

Diet Quality

What you need to know

What is meant by diet quality?

Diet quality refers to the healthfulness of a dietary pattern. A dietary pattern consists of the types and relative amounts of foods consumed over time. High-quality diets are based predominantly on foods that support optimal health. In general these diets are made up of a variety of whole and minimally processed foods that are nutrient dense (high in nutrients per calorie). A high-quality diet provides optimal energy nutrients needed for growth and development, providing the foundation for a healthy and active life.



Why is diet quality important?

What you eat and drink day after day is the number one predictor of how healthy you are and how long you live. In fact, studies on large populations have shown that diet quality is strongly associated with how long you live and your risk of having a chronic disease like heart disease and diabetes.

What about calories, carbs, and fat?

Calories do count, but **quality matters more**. Rather than choosing foods based on amount of calories, carbs, or fat, you can optimize success by choosing mainly **unrefined, minimally processed foods** like vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, nuts, and seeds, with water for thirst. Focusing on a variety of healthy foods provides a **naturally ideal balance** of calories, carbohydrates, fat, and protein, along with a boost of protective nutrients. At the same time, it's important to **minimize your intake** of fast food, highly processed snack foods, sugar-sweetened beverages, refined (white) flour-based foods, added sugar, fried foods, and foods high in saturated fats like red meat, butter, and high fat dairy.



How is diet quality measured?

Tools that evaluate diet quality rely on established dietary guidelines. The average number of daily servings of healthy foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and beans are counted, as well as how much saturated fat, salt, and added sugar there is. While this information is traditionally gathered with long surveys, Diet ID uses a 1-minute image-based approach.

Should I follow a special plan to improve the quality of my diet?

There isn't one "perfect" diet pattern for everyone, due to individual differences in health conditions, genetics, cultural influences, and food preference. There are many ways to eat well--a Mediterranean style diet with plenty of greens, whole wheat, and chickpeas is very different than a Mexican style diet with plenty of peppers, whole grain corn, and black beans, but both are high in quality.