



What  
are the

# Benefits of Eating Healthy?

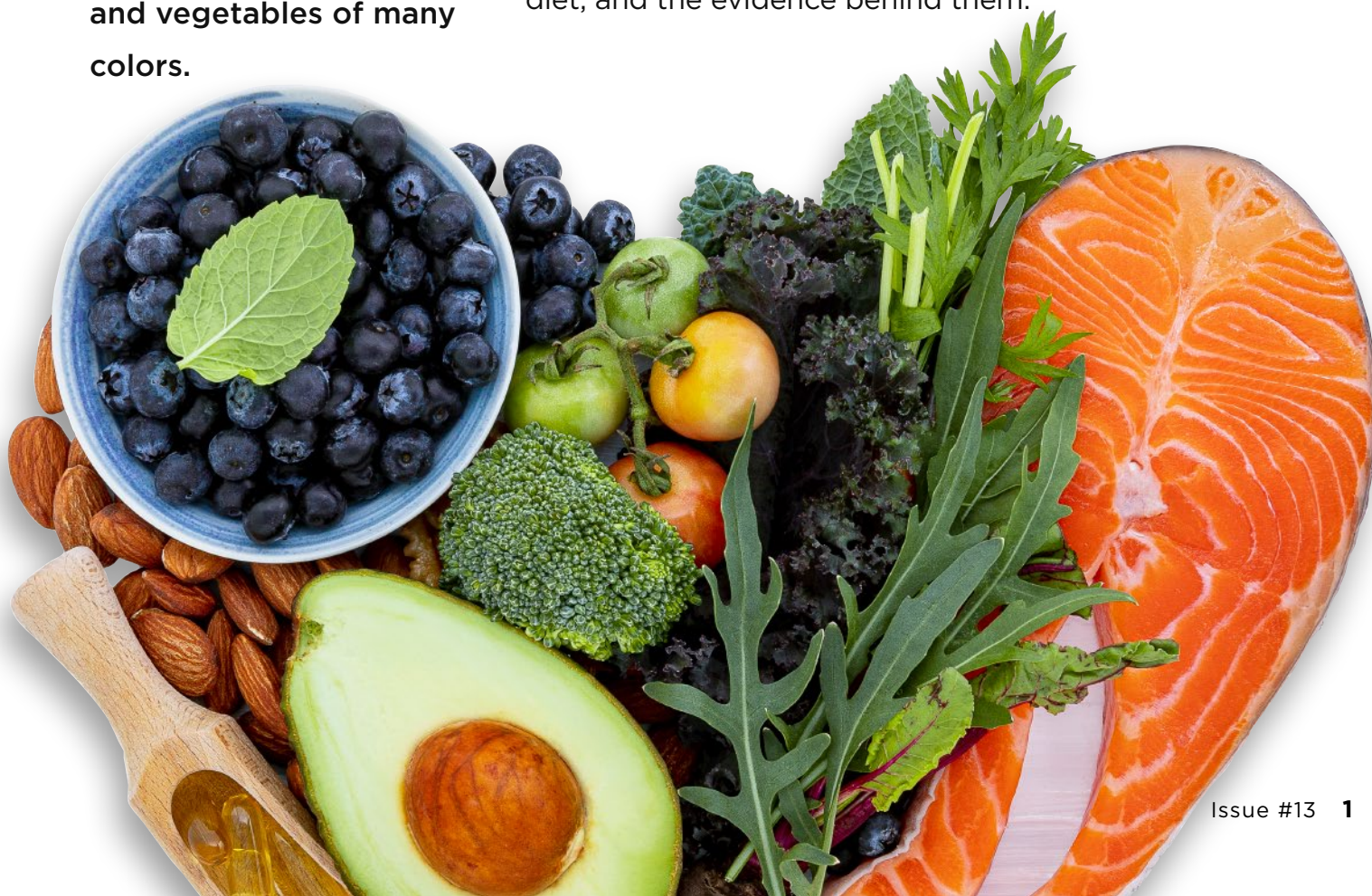
—Written by [Cathleen Crichton-Stuart](#)

**A healthful diet typically includes nutrient-dense foods from all major food groups, including lean proteins, whole grains, healthful fats, and fruits and vegetables of many colors.**

Healthful eating also means replacing foods that contain trans fats, added salt, and sugar with more nutritious options.

Following a [healthful diet](#) has many health benefits, including building strong bones, protecting the heart, preventing disease, and boosting mood.

This article looks at the top 10 benefits of a healthful diet, and the evidence behind them.





# HEART Health

According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#), heart disease is the leading cause of death for adults in the United States.

The [American Heart Association \(AHA\)](#) state that almost half of U.S. adults live with some form of cardiovascular disease.

[High blood pressure](#), or hypertension, is a growing concern in the U.S. The condition can lead to [heart attack](#), heart failure, and [stroke](#).

Some sources report that it is possible to prevent [up to 80%](#) of premature heart disease and stroke diagnoses with lifestyle changes, such as increasing physical activity and healthful eating.

The foods people eat can reduce their blood pressure and help keep their heart healthy.

The dietary approaches to stop hypertension diet, known as the [DASH diet](#), includes plenty of healthful foods for the heart. The program recommends the following:

- eating plenty of vegetables, fruits, and whole grains
- choosing fat-free or low fat dairy products, fish, poultry, beans, nuts, and vegetable oils
- limiting saturated and trans fat intake, such as fatty meats and full-fat dairy products
- limiting drinks and foods that contain added sugars
- restricting sodium intake to less than 2,300 milligrams per day—ideally 1,500 mg daily—and increasing consumption of potassium, magnesium, and calcium

[High fiber foods](#) are also crucial for keeping the heart healthy.

The AHA state that dietary fiber helps improve blood cholesterol and lowers the risk of heart disease, stroke, obesity, and [type 2 diabetes](#).

The medical community has long recognized the link between trans fats and heart-related illnesses, such as [coronary heart disease](#).

Limiting certain [types of fats](#) can also improve heart health. For instance, eliminating trans fats reduces the levels of low-density lipoprotein [cholesterol](#). This type of cholesterol causes plaque to collect within the arteries, increasing the risk of heart attack and stroke.

Reducing blood pressure can also promote heart health. A person can achieve this by limiting their salt intake to [no more than 1,500 milligrams](#) per day.

Food manufacturers add salt to many processed and fast foods, and a person who wishes to lower their blood pressure should avoid these products.

[Learn more about the DASH diet here.](#)



# 2 REDUCED Cancer Risk

Eating foods that contain [antioxidants](#) can reduce a person's risk of developing cancer by protecting cells from damage.

The presence of free radicals in the body increases the risk of cancer, but antioxidants help remove them to lower the likelihood of this disease.

Many phytochemicals found in fruits, vegetables, nuts, and legumes act as antioxidants, including [beta-carotene](#), lycopene, and [vitamins](#) A, C, and E.

According to the [National Cancer Institute](#), though humans trials are inconclusive, there are laboratory and animal studies that link certain antioxidants to a reduced incidence of free radical damage due to cancer.

[Foods high in antioxidants](#) include:

- berries such as blueberries and raspberries
- dark leafy greens
- pumpkin and carrots
- nuts and seeds

Having obesity [may increase](#) a person's risk of developing cancer and result in poorer outcomes. Maintaining a moderate weight may reduce these risks.

In a [2014 study](#), researchers found that a diet rich in fruits reduced the risk of upper gastrointestinal tract cancers.

They also found that a diet rich in vegetables, fruits, and fiber lowered the risk of [colorectal cancer](#), while a diet rich in fiber reduces the risk of [liver cancer](#).

[Read more about cancer-fighting foods here.](#)





## 3 BETTER Mood

Some evidence suggests a close relationship between diet and mood.

In [2016](#), researchers found that diets with a high glycemic load may trigger increased symptoms of [depression](#) and [fatigue](#).

A diet with a high glycemic load includes many refined [carbohydrates](#), such as those found in soft drinks, cakes, white bread, and biscuits. Vegetables, whole fruit, and whole grains have a lower glycemic load.

If a person suspects they have symptoms of depression, talking to a doctor or mental health professional can help.

## 4 IMPROVED Gut Health

The colon is full of naturally occurring bacteria, which play important roles in metabolism and digestion.

Certain strains of bacteria also produce vitamins K and B, which benefit the colon. These strains also help fight harmful bacteria and viruses.

A diet low in fiber and high in sugar and fat alters the gut microbiome, increasing [inflammation](#) in the area.

However, a diet rich in vegetables, fruits, legumes, and whole grains provides a combination of prebiotics and [probiotics](#) that help good bacteria thrive in the colon.

These fermented foods are rich in probiotics:

- yogurt
- sauerkraut
- kefir
- kimchi
- miso

Fiber is an easily accessible prebiotic and is abundant in legumes, grains, fruits, and vegetables. It also promotes regular bowel movements, which can help prevent bowel cancer and [diverticulitis](#).





# 5 Improved **MEMORY**

A healthful diet may help maintain cognition and brain health.

A [2015](#) study identified nutrients and foods that protect against cognitive decline and [dementia](#). The researchers found the following to be beneficial:

- vitamin D, vitamin C, and vitamin E
- [omega-3](#) fatty acids
- flavonoids and polyphenols
- fish

Among other diets, the [Mediterranean diet](#) incorporates many of these nutrients.

[Read more about foods to boost brain function here.](#)



# 6 Weight **LOSS**

Maintaining a moderate weight can help reduce the risk of chronic health issues.

Having overweight or obesity are risk factors for several conditions, including:

- heart disease
- type 2 diabetes
- poor bone density
- some [cancers](#)

Many healthful foods, including vegetables, fruits, and beans, are lower in calories than most processed foods.

A person can determine their calorie requirements using guidance from the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2015-2020](#).

Maintaining a healthful diet free from processed foods can help a person stay within their daily limit without monitoring calorie intake.

Dietary fiber is particularly important for managing weight. Plant-based foods contain plenty of dietary fiber, which helps regulate hunger

by making people feel fuller for longer.

In 2018, researchers found that a diet rich in fiber and lean proteins resulted in [weight loss](#) without the need for monitoring calorie intake.



# 7 Diabetes **MANAGEMENT**

A healthful diet can help a person with diabetes in:

- managing blood glucose levels
- keeping [blood pressure](#) and [cholesterol](#) within target ranges
- preventing or delaying complications of diabetes
- maintaining a moderate weight

It is vital for people with diabetes to limit their intake of foods with added sugar and salt. They should also consider avoiding fried foods high in saturated and trans fats.

[Read about the best foods for diabetes here.](#)



# 8 **STRONG** Bones and Teeth

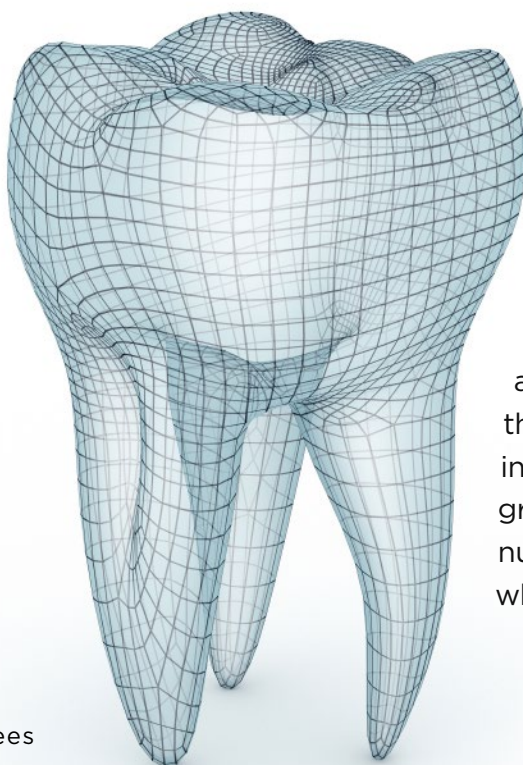
A diet with adequate [calcium](#) and [magnesium](#) is important for strong bones and teeth. Keeping the bones healthy can minimize the risk of bone issues later in life, such as [osteoporosis](#).

The following foods are rich in calcium:

- low fat dairy products
- broccoli
- cauliflower
- cabbage
- canned fish with bones
- tofu
- legumes

Food manufacturers often fortify cereals and plant-based milks with calcium.

Magnesium is abundant in many foods, and some of the best sources include leafy green vegetables, nuts, seeds, and whole grains.





# 9 Getting a Good Night's **SLEEP**

A variety of factors, including [sleep apnea](#), can disrupt sleep patterns.

Sleep apnea occurs when the airways repeatedly become blocked during sleep. Risk factors include obesity, drinking alcohol, and eating an unhealthful diet.

Reducing alcohol and caffeine intake can help a person gain restful sleep, whether they have sleep apnea or not.



# 10 The **HEALTH** of the Next Generation

Children learn most health-related behaviors from the adults around them, and parents who model healthful eating and exercise habits tend to pass these on.

Eating at home may also help. In [2018](#), researchers found that children who regularly ate meals with their families consumed more vegetables and fewer sugary foods than their peers who ate at home less frequently.

In addition, children who participate in gardening and cooking at home may be more likely to make healthful dietary and lifestyle choices.



# Quick Tips for a Healthful **DIET**

There are plenty of small, positive ways to improve diet, including:

- swapping soft drinks for water and herbal tea
- eating no meat for at least 1 day a week
- ensuring each meal consists of around 50% fresh produce
- swapping cow's milk for plant-based milk
- consuming whole fruits instead of juices, which contain less fiber and often include added sugar
- avoiding processed meats, which are high in salt and may [increase](#) the risk of [colon cancer](#)
- eating more lean protein, which people can find in eggs, tofu, fish, and nuts

A person may also benefit from taking a cooking class, and learning how to incorporate more vegetables into meals.

## Summary

**Healthful eating** has many health benefits, such as **reducing** the risk of heart disease, stroke, obesity, and type 2 diabetes. It can also **boost** a person's mood and provide them with more **energy**.

A doctor or dietitian can provide tips on eating a more healthful diet.