FIT after 50
Nutrition Essentials
David Schutz
At 50 years old, would you like to get up every morning feeling rested, full of vigor and excited about the day ahead with plenty of energy? How about when you’re 60, 70, or older?

A life full of vitality results from both proper exercise and healthy nutrition. If one of these is missing in your life, your days won’t feel as good and may be numbered. Research shows that the longest living, healthiest people in the world adopt the following habits:

- **Nutrition:** Make beans, whole grains, veggies, and fruit the center of your diet
- **Exercise:** Move naturally throughout the day. Resistance training is the single best exercise for your heart. This is true for both men and women. High Intensity Interval Training literally reverses aging at the cellular level.
- **Genetics (Family)**
- **Faith:** Be part of a faith-based community or organization
- **See your doctor regularly**
- **Stress management**
- **Have and cultivate a strong sense of purpose**
- **80% Rule:** stop eating when you are 80 percent full
- **It’s OK to enjoy wine and alcohol moderately with friends and/or food**
- **Cultivate close friends, strong family connections, and strong social networks**

In this handbook, we’ll look at the vital role that healthy nutrition plays in helping you stay active, energetic, happy and fulfilled into your 50s, 60s, 70s – and beyond.
The Perfect Human Diet?

To begin with, there is no “perfect diet,” or “ideal diet.” A huge amount of research from all over the globe has tried to find the perfect diet. As an example, Dr. Mercola says it’s the Ketogenic diet, which involves drastically limiting carbohydrate intake so your body starts using fats as fuel, instead of carbohydrates. How does that reconcile with the fact that the Japanese people living on the island Okinawa are among the longest lived people in the world, and they get 58% of their calories from carbohydrates?

That’s just one example of the huge number of diets that you’re probably familiar with: the Mediterranean diet, the Paleo Diet, the Dash diet, the Mind diet, the Zone diet... Makes your mind spin, right? I mean, who’s right?

Well, it turns out that there is no “perfect diet.” Professor Eran Segal of the Weizmann Institute of Science in New Jersey does research in Computational and Systems Biology, focusing on Nutrition, Genetics, Microbiome, and Gene Regulation and their effect on health and disease. He conducted a study that followed the blood glucose levels of 1,000 people for a week, and since most people eat 50 meals per week, the study looked at 50,000 meals.

What did he find?

For every trend that looked at how people process food, there were many people who were very different from the trend. Ice cream might cause a blood sugar spike in one person, but not in others. White bread induced almost no effect on the blood sugar levels of some people, but in others, it caused huge spikes. The same was true for every single food they tested, including rice, pizza, sushi and even chocolate. For every food, there were some people who had low responses, others who had medium responses, and yet others who had very high responses.
What’s the bottom line?

How your body processes food is related to your ethnic heritage, where you live, what foods you regularly consume, and what’s in your gut biome. The best diet for humans does not exist. Our responses to food are personal, so what food is “best” for each of us must also be personal.

So what do we do?

In my opinion, the only approach to take is to recognize that “the truth is somewhere in the middle.” So what does most of the research say? Quite simply, it’s this:

---

**Eat fresh, whole foods,**

**mostly plants, and not too much**

---

Simply put, foods from plants – vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes (that is, beans and lentils) – should make up most of the calories you consume. Most of the rest should come from low-fat or nonfat dairy products, lean meat and poultry, and fish. Studies show that people who eat this way have a reduced risk of heart disease, diabetes, and, possibly, cancer. The healthy diet recommended here can also help with weight control, especially if you limit portion sizes and start to exercise more.

A healthy diet doesn’t have to mean eating foods that are bland or unappealing. In fact, you should view healthy eating as an opportunity to expand your range of choices by trying foods – especially vegetables, whole grains, and fruits – that you don’t normally eat. You may want to look for more local, seasonal foods, which are often fresher, taste better, and help support local farmers.

This doesn’t mean that you have to give up your favorite foods, either. As long as your overall diet is balanced and rich in nutrients and fiber, there is nothing wrong with a cheeseburger or a dish of ice cream on occasion. Just be sure to limit how frequently you eat such foods, and eat them in small portions.
As Aristotle said:

**Moderation in all things.**

With that in mind, here are **15 Keys to a Healthy Diet**

1. **Keep portions moderate**, especially high-calorie foods. In recent years, serving sizes have ballooned, especially in restaurants. Choose an appetizer instead of an entrée, split a dish with a friend, and avoid anything that’s been “supersized.”

2. **Eat a variety of foods.** Eating a wide assortment of foods helps ensure that you get all of the disease-fighting potential that foods offer. In addition, this will limit your exposure to any pesticides or toxic substances that maybe present in a particular food.

3. **Focus on high-fiber foods** – that is, vegetables, fruits, beans, and whole grains. These are the “good” carbohydrates – nutritious, filling, and relatively low in calories. They should supply the 20-35 grams of dietary fiber that you need each day.

4. In particular, **eat nine servings a day of vegetables and fruits** -- Be sure to include green, orange, red, and yellow vegetables and fruits – such as broccoli, carrots, tomatoes, berries, and citrus fruits. Beans (legumes), rich in fiber, count as vegetables (although they have more calories than other vegetables). Choose whole fruits over juice for more fiber.

5. **Include as many whole grains as possible** – at least half your grains should be whole grains (such as whole wheat and oats). Servings are small – just 1 ounce, such as a slice of whole-wheat bread, 1/2 cup of oatmeal, or 1/2 cup of brown rice.

6. **Limit your intake of refined carbohydrates**, such as white bread, regular pasta, and many snack foods. These foods have little or no dietary fiber and have been stripped of many nutrients. In particular, limit sugary foods, such
as soda and candy, which are sources of “empty calories” that contribute to weight gain. Many sugary foods are also high in fat, so they’re even more calorie-dense.

7. **Eat more “good” (unsaturated) fats** – as found in fish, nuts, avocados, and vegetable oils. But you should consume these high-fat foods in place of other foods. For instance, substitute olive or canola oil for butter. Eating two servings of fish (preferably fatty fish) a week may reduce the risk of heart disease and have other benefits, largely because of their healthy omega-3 fats.

8. **Limit your intake of saturated fat** – found primarily in animal products. To limit your intake, choose lean meats, skinless poultry, and nonfat or low-fat dairy products.

9. **Avoid, or at least minimize, trans fats**, which are found in processed foods (such as snack foods, packaged baked goods, and stick margarine) and fast foods (such as French fries). Trans fats increase the risk of heart disease, and while the FDA’s ban of trans fats went into effect on June 18, 2018, products manufactured before this date will still be available until January 2020, and in some cases 2021.

10. **Limit your intake of dietary cholesterol** – below 500 milligrams per day, on average. If you have multiple risk factors for cardiovascular disease (such as high blood pressure or high cholesterol) or if you have cardiovascular disease or diabetes, a better limit is 200 milligrams. Keep in mind that saturated fat has a greater effect on blood cholesterol than dietary cholesterol does. Cholesterol is found only in animal foods, such as meats, poultry, dairy products, and egg yolks.

11. **Limit your sodium intake and eat more potassium-rich foods**. It is recommended that the daily sodium limit should be less than 2,300 milligrams (that’s less than a teaspoon of salt) with a further reduction to 1,500 milligrams of sodium (about two thirds of a teaspoon of salt) for people 51 and older, African Americans, and those with hypertension,
diabetes, or chronic kidney disease. As you cut back on sodium you should consume more potassium, which lowers blood pressure. Potassium-rich foods include citrus fruits, bananas, potatoes, beans, and yogurt.

12. **Maintain an adequate intake of calcium and vitamin D** – for bone health as well as other potential benefits. Get your calcium from low-fat or nonfat sources, such as nonfat milk and low-fat or nonfat yogurt, or fortified foods such as some orange juices and soymilk. If you can’t get the optimal amount from foods, take a calcium supplement. It’s hard to consume enough vitamin D from foods, and getting it from sun exposure is risky and unreliable. Thus, many people – especially those who are over 60, live at northern latitudes, or have darker skin – may need to take a D supplement to meet their needs.

13. **Get most of your vitamins and minerals from foods rather than supplements.** Supplements cannot substitute for a healthy diet, which supplies other potentially beneficial compounds besides vitamins and minerals. Foods also provide the “synergy” that many nutrients require to be efficiently used in the body. Still, for many people a basic multivitamin/mineral pill can provide some of the nutrients they may fall short on.

14. **Watch out for liquid calories.** Beverages now supply more than 20% of the calories in the average American’s diet, a percentage that has risen over recent decades. Some liquid calories come from healthy beverages, such as nonfat or low-fat milk and 100% fruit juices. But most come from soda (and other sweetened beverages) and alcoholic beverages, which add many calories to your diet but supply few or no nutrients. Soft drinks, in particular, are a significant source of sugar and calories for many Americans, especially children.

15. **Drink lots of water.** The goal is to drink half of your bodyweight in ounces of body weight per day. So, a person who weighs 180 pounds would shoot for 90 ounces of water per day.
It’s not complicated...

Eating a healthy diet doesn’t have to be overly complicated. While some specific foods or nutrients have been shown to have a beneficial effect on mood, it’s your overall dietary pattern that is most important. The cornerstone of a healthy diet pattern should be to replace processed food with real food whenever possible. Eating food that is as close as possible to the way nature made it can make a huge difference to the way you think, look, and feel.

The Harvard Healthy Eating Pyramid represents the latest nutritional science. The widest part at the bottom is for things that are most important. The foods at the narrow top are those that should be eaten sparingly, if at all.
While some extreme diets may suggest otherwise, we all need a balance of protein, fat, carbohydrates, fiber, vitamins, and minerals in our diets to sustain a healthy body. You don’t need to eliminate certain categories of food from your diet, but rather select the healthiest options from each category.

We all need each of the three macronutrients fats, proteins and carbohydrates. In addition we all need micronutrients such as vitamins and minerals plus the basic necessity of water. However, as we previously discussed, we all don’t need the same ratio of macronutrients or the same form of micronutrients. Let’s review...

For genetic reasons, we’re all very different in the way that our bodies process foods and utilize nutrients. Throughout humankind’s evolutionary history, people all over the world have been forced to adapt to a vastly differing environmental circumstances, including very different climates and food supplies (nutrition).

We all need a full spectrum of nutrients. But different people have genetically programmed requirements and adaptations for different amounts of the various nutrients. It is these differing genetic requirements and adaptations that explain why a given nutrient causes one person to feel good, has no effect on another, and causes a third person to feel poorly. These differing genetic requirements and adaptations also explain why a food that causes an insulin spike in one person may cause little to no insulin spike in another.

Taking in the proper nutrients at the right time in a form that’s bioavailable to your body results in good health. That is one way to define proper nutrition. On the other hand, if you don’t supply your body with the nutrients it needs at the time it needs them and in the form your body can use, the result is system wide problems (excessive weight, cardiovascular disease and other degenerative diseases). Poor nutrition results in poor health.

Everything you take in through eating or drinking gets broken down to be used by your cells – it’s literally fuel for your body. It’s the same thing as putting gas in your car. You need the right type of fuel for your car to run well.
Likewise, your nutrition needs to be the right fuel for your body to run well. If you take in incorrect fuel, your cells won’t be able to use it and they won’t run well. Since cells make up every tissue in your body (organs, muscles, nerves, etc.), if they aren’t functioning properly then you can’t expect your body to function properly.

It’s a sad fact that much of the North American diet contains too much CRAP (Carbohydrates, Refined sugars, Additives and Preservatives). Food that has been overly manufactured or processed has lost much of its nutrient content and has many artificial additives. Aim to eat organic and non-GMO (genetically modified) fruit and vegetables.

Buy grass-fed or free range meat and poultry as well as wild fish.

Organically grown food has the best nutrient content and enzymes for your body. It is in a form that is most available to your body without any harmful chemicals or drugs. An added benefit is that this food is also good for the environment. Foods grown organically and meat products raised by grazing have been shown to be the most sustainable methods of farming. And before 1900, it wasn’t called “organic;” it’s just what everyone ate, as there was no manufactured, processed, genetically modified food.

**Think about it like this:** Do you remember science class, and how in conducting an experiment, there needs to be a “control group” and a “study group?” You have a choice to be part of the “study group,” i.e., those that eat food that never existed until the last 50-70 years, or part of the “control group,” i.e., those that eat like our ancestors did. Which do you think is safer, and better for your health?

So let’s delve a little deeper into what happens when we eat and why nutrition is so important.

We all need each of the macronutrients (fats, proteins and carbohydrates) and various micronutrients (vitamins and minerals, etc.) to live. However due to genetic reasons we all respond differently to the way we process food and the way our bodies utilize nutrients.
Most people have heard the term "metabolism". Your metabolism is simply the sum of all the chemical and biological activities your body needs to perform in order to support life.

Nutrition is essential because it provides the fuel that is oxidized (burned) in our cells to provide energy for all metabolic activities. The raw materials in our foods (macronutrients, vitamins, minerals, enzymes, etc.) are particularly important since they're used to repair, rebuild and heal tissue.

Your metabolism operates on the cellular level. As food passes through the digestive tract it is absorbed into the bloodstream where it is transported to the cells. Once nutrients arrive at the cell they are taken into the cell and used to produce energy and to carry out the role that particular cell was programmed to do.

Every biochemical process in your body is dependent on the amount of energy available, the quality of that energy and how quickly that energy gets to your cells. In other words, you're dependent on the amount of fuel you put in, the quality of that fuel and how quickly your fuel gets to your cells.

**Protein** gives you the energy to get up and go—and keep going—while also supporting mood and cognitive function. Too much protein can be harmful to people with kidney disease, but the latest research suggests that many of us need more high-quality protein, especially as we age. That doesn’t mean you have to eat more animal products—a variety of plant-based sources of protein each day can ensure your body gets all the essential protein it needs.

**Fat.** Not all fat is the same. While bad fats can wreck your diet and increase your risk of certain diseases, good fats protect your brain and heart. In fact, healthy fats—such as omega-3s—are vital to your physical and emotional health. Including more healthy fat in your diet can help improve your mood, boost your well-being, and even trim your waistline.
Fiber. Eating foods high in dietary fiber (grains, fruit, vegetables, nuts, and beans) can help you stay regular and lower your risk for heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. It can also improve your skin and even help you to lose weight.

Calcium. As well as leading to osteoporosis, not getting enough calcium in your diet can also contribute to anxiety, depression, and sleep difficulties. Whatever your age or gender, it’s vital to include calcium-rich foods in your diet, limit those that deplete calcium, and get enough magnesium and vitamins D and K to help calcium do its job.

Carbohydrates are one of your body’s main sources of energy. But most should come from complex, unrefined carbs (vegetables, whole grains, fruit) rather than sugars and refined carbs. Cutting back on white bread, pastries, starches, and sugar can prevent rapid spikes in blood sugar, fluctuations in mood and energy, and a build-up of fat, especially around your waistline.

Making the switch to a healthy diet

Switching to a healthy diet doesn’t have to be an all or nothing proposition. You don’t have to be perfect, you don’t have to completely eliminate foods you enjoy, and you don’t have to change everything all at once—that usually only leads to cheating or giving up on your new eating plan.

A better approach is to make a few small changes at a time. Keeping your goals modest can help you achieve more in the long term without feeling deprived or overwhelmed by a major diet overhaul. Think of planning a healthy diet as a number of small, manageable steps—like adding a salad to your diet once a day. As your small changes become habit, you can continue to add more healthy choices.
Set yourself up for success

To set yourself up for success, try to **keep things simple**. Eating a healthier diet doesn’t have to be complicated. Instead of being overly concerned with counting calories, for example, think of your diet in terms of color, variety, and freshness. Focus on avoiding packaged and processed foods and opting for more fresh ingredients whenever possible.

**Prepare more of your own meals.** Cooking more meals at home can help you take charge of what you’re eating and better monitor exactly what goes into your food. You’ll eat fewer calories and avoid the chemical additives, added sugar, and unhealthy fats of packaged and takeout foods that can leave you feeling tired, bloated, and irritable, and exacerbate symptoms of depression, stress, and anxiety.

**Make the right changes.** When cutting back on unhealthy foods in your diet, it’s important to replace them with healthy alternatives. Replacing dangerous trans fats with healthy fats (such as switching fried chicken for grilled salmon) will make a positive difference to your health. It’s also easier to make changes within a habit. For example, if you’re used to having 2 sodas with dinner, start by reducing that to one soda and one glass of water.

**Read the labels.** It’s important to be aware of what’s in your food as manufacturers often hide large amounts of sugar or unhealthy fats in packaged food, even food claiming to be healthy.

**Focus on how you feel after eating.** This will help foster healthy new habits and tastes. The healthier the food you eat, the better you’ll feel after a meal. The more junk food you eat, the more likely you are to feel uncomfortable, nauseous, or drained of energy.

**Drink plenty of water.** Water helps flush our systems of waste products and toxins, yet many of us go through life dehydrated—causing tiredness, low energy, and headaches. It’s common to mistake thirst for hunger, so staying well hydrated will also help you make healthier food choices.
In addition to eating a low fat diet with plenty of fruits and vegetables, eating cold-water fish for the omega-3 fatty acids reduces the risk of prostate cancer. Drinking green tea and eating foods containing isoflavones (soy products, kidney beans, chickpeas, lentils and peanuts) also has been linked to a reduced risk of prostate cancer.

More than two glasses of wine a day for men under 65 (one glass for women and men over 65) increases the risk of cancers of the mouth and pharynx, larynx, esophagus, liver, colon, rectum and female breast—alcohol contributes to 15% of breast cancer deaths. (New York Times, 2013)

**Where to Start?**

You may feel overwhelmed by the above information—eat more fruit and veggies, drink your milk, eat fewer burgers and steaks, don’t eat white bread, cut back on the beer. Do I sound like your mother? Change happens slowly—you developed the exercise habit slowly, and it took time to get fit—and it will take time to change your nutritional habits.

Changing what you eat can be hard. You have developed your eating habits over a long period, perhaps influenced by religious and cultural norms. You’ve also acquired your eating habits based on your lifestyle. Eating is a wonderful social occasion, yet eating with others may influence your choices. Certain things may also trigger what and when you eat; for example, stress.

The first purpose of this handbook is simply to make you aware of what you eat and the importance of your choices. What’s the one most important dietary change that you could make to improve your health? The point is to pick something, make just one change and stick with it for three months until it becomes habit. Then decide on another change and make the change for three months.

Just as month after month, regular exercise improves your fitness, progressively changing your diet month by month will make you healthier, make you feel better, and improve the probability that you’ll live a long, healthy, fully functional life.