

Choose Healthy Foods Year-Round

Choosing nutritious foods is an important part of creating a healthy lifestyle. This publication includes tips for making the most out of each season's fresh produce, along with ideas for dealing with a variety of challenges, such as holiday meals, making your dollar stretch further at the grocery store, and what to look for on nutrition labels.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers a variety of science-based information related to nutrition here: <https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/features/healthy-eating-tips.html>. Consult your medical doctor before beginning any new diet.

Spring

Colorful Spring Salads

Spring brings fresh, colorful vegetables that brighten up your salad bowl.

- **Rainbow Salad:** Use different colored vegetables, such as red tomatoes, orange carrots, yellow bell peppers, green cucumbers, and purple cabbage. More colors = more vitamins!
- **Strawberry Spinach Salad:** Top fresh spinach leaves with sliced strawberries, a handful of pecan or walnut pieces, and a light vinaigrette dressing. The sweet berries and tangy dressing give this salad loads of flavor.
- **Crunchy Cucumber Salad:** Slice cucumbers, add cherry tomatoes, and top with apple cider vinegar and herbs, or Italian dressing. No lettuce required for this simple veggie salad!

Quick and easy veggies make it more likely you'll eat them, so prepare for the week by cutting, peeling, dicing, or otherwise preparing vegetables for salads and snacks.

Spring Cleaning Tips for a Healthier Kitchen

Spring is the perfect time to reset your kitchen for healthy eating habits! Here are some tips and tricks for creating an environment that supports positive choices.

The Fridge and Freezer

- Clear out all expired foods, especially condiments and sauces.
- Wipe down shelves and drawers with a food-safe cleaner.
- Organize food so healthy choices are front and center.
- Create a healthy snack section of the fridge so fruits and veggies are ready to grab and go.
- Replace expired condiments with low-sugar and low-salt options.



The Pantry

- Remove all expired items.
- Check dry goods, such as open containers of pasta, for pantry pests.
- Wipe down shelves with a food-safe cleaner.
- Restock the pantry with healthy options, such as low-salt canned goods, whole grains, and minimally processed foods.
- Don't forget to check your spices!

The Counters

- Declutter your space to make food prep more enjoyable.
- Wipe down counters and appliances with a food-safe cleaner.
- Keep a bowl of fresh fruit on the counter for easy access.
- Move less healthy snacks to a cabinet or hard-to-reach place.

For more healthy eating tips, check out this article from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/features/healthy-eating-tips.html>.

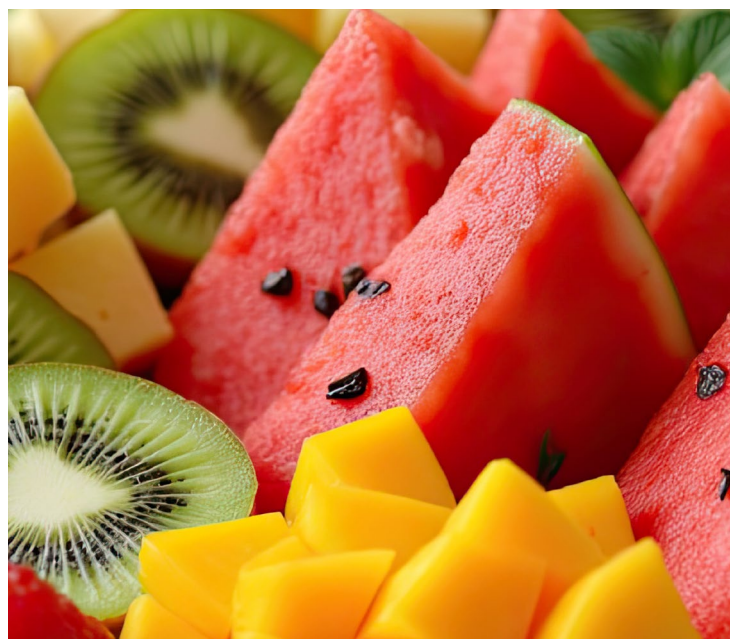
Summer

Seven Ways to Stay Hydrated

Summer is the perfect time to drink more water, a key strategy in maintaining a healthy weight. Here are seven tips for boosting your family's water intake and reducing sugar-sweetened beverages.

- **Keep it cold!** For some people, cold water or ice water is tastier than room-temperature water. Get in the habit of refilling pitchers or jugs every night before bed to be sure you have plenty of cold water each morning.
- **Add a squeeze of lemon, lime, or orange slices** for flavor without a lot of calories.
- **Choose a water bottle you like.** Let kids pick out their own water bottles and decorate them with stickers.
- **Freeze ice cubes with berries or chunks of fruit** to add color and flavor to your water.
- As a family, experiment with new flavor combinations for **fruit-infused water**, such as cucumber and lemon or strawberry and mint.
- Choose fresh fruits and vegetables that are **higher in water content**, such as watermelon, cucumbers, tomatoes, celery, cantaloupe, and peaches.

Summertime is a great time for families to play outside together. Be sure to stay sun safe, find shade whenever possible, and take water with you wherever you go!



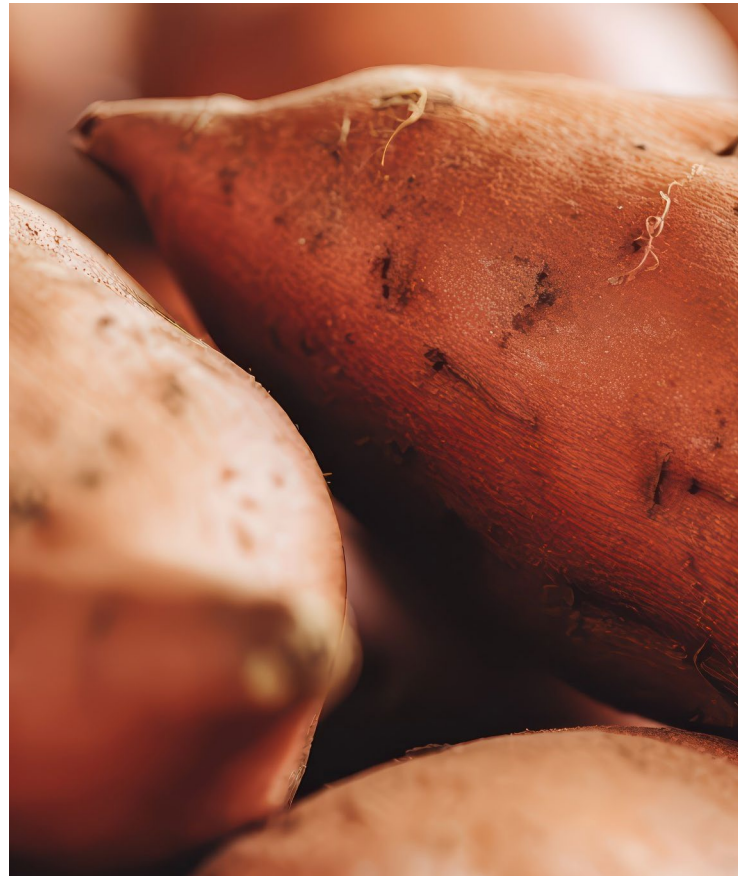
Fall

Fabulous Fall Vegetables and How to Cook Them

Fall brings delicious seasonal vegetables packed with nutrients and flavor. Buying in season at local farmers markets offers top value in both nutrition and money savings! Here are three versatile veggies to enjoy during autumn.

- **Sweet potatoes:** Mississippi farmers produce this nutritious veggie packed with vitamin A, vitamin C, beta carotene, and dietary fiber. Sweet potatoes are delicious roasted, turned into hashbrowns and sauteed, microwaved, or cooked in the air fryer for a naturally sweet side dish.
- **Cabbage:** This affordable vegetable brings fiber, vitamin C, and vitamin K to your diet. Did you know it comes in a variety of colors, including white, green, red, and purple, and can have smooth or crinkled leaves? Cabbage makes a terrific addition to soups and stir-fries or can be sauteed by itself. You can even slice it into a slab and grill it like a steak!
- **Butternut squash:** Like sweet potatoes, butternut squash is loaded with vitamin A, vitamin C, beta carotene, and dietary fiber. The easiest way to cook it is to slice it in half lengthwise, scoop out the seeds, and bake it in the oven, so you don't have to deal with the tough peel. It's delicious cut into cubes, tossed in olive oil and coarse salt, then roasted. Butternut squash can be added to salads, soups, and even macaroni and cheese!

These are just three of the many fall vegetables you can add to your meals as the days get shorter and cooler! For more ideas about adding fruits and vegetables to your meals, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/healthy-weight-growth/healthy-eating/fruits-vegetables.html>.



Winter

Five Tips for Healthier Holiday Meals

Family traditions make the holidays special, and nothing feels more memorable than the times everyone gathers around the table to share a delicious meal. Here are some practical approaches to make the holidays a little healthier!

- **Talk to your family members before you build the menu.** Find out which dishes are must-haves for the majority of the family and which ones could be swapped out for something lighter. You might create a new family favorite!
- **Rethink portions and presentation.** Use smaller plates to naturally reduce serving sizes. Make vegetables and salads the visual stars of the table rather than afterthoughts.
- **Add more vegetables strategically.** Bulk up stuffing with diced celery, carrots, and onions. Include a colorful roasted vegetable medley alongside traditional sides. Start meals with a fresh salad to help with portion control of heavier dishes.
- **Consider cooking methods.** Roast vegetables with herbs and a light coating of olive oil instead of using them in butter-heavy casseroles. Grill or roast meats rather than frying.
- **Walk before dessert.** Get everyone outside after the holiday meal for a walk, a game of tag, or a dance party. Offer lighter desserts, fruit, and cheese alongside your family's traditional favorites so everyone has options.

Check out more ideas for a healthier holiday at <https://www.cdc.gov/healthy-weight-growth/about/healthier-holidays-in-1-2-3.html>



Year-Round

Three Ways to Add More Vegetables to Your Meals

Veggies are full of the fiber and nutrients we need, but it can be challenging to squeeze them into our busy lifestyles. Maximize your vegetable intake by thinking outside the can of green beans!

- **Include vegetables with breakfast.** Bake a veggie frittata, add spinach to your scrambled eggs, or add finely grated carrots or zucchini to your morning muffins. **Pro tip:** Keep a bag of chopped frozen spinach on hand to save time.
- **Make veggies the stars** of your soup, stew, gumbo, or chili. Finely chopped vegetables pack flavor and fiber into your cold-season meals. Carrots, sweet potatoes, and butternut squash add sweetness. Pureed canned peas, beans, and lentils add fiber and creaminess without the fat of dairy products. Making soup with fresh vegetables before they spoil saves grocery money, too!
- **Use vegetables as wraps or bases** instead of traditional carb-based versions, such as lettuce wraps or stuffed



bell peppers instead of tortillas or taco shells, cucumber and zucchini slices instead of crackers, and zucchini or eggplant boats.

What Are Whole Foods?

Whole foods are foods that are as close to their natural state as possible—minimally processed, refined, or altered from how they originally grew or existed. Think of an apple versus apple juice, or a chicken breast versus chicken nuggets. Whole foods retain their original nutrients, fiber, and natural structure.

Why Whole Foods Are Considered the Healthiest

- **Nutrient Density:** Whole foods pack more vitamins, minerals, and beneficial compounds per calorie compared to processed alternatives. Processing often strips away essential nutrients.
- **Fiber Content:** Most whole foods naturally contain fiber, which aids digestion, helps you feel full longer, and supports gut health. Processing typically removes this fiber.
- **No Added Chemicals:** Whole foods don't contain artificial preservatives, colors, flavors, or other additives that your body doesn't recognize or need.
- **Natural Satiety:** The combination of fiber, protein, and natural structure in whole foods helps you feel satisfied with appropriate portions, making overeating less likely.
- **Stable Blood Sugar:** Whole foods are digested more slowly, preventing the rapid spikes and crashes in blood sugar that come with highly processed foods.

Easy Ways to Add Whole Foods to Your Diet

- **Start Your Day Right:** Replace sugary cereals with oatmeal topped with fresh berries and nuts, or try eggs with vegetables.
- **Smart Snacking:** Choose fresh fruit, raw vegetables with hummus, or a handful of nuts instead of chips or crackers.
- **Upgrade Your Grains:** Swap white rice for brown rice or quinoa, and choose whole-grain bread over white bread.
- **Build Around Vegetables:** Make vegetables the star of your meals—fill half your plate with colorful, fresh or simply cooked vegetables.
- **Choose Whole Proteins:** Opt for plain chicken, fish, beans, or eggs rather than processed meats like deli meats or frozen breaded items.
- **Gradual Swaps:** Replace one processed item at a time—maybe switch from flavored yogurt to plain yogurt with fresh fruit, or from instant oatmeal to rolled oats.

The key is making gradual changes that feel sustainable rather than overhauling your entire diet at once. Even small increases in whole food consumption can make a meaningful difference in how you feel and your overall health.



Beyond Calories: What to Look for on Nutrition Labels

While calories often get the spotlight, nutrition labels contain valuable information that can help you make healthier food choices. Here's what deserves your attention:

- **Serving Size:** Always check this first! Nutrition facts are meaningless without understanding the portion they represent—many packages contain multiple servings.
- **Added Sugars:** Look for this specific line item, which separates naturally occurring sugars from those added during processing. The American Heart Association recommends limiting added sugars to 25 grams daily for women and 36 grams for men.
- **Fiber Content:** Higher fiber foods (aim for 3 or more grams per serving) promote fullness, digestive health, and stable blood sugar levels.
- **Sodium:** Most Americans consume too much sodium. Aim for products with less than 140 milligrams per serving.
- **Ingredient List:** Ingredients appear in descending order by weight. Watch for multiple forms of sugar (corn syrup, dextrose, etc.) and unfamiliar chemical additives.
- **Trans Fats:** Even if the label says “zero grams,” check the ingredients for “partially hydrogenated oils,” which indicate trace amounts of these harmful fats.



By looking beyond calories, you'll develop a more complete picture of what you're eating and make choices aligned with your health goals. Learn more about nutrition labels at <https://www.cdc.gov/healthy-weight-growth/healthy-eating/nutrition-label.html>.

Amount	% Daily Value
Calories 571	
Calories from Fat 14	3%
Total Fat 2 g	
Saturated Fat 0 g	
Trans Fat 0 g	
Cholesterol 0 mg	
Sodium 11 mg	
Carbohydrate 10 g	
Fiber 10 g	
Sugars 10 g	
Protein 24 g	
Vitamin A 100%	
Vitamin C 100%	

Amount	% Daily Value
Calories 377	
Calories from Fat 0	
Total Fat 0 g	
Saturated Fat 0 g	
Trans Fat 0 g	
Cholesterol 0 mg	
Sodium 0 mg	
Carbohydrate 8 g	
Fiber 0 g	
Sugars 0 g	
Protein 0 g	
Vitamin A 0%	
Vitamin C 0%	

Amount	% Daily Value
Calories 56	
Calories from Fat 3	
Total Fat 0.5 g	1%
Saturated Fat 0 g	0%
Trans Fat 0 g	
Cholesterol 0 mg	0%
Sodium 4 mg	1%
Carbohydrate 14 g	
Fiber 14 g	
Sugars 14 g	
Protein 14 g	
Vitamin A 100%	
Vitamin C 100%	

How to Save Money on Groceries

As grocery prices continue to skyrocket, it is more important than ever to find ways to save money on food. Here are five quick tips for getting the most bang for your buck at the store!

- **Start with a Plan:** Decide what you're going to cook, and make a list of the ingredients you need. Use store apps to see what's on sale and what coupons are available. This helps you avoid impulse purchases, too!
- **Shop in Your Pantry First:** One way to waste money is to let groceries expire in the pantry. Find the oldest ingredients and add them to your menu. Look in your pantry before you shop to be sure you aren't duplicating items.
- **Buy Whole Vegetables and Fruits in Season:** You pay extra for the convenience of pre-chopped onions, carrots, and apples. Focus on seasonal produce as it is cheaper.
- **Buy Generic:** Compare major brand names with the store-brand option. You may be shocked by the price differences! **Pro tip:** Don't shop at eye level. That's where the priciest items are! Less expensive options are usually on lower shelves.
- **Shop by Unit Price:** Look on the shelf label for the unit price, which is the total price divided by the number of units, such as ounces or grams. Because packages can contain varying amounts of an item, the unit price is a more accurate way of figuring out which option is cheaper.

Not sure what's in season? Check out this guide: <https://bit.ly/4qiqAUQ>.





This publication is brought to you by AIM for CHange, which is short for Advancing, Inspiring, Motivating for Community Health through Extension. The award-winning program was launched in 2018 and is made possible with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

AIM for CHange works in targeted counties to partner with local community change agents to increase access to healthy foods, identify safe spaces for physical activity, and work toward policy changes for a healthier Mississippi. Learn more at <http://www.msuext.ms/aim>.

Publication 4220 (POD-09-26)

By **Keltra Chandler**, Program Manager, Biochemistry, Nutrition, and Health Promotion; and Keri Lewis, Communications Consultant, AIM for CHange.



Copyright 2026 by Mississippi State University. All rights reserved. This publication may be copied and distributed without alteration for nonprofit educational purposes provided that credit is given to the Mississippi State University Extension Service.

Produced by Agricultural Communications.

Mississippi State University is an equal opportunity institution. Discrimination is prohibited in university employment, programs, or activities based on race, color, ethnicity, sex, pregnancy, religion, national origin, disability, age, sexual orientation, genetic information, status as a U.S. veteran, or any other status to the extent protected by applicable law. Questions about equal opportunity programs or compliance should be directed to the [Office of Civil Rights Compliance](#), 231 Famous Maroon Band Street, P.O. 6044, Mississippi State, MS 39762.

Extension Service of Mississippi State University, cooperating with U.S. Department of Agriculture. Published in furtherance of Acts of Congress, May 8 and June 30, 1914. ANGUS L. CATCHOT JR., Director