

## Healthy Eating for An Active and Healthy Lifestyle

Healthy eating is important for everyone - with and without a disability, inactive or very active and from recreational enthusiast to elite athlete. It is an important part of being healthy ...along with being physically active and feeling good about yourself.

People with physical disability do have unique nutrition issues. This is for a number of reasons such as changes in activity level, onset of disability, changes in the body's metabolism and body composition, changes in eating patterns and preparation, and many others.

### Healthy Eating has numerous benefits

- Better overall health
- More energy
- Decrease stress, adds to enjoyment
- Prevent pressure sores
- Fight infections
- Maintain a healthy heart
- Stay regular
- Improve sport performance
- Maintain a healthy weight (which impacts all of the above)

### Not a quick fix

Healthy eating is not a quick fix, the latest fad or a one shot deal. It is about enjoying your food and making healthy choices most of the time.

**Balance, variety and moderation** are the keys to healthy eating.

### Making Healthy Choices - The Pyramid Way

Following the US Department of Agriculture's, My Pyramid ([www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov)) can help you make healthy choices every day through balance, variety and moderation.

**Some special nutrition considerations** for people with spinal cord injury and other physical disability:

### Fiber

- Helps maintain digestive system and maintain regular bowel function
- Fiber also helps in maintaining a healthy heart.
- Need 20-35 grams/day (increase amount gradually)

- Food sources: fruits, vegetables, whole grains (such as whole wheat bread, All Bran, brown rice, etc). Natural sources of fiber are best.

### Calcium

- Helps in build teeth and bones and maintain bone mass (especially for women with a spinal cord injury or those who cannot ambulate).
- Also needed for blood clotting, and muscle and nerve functioning.
- Vitamin D is also needed to help calcium do its job in the body.
- Need 2-3 cups of dairy everyday (1 cup=1 cup milk or yogurt, 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  oz cheese) to get the 1200-1500 mg calcium daily (depending on gender and age). Talk to physician about the need for a calcium supplement.
- Food sources: dairy products (milk, cheese, yogurt), fortified soy milk, green leafy vegetables (spinach, kale, collard greens).

### Protein

- Helps build muscle, skin and fight infections. Helps prevent and treat pressure sores/ulcers.
- Protein for people with spinal cord injury are generally the same as people without (unless active wound healing) - 0.8 g/kg of body weight.
- Food sources: eggs, fish, lean meat, seafood, low-fat milk, cheese, beans and lentils. Ensure is a great source during active wound healing.

### Sodium

- Helps regulate fluid balance in the body and important for nerve transmission and muscle contraction.
- Limit intake to less than 2300 mg/day (~1 tsp). For people with hypertension, older adults and African Americans, limit to no more than 1500 mg/day
- Sources: table salt, canned foods and other prepared foods

### The Bottom Line

- Choose a variety foods from all food groups
  - Choose whole grain breads and cereals - whole wheat, brown rice, oatmeal,
  - Focus on fruits and vegetables: *color your world*
  - Make your dairy low fat: *Choose 1% or skim milk, yogurt and cheese*
  - Choose eggs, nuts, lean meats, poultry and fish to build healthy skin and muscle and fight infection
  - Use good fat for cooking *like canola and olive oil*
- Choose water (at least 8 cups - 64oz/day) over juice or soda. If you drink juice, make sure the label says 100% fruit juice.

- Limit salt, alcohol and caffeine
- Portion control - *watch your portion size*
- Calories count - fat, carbohydrate or protein. At the end of the day, total calories count.
- Eat breakfast every day - this is an important weight management tool
- Parents/Caregivers be good role models
- Eat together as a family as often as possible
- Be active every day at least 30 minutes/day for adults - 10-minute increments count.

### **Goal Setting**

Setting realistic and achievable goals is the first step to lasting change. Choose short (a few weeks) and long-term goals. Start small and ones you can live with. Ask your self: *what is one change I can make now?* Revisit your goals often.

### **Resources**

US Department of Agriculture's My Food Guide Pyramid [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov)

EatRight® Home-Based Weight Management Program for Individuals with SCI:  
<http://www.spinalcord.uab.edu/show.asp?durki=78095&site=1021&return=77527>

BlazeSports America for physical activity and disability sport programs and services in Georgia and around the country [www.blazesports.org](http://www.blazesports.org)

National Center on Physical Activity and Disability Health Promotion  
<http://www.ncpad.org/nutrition/>

### **How to find a dietitian:**

A registered dietitian can help assess individual dietary needs and develop individual goals and diet plan. To find a registered dietitian in your area, ask your physician/health care provider for a referral or go to the American Dietetic Association website ([www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)), and click on "Find a Nutrition Professional".

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### **Sources:**

1. US Department of Agriculture, My Pyramid, [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov). 2005. Accessed June 4, 2008.
2. Columbia University, *Columbia University Women's Soccer, 2008 Summer Training Manual*
3. University of Alabama Birmingham Spinal Cord Injury Care System. [www.spinalcord.uab.edu](http://www.spinalcord.uab.edu). Accessed June 2, 2008.