



Making **LIFE** Work

Healthy Food Choices

Eat More Fruit and Vegetables

Good alternatives to processed foods are fruits and vegetables, ideally, those that contain the highest amounts of potassium, vitamins A and C, and the host of phytochemicals that enhance our immune functions.

Fresh fruits and vegetables are good choices, but frozen fruits and canned vegetables are good choices too.

An excellent nutritional option is green, leafy vegetables. Instead of choosing the nutritionally lacking iceberg lettuce in salads, opt for greener salads with spinach, kale, and romaine lettuce. Other nutrient-rich vegetable selections include red, yellow, or green bell peppers. All are readily available at supermarkets.

Canned vegetables are less desirable because of their high sodium content. Some of the sodium, however, can be rinsed off before cooking. Read the nutrition label to see how many milligrams of sodium are in one serving. Aim to consume less than 2300 milligrams of sodium per day.

When canned fruits are the only option, use products in natural juices or water rather than syrup, which contains added sugar.



Reduce Fats

High-fat, high-cholesterol diets lead to health problems. Look for healthy alternatives.

The [Alabama Extension website](#) offers helpful information on fat and cholesterol. The US Department of Agriculture's [Choose MyPlate](#) has simple, healthy suggestions for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks.

Eat Your Veggies

How can you add more fruits and vegetables to your daily meals? Do whatever you can to make eating fruits and vegetables convenient. Surround yourself with these nutritious foods in the forms you like most—maybe a favorite apple variety, a carrot salad, or pizza topping. Think about adding fruits and vegetables when you plan snacks, meals, and desserts.

As you replace less healthy foods with fruits and vegetables, you may find that when you are hungry you are more likely to choose a juicy apple rather than a high-calorie cookie.

Nutritionists continue to identify a growing number of other foods that optimize health and reduce the risk of chronic, often life-threatening disease. The following are examples of foods rich in healthy benefits and readily available in most grocery stores.

Beets. A rich source of folate and presumed cancer fighter.

Cabbage. Abundant in sulforaphane believed to enhance cancer-fighting properties.

Canned pumpkin. Rich in fiber and immune-boosting vitamin A.

Cinnamon. Possibly beneficial for maintaining healthy blood pressure and blood glucose.

Dried plums. Prunes by another name and a treasure trove of antioxidants.

Frozen blueberries. Loaded with antioxidants and believed to enhance memory.

Pomegranates. Also potentially effective in supporting healthy blood pressure and loaded in antioxidants.

Pumpkin seeds. Loaded with magnesium and presumed to promote heart health and longevity.

Salmon. Rich in omega-3 fatty acids, iron, magnesium, phosphorus, and several other minerals.

Swiss chard. A green leafy vegetable chock-full of eye-protecting carotenoids.

Turmeric. Contains anti-inflammatory and cancer-fighting properties.

Other good nutritional sources are the cabbage family of vegetables—kale, broccoli, cauliflower, and brussels sprouts—that are rich in phytonutrients that help lower inflammation. Wheat germ found in whole wheat products is another nutritious food option readily available in a concentrate that can be added to cereals, casseroles, and other foods.

Another good food choice is nuts (almonds, walnuts, peanuts, and pecans). A word of caution: while nuts are rich in healthy monounsaturated fats, they are high in calories.

A few traditionally Southern foods worth considering are sweet potatoes, watermelon, and collard greens. If prepared in a healthy way, these foods can be excellent additions to a nutritious diet.

Read the Food Label

The US Food and Drug Administration offers advice on [how to read and use food labels](#) to help you make informed food decisions.

