, colleagues, etc.), at the cost of neglecting their own physical and psychological needs. At the risk of feeling selfish, prioritize your own needs and make sure you meet at least *some* of these before you work on fulfilling other people's. Attending a [CODA Meeting](#) (Co-Dependents Anonymous) can help you learn to say "no" and set healthy boundaries.
- **Avoid negative self-talk.** Have compassion and patience for yourself, even when you may not be "performing up to your usual standards." Sometimes "good-enough" is just fine.
- **Eat calm sit-down meals on a regular food cycle** (breakfast, lunch, dinner, a small snack in-between each) and minimize caffeine, especially after lunch.
- **Take regular, gentle exercise** -- nothing too tiring. A moderately brisk walk, Nia or yoga are great ways to de-stress while moving and stretching your body. Excessively long or intense cardio workouts can raise your cortisol levels, so don't overdo it.
- **Seek counsel or support** from a certified mental health professional to process any traumatic experiences or relational difficulties in your life, past or present.
- Consider using **botanical supplements** to help balance your stress hormones. Ask a licensed herbalist for guidance.

13. Supplements

We should ideally get all our nutrients from food. However, due to modern farming methods and food processing techniques, our diet may not contain as many nutrients as it did before the advent of industrialized food. Moreover, people with digestive problems have trouble absorbing nutrients from their meals and may need extra reinforcements. That's where high-quality supplements can help. (FYI, I do not sell supplements or derive any financial gain from these recommendations.)

Before starting to take a nutritional supplement, please check with your doctor that it's safe for you; some supplements can interfere with drugs you might be taking, and others may not be appropriate for your health condition. And remember: Nutritional health always starts with food! Supplements are just that: an adjunct to – not a replacement of – real food.

- A good **multivitamin and mineral** supplement can help you fill any nutritional gaps you might have. I recommend *Nature's Way's* [Alive! Max3 Daily Men's Multivitamin](#) for men / [Alive! Max3 Daily Women's Multivitamin](#) for women.
- For anyone experiencing bone loss (osteopenia or osteoporosis), I recommend a **bone-building supplement** that contains nutrients such as vitamin D, vitamin C, calcium, magnesium and vitamin K2. My favorite bone-building multi is *Garden of Life's* [Vitamin Code Grow Bone System](#).
- A **probiotic supplement** can support healthy gut flora (esp. if you have recently taken, or are taking, antibiotics, or if you rarely eat fermented foods/foods high in probiotics). I recommend [VSL#3](#) (esp. if you have SIBO, IBS, colitis, Crohn's or other serious GI disorders) or *Garden of Life's* probiotics, e.g. [Raw Probiotics for Women](#), [Raw Probiotics for Men](#) or [Primal Defense Ultra](#).
- If you rarely eat prebiotic foods (above), consider taking a **prebiotic supplement** (e.g., *Hyperbiotics'* [Organic Prebiotic Powder](#)). These are sold as powders to mix into smoothies or water. Prebiotics nourish the beneficial microbes in our gut and, among others, can help ease constipation.
- While I prefer that my clients get their **omega-3 fatty acids** from fatty fish like salmon, some people just don't like – or rarely eat – fish. In this case I recommend they take a fish oil supplement to make sure you consume these anti-inflammatory, heart-and brain-healthy fats. The product I recommend is *Viva Naturals'* [Triple-Strength Omega-3](#) supplement.
- **Digestive problems:** There are thousands of supplements aimed at digestive health and I would be happy to advise you on these if necessary. However, digestive enzymes are one basic and uncontroversial type of digestive aid that can afford quick and safe relief; a product I like is *NOW's* [Super Enzymes](#).

What Next?

Your nutrition evaluation is the first step on your journey to nutritional health: an opportunity to take stock of your dietary and lifestyle habits, evaluating what works and what doesn't.

Unfortunately, one meeting can't provide all the information you may need to optimize your diet. That's why I offer a wide range of tools to help you improve your nutritional health. My free or low-cost support services include:

- **Nutrition workshops** in Denver & Boulder (check "Events" section of my [website](#))
- **Cooking demonstrations** in Boulder & Denver (check "Events" section of my [website](#))
- **Nutritional health blog**, [Eating the Good Life](#)
- **Recipe & lifestyle blog**, [Recipes for Disaster](#)
- **Instagram**: I share pictures of my meals on [modernmediterranean](#). For a more philosophical take on healthy living, check out my other Instagram account, [myrecipesfordisaster](#).
- **YouTube**: I have a [YouTube cooking channel](#) where you can watch me preparing healthy, anti-inflammatory Mediterranean meals (ignore the first video – it's in German).

If you would like to work with me one-on-one, here are some of my coaching programs (more information on my website):

- **Follow-up consultations**: If you already enjoy a healthy diet and lifestyle but want to meet with me occasionally to help you tweak their diet to optimize their health.
- **Mediterranean Makeover**: An eight-session coaching program for people with long-standing health problems that require a more gradual approach (e.g., (pre-)diabetes, elevated cholesterol, high blood pressure, gout, IBS, weight loss, depression, etc.).
- **Anti-Cancer Coaching Program**: If you are preparing for, undergoing or recovering from cancer treatment, or are healthy but have a family history of cancer and wish to reduce your risks, this eight-session program is for you (can include one caregiver).
- **Guided Shopping**: We pay a two-hour visit to your usual grocery store and I show you which foods to choose and which to limit or avoid. A fun way to learn to make healthy choices.
- **Cooking Classes**: If you'd like to cook more but lack time or confidence, I will come to your home and show you how to cook delicious, healthy meals from scratch. Menus tailored to your health needs and dietary preferences.
- **Family Nutrition Coaching**: Teaching parents and children about healthy eating in the comfort of their home, this program brings together theory & practice in a fun and engaging way.
- **Weight-loss coaching & support group**: A cost-effective way to get coached by me and supported by your peers (*coming soon; please sign up to my website mailing list for updates*).

For more information about my services, please visit www.modernmediterranean.com.