

Cooperative Extension

Promoting Healthy Families, Schools and Communities: Making a Difference

Eating to Fight Inflammation

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Inflammation is a natural process that helps your body heal, but when it sticks around too long, it can do more harm than good. Chronic inflammation is linked to conditions like heart disease, arthritis, and diabetes. However, what you eat can make a big difference. By choosing the right foods, you can help reduce inflammation and feel your best.

What Is Inflammation?

Inflammation is not always the enemy. If you have ever had a swollen ankle or a sore throat, that is acute inflammation at work, it is your body's way of protecting and healing itself. The problem starts when inflammation becomes chronic, silently lingering and potentially damaging healthy tissues over time. That's where what you eat can come in as a powerful tool.

The Best Foods for Fighting Inflammation

Some foods naturally calm inflammation. Brightly colored fruits and vegetables, like berries, spinach, and bell peppers, are packed with antioxidants that protect your cells. Healthy fats, like those in olive oil, avocados, and salmon, are also great choices; they help lower inflammation and support heart health. Whole grains, nuts, and seeds also offer fiber and nutrients that strengthen your body's defenses.

Tip: Drizzle olive oil on roasted veggies, toss chia seeds into your yogurt, or snack on a handful of walnuts.

Foods That Worsen Inflammation

Just as some foods help, other foods can hurt. Highly processed items, sugary drinks, and refined carbohydrates, like white bread and pastries, can increase inflammation. Red and processed meats, as well as fried foods, can also trigger inflammation if eaten too often.

Tip: Swap soda for water or green tea and enjoy grilled chicken or plant-based proteins instead of fried options.

Finding Balance in Your Diet

An anti-inflammatory approach doesn't mean giving up everything you love. It's about adding more whole, nutrient-rich foods to your plate. Think of it as creating a colorful meal, a rainbow of greens, oranges, reds, and purples ensures you're getting a variety of nutrients.

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How Climate Change Threatens Our Food Intake -

What Can We Do About It?

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Climate change is not just about warmer temperatures or more storms. It's also affecting the food we eat and the nutrition we get from it. A [new study](#) shows that severe climate change poses serious risks to our food security and nutrition, but there are ways to adapt and reduce these risks—and the good news is, solutions are within reach.

Main Points:

- 1. Food production is at risk:** Changes in weather patterns, such as droughts, floods, and extreme temperatures, are making it harder to grow crops and raise animals. This means there could be less food available in many parts of the world.
- 2. Nutritional quality of food is decreasing:** Not only are food supplies threatened, but the quality of the food we eat is also dropping. Climate change is affecting the nutrients in crops, making some foods less nutritious than they used to be.
- 3. Vulnerable populations will be hit hardest:** People in poorer regions, where food access is already limited, will be most affected. These areas are often less prepared to deal with climate changes and will struggle to provide enough nutritious food for their populations.
- 4. Global action is needed:** The study suggests that without immediate efforts to slow down climate change and adapt food systems, these risks will become even more severe. Governments, businesses, and communities must work together to find solutions, such as improving farming practices and supporting sustainable food production.



Adaptations to reduce the risk:

The study highlights several strategies that could help reduce the impacts of climate change on food security and nutrition:

- ✓ **Improved farming practices:** Farmers can adopt methods that make crops more resilient to extreme weather, such as using drought-resistant seeds and improving irrigation systems.
- ✓ **Diversifying crops:** Growing a wider variety of crops can make food systems more adaptable to changing conditions, reducing reliance on a few staple crops that are vulnerable to climate shifts.
- ✓ **Reducing food waste:** By wasting less food, we can make better use of the food that is produced, reducing pressure on the food system.
- ✓ **Investing in sustainable food systems:**



Governments and organizations can support sustainable farming and food distribution, ensuring that we have a secure food supply for the future.

While the challenges are real, the study suggests there are viable solutions to address these challenges. Around the world, researchers, farmers, and communities are coming together to build more resilient food systems. Innovations like vertical farming, climate-smart agriculture, and the use of technology in farming offer exciting possibilities to overcome these obstacles. By supporting sustainable farming and food security initiatives, we can ensure that future generations not only have enough to eat but also have access to nutritious, high-quality food.

For more information on severe climate change risks to food security and nutrition: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2212096322000808>



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Supporting the LGBTQIA2S+ Community:

A Call to Action

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National Coming Out Day, celebrated annually on October 11, encourages individuals within the LGBTQIA2S+ community to live openly and with pride. This day not only celebrates individuals who have embraced their identity but also reminds allies to show their support. For communities and institutions, understanding and supporting LGBTQIA2S+ individuals is essential to fostering inclusivity, equity, and a sense of belonging.

About the LGBTQIA2S+ Community

The acronym LGBTQIA2S+ represents a diverse and intersectional community. It stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and Two-Spirit. Each identity in this acronym reflects the diversity of experiences, struggles, and accomplishments faced by individuals who have been historically marginalized.

Coming Out and Why It's Important

"Coming Out" or "Inviting In" – the act of sharing one's LGBTQIA2S+ identity with others – is a deeply personal and transformative experience. For many, this process is a step toward self-acceptance. Unfortunately, the process is often burdened with emotional and social challenges. The societal pressure to conform to heteronormative expectations can create fear of rejection, discrimination, or even violence. However, by sharing one's whole self, LGBTQIA2S+ individuals help normalize diverse identities. Public visibility can reduce isolation, as others in the community see positive role models. While coming out is a personal choice and no one should feel forced to do so, it is an act that can contribute to broader societal change and progress toward equality.

How to Be Supportive

Whether or not someone chooses to come out, communities and allies must foster an environment where LGBTQIA2S+ individuals feel safe and valued. There are several ways to offer support:

- 1. Educate Yourself:** One of the most effective forms of allyship is knowledge. Learn about LGBTQIA2S+ history, terminology, and the unique challenges this community faces.
- 2. Listen Without Judgment:** If someone chooses to invite you in, offer a listening ear without judgment. Validate their experience and recognize that coming out may be a difficult process for them. Your role as an ally is to provide support.
- 3. Advocate for Inclusive Policies:** Advocacy can take many forms. Policies that affirm the rights of LGBTQIA2S+ individuals help establish safer and more inclusive environments.

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Helpful Resources

For those looking to better support the LGBTQIA2S+ community, many resources are available.

Wellness Wednesday with FCHS

- [Celebrating National Coming Out Day](#)

Human Rights Campaign (HRC)

- [Coming Out Resources](#)
- [Being an LGBTQ+ Ally Report](#)

Family Acceptance Project

- [Family Acceptance Project Posters](#)
- [Helping Diverse Families Learn to Support Their LGBTQ Children Report](#)

National LGBTQIA+ Health Education Center

- [Glossary of Terms](#)

National Coming Out Day is a celebration of individual courage and a call for communities to embrace diversity and create spaces where LGBTQIA2S+ individuals feel safe, welcomed, and valued. By educating ourselves, offering support, and promoting inclusive policies, we can all contribute to a community where everyone is free to be their true selves.



Seeing Beyond the Surface:

Body Image and Eating Disorders

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Seeing Beyond the Surface: Body Image and Eating Disorders

We've all looked in the mirror and wondered, "Do I look good?" It is perfectly normal to want to look and feel as healthy as possible, but when these concerns become all consuming, they can lead to significant damage to our mental and physical wellbeing. While body image concerns are often associated with young women, the reality is that 69–84% of women and 20–40% of men in the United States experience body dissatisfaction. Members of the LGBTQIA25+ community face even higher rates.

Eating Disorders: More Common Than We Think, But Not Always Visible

Eating disorders are serious medical conditions influenced by biological, psychological, and social factors. About 1 in 10 Americans will experience an eating disorder in their lifetime. These disorders don't discriminate—they affect people of all races, ages, ethnicities, and genders.

While we see eating disorders often presented in specific ways in the media the truth is that those living with eating disorders do not often have the appearance of being unwell. Contrary to common belief, fewer than 6% of people with eating disorders are classified as "underweight" by their BMI. Many appear to have a normal or higher weight, making awareness and early intervention critical.

How to Promote a Healthy Relationship with Food and Body

- ✓ **Recognize Media's Influence:** Many media images are heavily edited. Challenge unrealistic standards and engage in creative activities like art, music, or spending time with loved ones.
- ✓ **Practice Self-Compassion:** Appreciate your body for what it does rather than how it looks. Give yourself permission to grow and learn without self-criticism.
- ✓ **Eat Mindfully:** Pay attention to hunger and fullness cues. Avoid distractions while eating and enjoy meals with others. Check out [this webinar](#) about Mindful Eating.
- ✓ **Be Thoughtful in Conversations:** Avoid commenting on others' weight or appearance. If you're concerned about a loved one, approach with empathy. [This video](#) offers guidance on how to start the conversation.
- ✓ **Focus on Health, Not Size:** Nourish your body with foods that promote well-being instead of striving for unrealistic beauty ideals.
- ✓ **Seek Professional Help When Needed:**
 1. National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA)
 2. National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders

Body image struggles and eating disorders are complex, but healing can be possible with awareness, compassion, and professional support. "Seeing beyond the surface" means recognizing that body image is deeper than appearance -it's about understanding the emotions, experiences, and pressures that shape our relationship with food and our bodies. By practicing self-kindness, challenging unrealistic beauty standards, and supporting others, we can all be part of the solution.

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- Renfrew Centers are outpatient facilities specializing in the treatment of anorexia, bulimia, and binge eating. <https://renfrewcenter.com/>. This is one example of a facility that offers a variety of programs on eating disorders.

Body image struggles go beyond appearance—they can affect mental and physical well-being. This article explores these challenges and offers ways to support ourselves and others.

What Is Body Image? Body image is how we see, feel about, and experience our bodies—not just how we look but how we believe others perceive us.

- **Positive Body Image:** Feeling comfortable in our own skin and treating ourselves with kindness.
- **Negative Body Image:** Feeling ashamed or dissatisfied with our bodies, which can lead to extreme dieting, over-exercising, or eating disorders.



Finger Foods for Infants and Toddlers:

Make Every Bite Count!

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Healthier eating habits should start early in life. Introducing children to a variety of nutritious foods at a young age encourages healthy eating habits that can last a lifetime. Finger foods are a great way for little ones to practice their independence and experience new foods by feeding themselves. Infants may be ready to start finger foods around nine months old if they can sit up independently, bring hands and objects to their mouth, and have started to master the pincer grasp using their thumb and forefinger to pick up small pieces of food.

To encourage infants and toddlers to try new foods and reduce picky eating, offer a wide variety of foods from all food groups. The variety will make them comfortable trying foods with different tastes and textures. It may take as many as 10 attempts or more before a child accepts a new food. Here are some of our favorite finger foods from each food group:

Fruits

Fruits are an excellent source of vitamins, minerals, fiber, antioxidants, and water. Ensure all fruit served is ripe, peeled, cut, and with seeds removed.

- Ripe bananas cut lengthwise into strips
- Soft strawberries, ripe avocado, or watermelon cut into bite-sized pieces without seeds.
- Canned peaches in 100% juice, drained well and cut into pieces.

Vegetables

Vegetables contain vitamins, minerals, fiber, and antioxidants. Fresh, frozen, and canned vegetables are all good choices. If using canned vegetables, rinse under cool water to remove sodium and choose "no salt added" or "low sodium" options when available.

- Low sodium canned vegetables like green beans, peas, and carrots are easy to pick up.
- Steamed or roasted vegetables like butternut squash and broccoli, served in a consistency and small pieces that can be easily picked up by the child.
- Baked sweet potato cut into small pieces.

Grains (Breads, Cereals, & Pasta)

All grains are good sources of vitamins and minerals. Whole grains are also excellent sources of fiber. Offer babies and toddlers plenty of whole grains or products made with whole grain.

- Low-sugar, whole grain infant or breakfast cereals and oatmeal fortified with iron and zinc by spoon.
- Softly cooked brown rice or whole grain pasta cut into small pieces or by spoon.
- Whole grain crackers without seeds or nuts.

Protein Foods

Protein foods are essential for growth and development, helping build muscles and bones. Protein foods provide important nutrients like vitamin E, B vitamins, zinc, iron, and magnesium.

- Fully cooked eggs or mashed beans by a spoon.
- Soft, cooked meats like chicken, ground turkey, or meatballs cut into bite-sized pieces.
- Boneless cooked fish like flounder, cod, tilapia, or salmon in small pieces.



Dairy Foods

Dairy foods are rich in calcium and fortified with vitamin D for healthy bones and teeth. They are also good sources of protein. Yogurts and cheese can be introduced before 12 months, but dairy foods and milk should not replace human milk or formula until after 12 months. Whole milk products, which are higher in fat, should be offered until 24 months to support healthy growth and brain development.

- Using a spoon, plain, whole milk yogurts without added sugar (Add soft fruit at home for flavor.)
- Plain, whole milk cottage cheese using a spoon.
- Shredded or small cubes of cheese such as mozzarella or cheddar.

For more information and important tips on safely introducing finger foods, reducing choking risk, and an update on food allergies, refer to our fact sheet at **[FS1046: Finger Foods for Infants and Toddlers](#)**



Ten Ways to Improve Your Financial Wellness

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Financial wellness is a state of well-being where individuals are able to:

- ◆ Manage finances effectively (e.g., adhering to a budget, repaying debt, and saving for emergencies),
- ◆ Meet current financial obligations (e.g., paying bills and covering unexpected expenses),
- ◆ Meet future financial obligations (e.g., investing for future financial goals, including retirement),
- ◆ Feel confident and in control of their finances with a sense of security and resilience, and
- ◆ Live a fulfilling and enjoyable life without being burdened by financial stress.



How do people achieve financial wellness? They follow time-tested “evergreen” financial management strategies. Below is a description of ten ways to improve your financial wellness:

- ◆ **Have Enough Money to Pay Expenses-** Doing this may involve increasing income, reducing or eliminating household expenses, or both. Ideally, no more than 15% to 20% of net pay should be spent on consumer debts (e.g., credit cards and loans) and no more than 40% to 50% of net pay for consumer debt and housing expenses.
- ◆ **Set Aside Money for Emergencies-** Three to six months of essential living expenses is recommended, but any amount of savings is better than none. Keep the first three months very liquid (e.g., a high-yield FDIC insured bank account or a money market mutual fund with check-writing).
- ◆ **Set Written Financial Goals-** Goals provide an incentive to save and can “reality test” vague bucket list dreams. Set a specific deadline date and a cost figure (e.g., save \$10,000 toward the cost of a new car in five years).
- ◆ **Follow a Written Spending Plan (Budget)-** The best spending plans use accurate figures derived by tracking income and expenses for 1-2 months. Income should be equal to or greater than expenses. Expenses should include 1/12 the annual cost of occasional expenses (e.g., quarterly water bills) plus savings for future goals.
- ◆ **Save/Invest Regularly for Future Financial Goals-** Equity investments (e.g., stocks and growth mutual funds) are best suited for financial goals that are five or more years away (for reduced short-term market volatility). Consider investing automatically in a stock or mutual fund automatic investment plan and for retirement.
- ◆ **Increase Savings When Cash Flow Increases-** Good times to kick savings “up a notch” are: when you receive a raise or bonus, when you get a higher paying job, when a non-working spouse enters the labor force, when you get a new income source (e.g., a “side hustle”), and when expenses like child care or car loan payments end.
- ◆ **Establish a Personal Retirement Savings Account-** Options include investing in a traditional (pre-tax) or Roth (after-tax) retirement savings plan. This includes Roth and traditional individual retirement accounts (IRAs) and qualified employer retirement plans (401(k), 403(b), 457, and thrift savings plans, depending on your employer).
- ◆ **Diversify Your Investments-** Experts advise selecting more than one type of asset class (e.g., stocks, bonds, cash, and real estate) and different investments within each asset class (e.g., stocks from different industry sectors). Another way to diversify is to select well-diversified mutual funds and exchange-traded funds.
- ◆ **Purchase Insurance to Cover Large Risks-** The “large loss principle” states that individuals should insure against big financial losses instead of smaller ones. Large potential losses include disability, liability for losses to others, destruction of a home, large medical expenses, and loss of a household earner’s income.
- ◆ **Comparison Shop for Major Purchases-** The “Rule of Three” is where shoppers check at least three competing vendors to make an “apples to apples” comparison of prices and product or service features. Smart shoppers also inquire about available discounts and time their purchases to take advantage of the best deals.



Setting Healthy Aging Goals

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Setting healthy aging goals may be done at or before the beginning of the New Year, but success requires our year-round commitment to achieving them. Achieving sustainable, lifelong behavior changes reaps the greatest rewards and motivation on our journey to optimal health.

What health goals, if any, did you set for yourself in 2025? What commitments did you make to achieve them? What worked? What barriers did you encounter and how did you address them? What have you learned about yourself? Now may be a good time to reflect on your progress, revise your goals, or make any adjustments to the strategies you are implementing to achieve them. Perhaps you have exceeded your goals so take the time to recognize and reward yourself for your accomplishments.



Common health goal topics and focus areas for healthy aging may include:

HEALTH GOAL TOPIC	FOCUS AREA
Prioritizing sleep	Aim for 7-9 hours of sleep per night.
Healthy eating	Consume a balanced diet of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats.
Physical activity	Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week.
Challenging our brains	Keep mentally stimulated to maintain brain health.
Stopping smoking	Set a quit date and utilize free quitting resources such as support groups, counseling, and nicotine replacement.
Finding an accountability partner	Ask someone with similar goals to provide mutual support and motivation in achieving health goals together.
Scheduling health screenings	Schedule health screenings recommended by your healthcare provider including routine blood work (e.g., cholesterol, blood sugar) and cancer screenings.

When setting or revising healthy aging goals, it is important to design them as SMART goals:

- ✓ Specific
- ✓ Measurable
- ✓ Achievable
- ✓ Relevant
- ✓ Time-bound

Examples of SMART goals can be small, sustainable healthy habits that can significantly improve health over time such as:

- ✓ Walk for 30 minutes three times a week this month.
- ✓ Make one healthy meal choice every day this week.
- ✓ Schedule a health screening by May.

Just as important as setting SMART healthy aging goals, is tracking your progress over time. Below is a SMART goal-setting sample and log for tracking progress.

MY GOAL:	I will walk for 15 minutes around my neighborhood four times a week.
I will start on...	pick date
I will re-evaluate my goal on...	pick date
My goal is important because...	I want to breathe more easily and feel better about myself.
The steps I will take are...	I will set a reminder on my calendar for Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday to walk at (time)
The possible barriers are...	Working late, weather conditions, sick spouse that needs help, etc.
My incentive or reward will be...	A new pair of walking shoes

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Don't Forget Hydration

Staying hydrated is the key for your body to work at its best. Water helps flush out toxins, while teas like green, ginger and turmeric provide extra anti-inflammatory benefits.

Takeaways

Eating to reduce inflammation does not have to be complicated. Start with small swaps, add a few servings of veggies, replace sugary snacks with fresh fruit, and include healthy fats like avocado or olive oil in your meals. Over time, these little changes can make a big impact on how you feel.

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Setting Healthy Aging Goals - continued from page 7

Tracking Progress	Week	Action	Followed Schedule?	Barrier	On track?
	1	Walked 4 times	Yes	None	Yes
	2	Walked 4 times	Yes	Rain; walked at mall.	Yes
	3	Walked 3 times	No	Sick spouse needed help.	Yes
	4	Walked 4 times	Yes	None	Yes
	5	Walked 2 times	No	Worked late; stressed; didn't feel like walking.	No
	6	Walked 4 times	Yes	Changed time to 5 p.m.	Yes
	7	Walked 4 times	Yes	None	Yes
	8	Walked 4 times	Rescheduled	Changed day due to snow.	Yes

When setting your health goals, consider the barriers you might encounter and how to overcome them. Be kind to yourself and celebrate your achievements on your journey. Goal setting, tracking progress, and having an accountability partner are powerful steps toward behavior change and creating and sustaining long-term healthy habits.

"The only mistake you can make is to give up on yourself." ~James Prochaska, Ph.D.

Useful Link: [Move Your Way](#)

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- National Institute on Aging. Healthy aging. <https://www.nia.nih.gov/health/healthy-aging>
- U.S. National Library of Medicine. Healthy aging. MedlinePlus. <https://medlineplus.gov/healthyaging.html>

