

# Healthy Eating for People with Lung Disease



THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY  
WEXNER MEDICAL CENTER

Oxygen plays a central role in helping your body turn the carbohydrates, proteins and fats in the foods you eat into energy. Carbon dioxide is a by product of that process. Carbohydrates produce the most carbon dioxide and fats produce the least.

## Tips for healthy eating

Since what you eat can affect your breathing, your doctor or dietitian may recommend that you:

- Eat 3 small meals and 1 or 2 snacks a day.
  - Women: 300 to 500 calories/meal
  - Men: 400 to 600 calories/meal
  - Snacks: 100 to 250 calories

Eating smaller meals and snacks will allow your lungs room to expand when you breathe and help you to maintain a healthy weight.

- Eat a variety of healthy foods like vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low-fat dairy products and lean protein foods.
- Servings sizes are listed on a food product's Nutrition Facts food label. Similar foods have the same serving size. This allows the consumer to compare foods more easily. Is your serving size the same as the one on the label? All nutrition information on the label is based on 1 serving. Be aware that many packaged foods have more than one serving in them!
- Eat two servings of protein like milk, meats, fish, poultry, eggs, beans and nuts each day to support respiratory muscle strength.
- Eat less carbohydrates to help you breathe easier.
- Limit foods high in added sugars like candy, cake, cookies and soft drinks.
- Eat less foods that cause gas if you feel bloated or short of breath. This includes raw apples, asparagus, beans, broccoli, cabbage, carbonated drinks, cauliflower, corn, cucumbers, melons, raw onions, peas and peppers.
- If you are working to lose or maintain your weight, choose mono- and polyunsaturated fats, like canola, olive and safflower oils, over saturated fats like butter and animal fat.

## Nutrients to look for: fiber

Dietary fiber is found in plant products. It adds bulk to your diet and makes you feel full faster, helping you to **control your weight**. It helps digestion and helps prevent constipation. Increase your fiber intake slowly to 25 to 35 grams a day to avoid abdominal discomfort. Good sources of fiber include whole grains, nuts and seeds, and fruits and vegetables.

## Nutrients to look for: calcium

If you are taking a steroid or have osteopenia or osteoporosis, eat 4 servings of calcium-rich foods a day. Good sources of calcium include:

Food	Serving size
Milk	1 cup
Yogurt, fruit flavored	1 cup
Frozen yogurt	1/2 cup
Cottage cheese	1/2 cup
Colby, cheddar and jack cheeses	1 ounce
American cheese	1 ounce
Swiss cheese	1 ounce
Non-fat dry milk powder	1 Tbsp
Clams	3.5 ounces
Sardines, canned with bones	1/2 cup
Shrimp	3.5 ounces
Orange	1 medium
Calcium-fortified orange juice	6 ounces

## Nutrients to limit: sodium

Avoid eating foods high in sodium if you have high blood pressure, heart disease or heart failure. Too much sodium increases blood pressure. Eat a very low sodium diet or less than 2,000 milligrams of sodium a day. Read food labels to help you plan low sodium meals and snacks, and cook at home. **Always check with your doctor before drastically changing your diet.**

- **Limit use of table salt.** Table salt is the most common source of sodium in the diet. One teaspoon of salt has 2,300 mg of sodium.
- **Avoid packaged, processed foods,** which are high in sodium. These include condiments, frozen meals, lunch meats, canned foods, and ready-to-eat cereals, breads and baked goods.
- Sodium occurs naturally in foods. Fresh fruits, vegetables, meats and rice often have low sodium content. **Most foods in your diet should come from these food groups.**
- **Use herbs and spices to flavor your foods** instead of salt.
- **Avoid fast food meals,** which are high in sodium.

## Maintain a healthy weight

Maintaining a healthy weight is important for your overall health. It can help you control your breathing problems, help you feel good about yourself and give your body energy.

### What should my weight be?

Body mass index (BMI) estimates what your weight should be for your height. It does not take into consideration that muscle mass is heavier than fat and may skew the result, such as for people with a lot of body muscle (body builders). **Ask your doctor what is a healthy weight for you.**

Pulmonary rehab staff can help you calculate your BMI:

$$\frac{\text{Weight in pounds}}{\text{Height in inches}^2} \times 703 = \text{_____ (BMI)}$$

Underweight = less than 18.5

**Normal = 18.5 - 24.9**

Overweight = 25.0 - 29.9

Obese = 30.0 or more

### If you need to lose weight:

Weight gain can be a problem for people with lung disease due to lack of physical activity, poor diet and certain medicines. Tips for weight loss:

- Follow guidelines at [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov) and ask for the handout, **Healthy Weight, Healthy Living**.
- Eat a diet low in saturated fat and sugar.
- Avoid fried and fast food meals, which contain a lot of sodium, fat and sugar.
- Be physically active. Choose activities you like and do what you can, at least 10 minutes at a time.

### If you need to gain weight:

Weight loss can be a problem for people with advanced lung disease. You may need more calories than someone without breathing problems. Tips to increase your weight:

- Eat 250 to 500 more calories a day.
- Eat calorie dense foods, such as those with a high fat content. Examples include high fat dairy products (ice cream, whole milk, butter), oils, nuts and peanut butter.
- Avoid drinking a lot of fluids before and during meals, which will fill you up.
- Use meal supplements, such as Ensure or Boost.

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**Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.**

The Library for Health Information is available to help you find more health information at (614) 293-3707 or e-mail: [health-info@osu.edu](mailto:health-info@osu.edu).