



Wellness Connection

Can ‘Healthy’ Foods Be Bad for You?

Most of us try to buy foods that we think are healthy. But are they? Some labels can make unhealthy foods seem good for you.

LOOK AT THE PACKAGE

At the grocery store, you see all kinds of claims on food packages.

“Natural,” “low-fat,” and “healthy” may sound good. But here’s how they are defined:

- “Natural” means a food does not have any artificial ingredients. A high-fat cheddar cheese may be natural, but if you’re trying to eat less fat, it isn’t so healthy.
- “Low-fat” foods cannot have more than 3 grams of fat per serving. The trick is low-fat foods are not always low in calories. Pay attention to total calories, not just fat calories.
- “Healthy” on a package means the food has a certain amount of vitamins and minerals. But a food may contain lots of vitamins and lots of sugar.

READ THE LABEL

When it comes to eating healthy, look to the facts—the Nutrition Facts. First check the serving size. You might not realize how small a serving can be. Three servings of a low-fat food might have as much fat as one serving of the regular version.



Next look at the percent daily value. This shows how much of each nutrient is in a serving. A food that has more than 20 percent daily value of a nutrient is considered high in that nutrient. A food with 5 percent or less is low. Use these numbers to pick foods with *less*:

- Total fat
- Saturated fat
- Trans fat
- Cholesterol
- Sodium

And with *more*:

- Fiber
- Vitamins
- Minerals

Eating better to avoid health risks is a wonderful goal. And by being a savvy shopper, you can ensure your healthy diet truly is good for you. ■

For a healthier spin on classic beef stew, flip to page 2 of this issue.

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Extra Weight Affects More Than You Think

You probably know that excess weight is hard on the heart. Here's new research that may surprise you, and how to tell if you're in the danger zone.

HARDLY JUST THE HEART

Obesity increases your risk for not only heart disease, but also cancer, type 2 diabetes, arthritis, stroke, and many other health problems. Now, newer research indicates obesity also may affect your brain.

A study reported in the journal *Neurology* found that excess fat around the waist might lead to an increased risk for dementia later in life. In another study, published in the *British Medical Journal*, researchers found that being obese during midlife also increases the risk for dementia in later years.

HOW DO YOU SHAPE UP?

Body mass index (BMI) can help



determine if extra pounds are endangering your health. BMI is a ratio of weight to height. A BMI of 25 to 29.9 is considered overweight, and 30 or more is considered obese. Calculate your BMI at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

website, www.cdc.gov. Click on "BMI Calculator" under the Tools & Resources tab.

Measure your waist, too. The fat you carry here may increase your health risks more so than fat elsewhere on the body. Men should aim for a waist size smaller than 40 inches. Women should try for less than 35 inches.

NUMBERS NOT IDEAL?

Losing just 5 to 10 percent of your body weight may lower your risk for health problems. Ditch fad diets and "miracle" weight-loss products. They don't work in the long-term. Instead, ask your doctor to help you develop a plan for safe and effective weight loss. ■

BMI and waist size aren't the only important numbers to know. For a more complete look at your health, join our **Know Your Numbers** campaign. See the health brief on the back of this issue for details.

RECIPE

Classic Beef Stew

This delicious and healthy take on a classic recipe also makes great leftovers. Just freeze and then reheat for a quick meal later.

- 1 tsp. **cooking oil**
- 1 lb. **beef** trimmed of all visible fat and cut into 1-inch cubes
- 4 **small onions**, halved
- 4 **carrots**, peeled and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 **large potato** (about ½ lb.), cut into bite-size pieces
- 1 cup **mushrooms**, quartered
- 2 **cloves garlic**, minced
- 1 cup **water**



1. Heat the oil in a skillet set on medium-high heat. Oil should just coat pan.
2. Add beef and brown, about five minutes. Put beef and all other ingredients into an ovenproof dish with a cover.
3. Bake at 325° F for about 2½ hours, until meat and vegetables are tender.

Yield: Four servings. Each serving provides: Calories 255; Protein 29 g; Fat 6 g; Sodium 116 mg.



Stretch Your Post-Holiday Budget

The presents are unwrapped, the meal is over, and out-of-town visitors are slowly heading back home. The holidays are coming to an end—and the credit card bills are starting to roll in.

Smart holiday budgeting doesn't end with December. Before you stress out about incoming bills, consider these tips to keep saving into the new year.

- Check return policies. Stores may give you only a limited amount of time to get refunds on unwanted gifts. Avoid opening packages or removing tags from items you might return.
- Don't toss wrapping paper, bows, or holiday greeting cards. Reuse them next year or recycle them into postcards, gift tags, or decorations.
- Make the most of holiday meals.

Pack up leftovers and freeze them or give them to family members. Untouched food can be donated to charities.

- Wash and reuse jars, jugs, cans, and tubs. Use them to store leftovers, decorations, and other items.
- Shut off your holiday lights during the day to save energy costs.
- If you celebrate Christmas, buy a potted tree you can plant outside later. Turn cut trees into mulch for your garden or kindling for your fireplace instead of food for the trash can.
- Read those tempting, post-holiday sales ads carefully. Some may have restrictions that make them less of a bargain. For instance, what good is buy-one-get-one free if you don't need multiples? ■

A Primer on Insurance Terms

The Fall 2008 edition of *Wellness Connection* introduced our series on health care lingo. Most likely, you have seen the following words on an Explanation of Benefits. We want to make sure you understand what they mean.

Benefit: Benefit is the value of insurance coverage as outlined by the insurance plan. It's also used to mean the actual service you've received under your insurance coverage.

Insured: You are an insured—as long as you are covered by your insurance plan.

Provider: The provider is the physician or facility that provided medical treatment to you, the patient.

how to reach us

For questions about billing, benefits, or claims, contact:

Customer Service

Monday–Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. (Central time)
402-398-3869 (Omaha)
800-424-7105 (toll-free)

Mail to:

7261 Mercy Road
P.O. Box 3248
Omaha, NE 68180-0001

For information about our products and services, call:
877-881-2583 (toll-free).

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HEALTH BRIEFS



Pets and Asthma Can Coexist

Cats and dogs are two of the most common year-round allergy triggers. Luckily, there are ways you can live alongside your furry friend:

- Use a vacuum cleaner with a high-efficiency particle arresting (HEPA) filter. Vacuum at least twice a week. Mop every week.
- Choose allergen-resistant bedding, and keep pets out of the bedroom.
- Have someone wash your pet weekly. Avoid bathing the animal yourself, if possible.
- Keep pets off upholstered furniture like sofas.
- Let your pet spend time outdoors when possible.
- Use an air purifier with a HEPA filter.

Battling the Winter Blues

Shorter daylight hours and chilly weather can affect how we feel. A specific type of depression—seasonal affective disorder—actually may stem from too little sunshine. Even if you're not clinically depressed, you might feel blue during these darker months.

What can you do? Step outside for about an hour around noon. The sunlight may help. Increase your indoor light with lamps and sheer curtains. Have your shrubs and trees trimmed so that they don't block windows.

Know Your Numbers

Do you know if you are at risk for diabetes, heart disease, or other chronic diseases? Certain "numbers" can tell you a lot about your health. Then you can take action to help prevent health problems. Here are the important ones to know:

- Blood pressure
- Cholesterol levels
- Blood sugar
- Body mass index
- Waist size

Keep track of your numbers with our FREE wallet card. You can find it, and learn more, at www.bluehealthadvantage.com. Click on "Individual Programs." Print the card. Ask your doctor to record your numbers at every visit.