A Practical Handbook for

Good Nutrition in Recovery

SILVER RIDGE

A PREMIER PROGRAM BY PYRAMID HEALTHCARE

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Introduction

Recovery is hard work, and much of that work involves taking good care of yourself. A high level of self-care is a major benefit to your recovery, while poor self-care is one of the most important factors for relapse.[1]

Good nutrition is a cornerstone of self-care, and your diet can make a big difference in your recovery. A nutritious diet helps you maintain a healthy weight, and it plays a role in regulating your mood, improving your sleep and giving you the energy you need to focus on other important aspects of recovery. It also reduces stress and cravings, which are frequent triggers for relapse. And according to an article published in ***Today's Dietitian***, a healthy diet can undo cellular damage caused by substance abuse.[2]

Nutrition is a highly complex topic, but eating a healthy diet doesn't have to be complicated. All you really have to do, in the immortal words of esteemed journalist Michael Pollan, is "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants."

That, of course, is the short answer. It's important to have a basic understanding of good nutrition, but for many, the problem isn't that they don't know what a healthy diet looks like as much as it is sorting out the logistics of eating well, which can be tricky. Healthy eating takes planning, and it takes a little more work than heating up a frozen pizza or ordering take-out.

This eBook provides a refresher on basic nutrition and offers practical tips that will help you make healthier food choices to benefit your recovery and improve your overall physical and mental health.

Nutrition Basics:

Micronutrients and Macronutrients

Nutrients are substances in food that help your body build and repair tissues, provide energy, fight disease and facilitate numerous other body functions.

Nutrients are divided into two categories: micronutrients and macronutrients. Vitamins and minerals are called micronutrients because we need them in very small amounts. Fat, protein and carbohydrates are called macronutrients because our bodies need them in larger amounts.

Vitamins

Vitamins are organic compounds that are needed to maintain normal bodily functions like metabolism and immunity. There are 13 vitamins, and each plays a different role in the body. The food you eat is the best source for vitamins.

Minerals

Minerals are non-organic compounds that the body needs for functions like maintaining normal blood pressure and bone health. There are 16 essential minerals, including calcium, potassium, iron and magnesium. Like vitamins, minerals should come from the food you eat.

Protein

Protein is found in every cell in the body, and it's made up of building blocks called amino acids. Protein helps break down food for energy, and it's essential for building structures in the body, including muscles.

The protein you get from animal products like meat, eggs and dairy products is called a complete protein because it contains all nine of the amino acids your body needs. Proteins from plants are incomplete proteins because no single plant provides all nine of the essential amino acids. However, by eating a wide variety of plant foods, people who don't eat animal products are able to cobble together complete proteins.

Carbohydrates

Carbs serve as the body's main source of energy, fueling the central nervous system and providing energy for muscles. They have an important influence on mood and memory, and the right carbs help you burn fat and maintain a healthy weight.

In the body, carbs are converted into glucose and carried through the bloodstream to be used for energy. If the glucose isn't needed immediately for energy, the liver and skeletal muscles can store about 2,000 calories' worth to be used later. But if you eat more carbs than your body can store as glucose, the extra carbs are stored in the body as fat.

On the other hand, if you eat too few carbs, your body will turn to protein for its fuel, which means that the protein you eat won't be used for building muscle, breaking down toxins and other essential functions. This can lead to a number of health problems.

Not all carbs are good for you. Simple carbohydrates are unhealthy carbs that are found in processed foods like white rice, breads, pastries, candy and soda. Simple carbs are digested and absorbed very quickly, leading to a spike in blood sugar, popularly known as a “sugar high.” This is soon followed by a blood-sugar crash that leaves you feeling tired and sluggish, and this can lead to cravings and a lowered guard that put your recovery at risk. Eating too many simple carbs can also lead to weight gain and generally poor health.

Complex carbs, on the other hand, include healthy foods like whole grains, fruits, vegetables, beans and legumes. These are digested and processed more slowly and help keep your blood sugar stable and your energy levels consistent. They also contain a wealth of other essential nutrients.

Fat

Fat is a source of energy, and it's used by the body to make the various substances it needs. Fat is also crucial for helping your body absorb vitamins A, D, E and K.

As with carbs, not all fats are good for you. Saturated fats, and in particular trans fats, increase your risk of heart disease, stroke and some cancers. Saturated fats are found in red meat, poultry, butter, coconut oil and whole milk and should be eaten in moderation. Trans fats are found in foods made with hydrogenated and partially hydrogenated oils, including fried foods, crackers, cookies and cakes. Trans fats should be avoided or consumed in very small amounts.

Healthy fats are those that are monounsaturated or polyunsaturated. Monounsaturated fats are found in avocados; nuts; and canola, olive and peanut oils. Polyunsaturated fats are found in safflower, corn, sunflower, soybean and cottonseed oils. Omega-3 fatty acids are a type of polyunsaturated fat that reduces your risk of heart disease. Omega-3 fatty acids are found in fatty fish like salmon and trout as well as in flaxseed oil and walnuts.

Water

Water is absolutely essential for optimum health. Water keeps tissues hydrated, regulates your body temperature, cushions your joints, helps your body process nutrients and flushes out waste products.

Experts recommend drinking six to eight 8-ounce glasses of fluids a day. The majority of the fluids you drink should be water, but milk, tea, coffee and juice are mostly water and count toward your body's water needs.

To Take Supplements or Not

Dietary supplements are a $37-billion-a-year industry, but are supplements all they're cracked up to be? The truth is, taking supplements without getting professional advice can backfire, according to Harvard Medical School.[3] Some supplements can even be dangerous, especially if you take more than the recommended dosage.

For example, vitamin E supplements, which were once believed to protect the heart, were later found to increase the risk of bleeding strokes. Some vitamin B supplements that were once thought to prevent stroke and heart disease have been found to increase the risk of cancer. Certain vitamins and minerals, when taken in doses larger than recommended, can interfere with the absorption of other essential nutrients and cause other negative side effects.

Experts across the board agree: the best way to get the nutrients you need, unless your physician or a licensed dietitian has told you otherwise, is through the food you eat.

A Varied, Colorful Diet Is Best

According to the 2015 to 2020 dietary guidelines set forth by the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, a nutritious diet should include a variety of foods from each of the five food groups.[4]

Vegetables

Vegetables are important sources of vitamins and minerals, and you should eat a wide variety of them in order to get plenty of the various nutrients they contain. According to the President's Council on Fitness, Sports & Nutrition, you get the same nutrition whether the vegetables are fresh, frozen, canned or dried, which means there are plenty of options for getting in your veggies.[5]

There are five subgroups of vegetables:

- Dark green veggies
- Red and orange veggies
- Beans and peas
- Starchy veggies, like potatoes and winter squash
- Other vegetables, such as artichokes, avocados, cauliflower, mushrooms and onions

Try to consume two and a half cups of vegetables each day. Over the course of a week, strive to eat a wide variety of veggies from each sub group.

Fruits

Like vegetables, whole fruits provide high returns in a range of nutrients. Fruit can be eaten raw or cooked, and it can be purchased fresh, frozen, canned or dried. Strive to eat around two cups of fruit each day. Over the course of a week, eat a variety of fruits in a rainbow of colors.

Grains

Eat around six ounces of grains each day, at least half of them whole grains. Whole grains are those that contain the entire kernel, including the endosperm, bran and germ. Refined grains are those that have had the bran and germ removed, which strips them of iron, dietary fiber and other nutrients. Brown rice, quinoa, oatmeal and popcorn are examples of whole grains. Whole grains are also found in a number of products, including breads and pastas.

If you eat refined grains, such as white bread or refined cereals, choose products that are enriched, which means that iron and four essential B vitamins—thiamin, riboflavin, niacin and folic acid—have been added back into the mix.

Low-Fat Dairy

Milk, yogurt, cheese and fortified soy milk are included in the low-fat dairy food group. Low-fat dairy products contain essential nutrients like calcium, protein and potassium, but they contain less fat and fewer calories than full-fat varieties. Aim for three cups of low-fat dairy each day.

Protein

The protein food group is comprised of a large variety of foods from both plants and animals. Plant protein sources include nuts, seeds, beans, peas and soy products. Animal sources include seafood, meat, poultry, dairy and eggs.

Eating a variety of protein-rich foods ensures you'll get the wide range of nutrients they collectively provide. Choose lean cuts of meat and low-fat dairy products. Avoid processed lunch meats and cheeses and choose low-sugar yogurt. Strive to eat around six ounces of protein foods each day, including eight ounces of seafood each week.

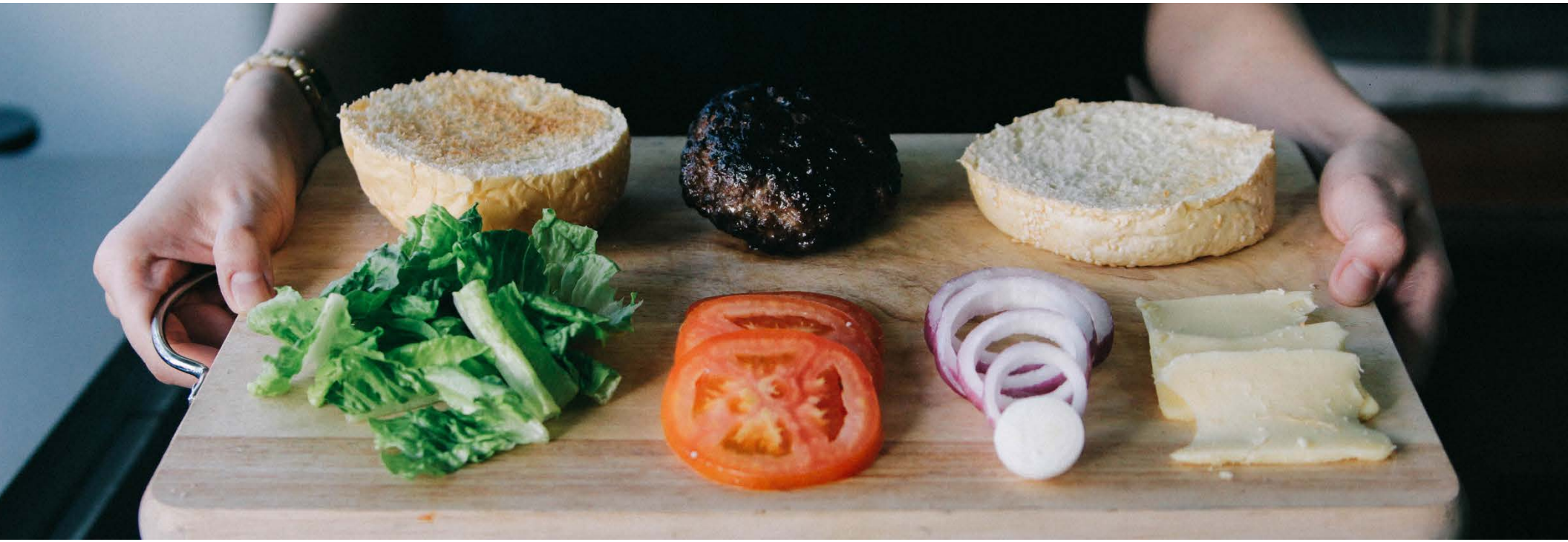
A Note About Oils

Although oils are no longer considered a food group, they're part of a nutritious diet because they're the main source of essential fatty acids and vitamin E. The recommended daily intake of healthy oils is around five teaspoons each day. Canola, olive, safflower and sunflower oils are good choices for healthy fats.

Processed Foods vs. Whole Foods

An important rule of thumb when it comes to eating healthy food is to choose whole foods over processed foods. Whole foods are those that are in their natural state: nuts, seeds, an apple, a bag of brown rice, a pound of salmon.

Processed foods are those that have been altered in some way. Lunch meats, pastries, ice cream and bread are examples of processed foods, as are frozen dinners, boxed mixes and packaged foods like chips, crackers and soups. Highly processed foods contain loads of added sodium and sugar; artificial colors, flavors and preservatives; and a lot of chemical ingredients that are hard to pronounce.



While natural cheeses, milk and oil are considered processed foods, they're only lightly altered in order to make them consumable. Other processed foods, like low-fat, low-sugar yogurt and whole grain breads, are less heavily processed and can be part of a healthy diet.

Whole foods should comprise the bulk of your diet. You'll notice that at the grocery store, the whole foods are located around the perimeter, while packaged and processed foods are typically found in the interior.

When you're choosing processed foods, read the ingredients list. If it has more than five ingredients, if sugar is listed early on or if the food contains ingredients you can't pronounce, it's probably not the healthiest choice. You should eat it in moderation.

Eating In vs. Eating Out

Restaurant food—especially fast food—generally has more calories, fat, salt and added sugar than the food you cook at home. Eating out too often can lead to unhealthy weight gain and poor nutrition. When you prepare most of your meals at home using mostly whole foods, you're eating healthier food and fewer calories. You're also saving a lot of money.

Cooking at home requires some basic culinary skills, but these are easy to learn. Once you master the basics, including the various ways to cook meats and vegetables, you can make an endless roster of simple, healthy recipes.

The simpler you make eating at home, the more likely you'll be to do it consistently. A healthy diet doesn't have to require a lot of ingredients. A lean protein, a side of steamed or roasted veggies and a green salad is a simple meal to prepare, and it's satisfying. If you often eat on the go, keep plenty of healthy snacks on hand, such as fresh fruit, carrots and hummus, boiled eggs, yogurt, nuts and seeds.

Practical Tips for Eating Well

Developing healthier eating habits doesn't happen overnight. It takes patience, practice and effort. Trying to revamp your entire diet all at once sets you up for failure, but implementing changes slowly can help them not only stick, but also become quite enjoyable.

You might begin by drinking more water each day and replacing the refined breads, cereals and pasta you eat with whole-grain versions. Once that has become a habit and a preference, add a couple of extra pieces of fruit to your daily diet. When that becomes natural, focus on cutting out as much added sugar as possible and eating an extra serving of vegetables each day.

Small changes over time will help your new way of eating become a habit, and each change will bring benefits to your health as well as inspire even more healthy lifestyle choices.

Here are some additional tips to help make healthy eating easier.

Reduce your stress. Stress can lead to unhealthy food choices and over-indulging. Keeping your stress levels down will help you stay clear-headed and mindful of the food choices you make.

Meet with a dietitian. A dietitian can evaluate your current eating habits and make recommendations for dietary changes to optimize your health.

Always eat breakfast. According to research, people who eat breakfast have more energy during the day, maintain a healthier weight and stay more alert than people who don't eat breakfast. If you're not much for breakfast, keep it simple, such as a piece of whole-grain toast with peanut butter and a handful of grapes.

Don't think of certain foods as "off limits." Most of the time, strive to eat healthy food. But when the urge strikes or the opportunity presents itself, don't feel guilty for indulging in a gooey chocolate donut or hitting the drive-thru for a burger and fries. It's the overall quality of your diet that counts. The occasional indulgence is good for the soul.

Plan ahead for the week. Nothing will derail a healthy diet like trying to decide what's for dinner when you're tired at the end of a busy day. That's when many people end up eating frozen, processed foods or stopping by the drive-thru on the way home. Planning your weekly menus ahead of time—and doing your grocery shopping for the week in one trip—will make healthy meals easier and more convenient to make.

Hit the farmers market. The U.S. Department of Agriculture touts the benefits of buying fresh, locally grown foods from your neighborhood farmers market, where you can find a huge selection of fresh meats, dairy and produce.[6] By talking to the farmers and ranchers behind the table, you can discover new foods and get advice for choosing and cooking your selections. Eating locally is also good for the environment and benefits the local economy.

Always have healthy snacks on hand at work. When a bout of hunger strikes at work, it's easy to grab a candy bar at the corner market or a snack from the break room, but these unhealthy foods add up. Keep healthy snacks handy at work so that you're not tempted to hit the vending machine when you need a little energy.

Don't shop for groceries when you're hungry. Hunger at the grocery store is responsible for many bad food choices. When you're famished, it's tempting and easy to grab a bag of chips or a package of cookies to take the edge off. Have a healthy snack before you hit the grocery store so that the treats and convenience foods don't tempt you.

Get into a mealtime routine. Having a routine surrounding mealtimes can make things go more quickly and smoothly. Enlist family members to help prep, set the table and clean up after meals. To save time in the morning, make your lunch for the next day while you make dinner, or plan your menu so that you're eating leftovers for lunch.

Use the slow cooker. Your slow cooker can be your best friend in the kitchen. Simply prep your meal the night before and put it in the fridge. In the morning, toss the ingredients into the slow cooker and turn it on. Walk away for six to eight hours, and when you come back, dinner is ready to eat.

Once you consistently eat healthy food, chances are, you'll develop a taste for it and lose interest in salty, fatty and sugary foods. The changes you implement in your diet will improve your energy levels, appearance, concentration, mood and overall health, and it will help you stay in recovery for the long-term.

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