6
Optimal Choices for Home Chow

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Key Points

- Foods eaten at home can impact mission performance.
- Smart shopping is the first step towards healthy meal preparation.
- Most recipes can be modified to improve nutrient composition.
- Use nutrition labels as a guide for making smart food choices.
- Every meal is important for overall health and performance.
- Aim for as many servings of fruits and vegetables as possible.

The foods and beverages consumed at home can impact mission performance. Since missions and deployments may come up suddenly, being ready to go at a moments notice is crucial. That translates into being healthy at all times! Good nutritional habits will help achieve health and better performance. This chapter provides basic information on how to eat well at home and how to avoid some of the consequences of frequently eating at fast food places.

Make the Most of Meals At Home

As families are occupied with their children's activities, taking classes in the evening, and other activities away from home, the family dinner has become an endangered activity. Only about one third of families eat dinner together each evening. Yet, children who eat seven or more meals a week with their families have fewer problems in school, are less depressed, and less likely to smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, or use marijuana. Parents have a great opportunity and responsibility to be role models for good eating habits and provide children with nutritious meals.

Want to save money and keep off weight? Home-prepared meals are healthier and less costly than restaurant meals. According to numerous sources, home-prepared meals are higher in many nutrients (fiber, calcium, folate, iron, vitamins B6, B12, C, and E), and generally lower in saturated and trans fats. Also, less fried foods and fewer soft drinks are consumed when meals are eaten at home. All meals should be planned around the
A balanced meal includes foods from at least 3 food groups.

Click for more information on nutrition and eating at home.
Click for 3 days of sample menus.

**Grocery Shopping**

Foods prepared at home can taste good and also be healthy and nutritious. Healthy meals start with healthy ingredients. Commissaries and grocery stores offer a wide variety of foods that can be the building blocks for a healthy and nutritious meal. The key is to know which foods are the most nutritious and can best fuel the body. The list below can help guide selections while at the grocery store.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>10 Tips for Grocery Shopping</th>
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<tr>
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**Recipe Modification**

A number of cookbooks and online recipe sites are devoted to healthy cooking. In addition, most recipes can be modified to decrease calories, fat, sugar, and sodium, and increase fiber.
Modifying a recipe to be healthier does not have to be complicated. Some changes can be made by substituting ingredients or changing the cooking technique. Table 6–1 provides some Sensible Substitutions on how to reduce total fat, calories, sodium, and sugar, and increase fiber, in recipes. The links in the left margin lead to a more extensive list of recipe modification techniques.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When a recipe calls for:</th>
<th>Try this instead:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cream, 1 cup</td>
<td>Evaporated skim milk, 1 cup</td>
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<tr>
<td>White rice</td>
<td>Brown rice, bulgur, kasha, quinoa, or whole wheat couscous</td>
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<tr>
<td>Butter/margarine, ½ cup</td>
<td>Applesauce (or prune puree), ¼ cup + canola oil, butter or margarine, ¼ cup</td>
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<tr>
<td>Egg, 1</td>
<td>Egg whites, 2, or liquid egg substitute, ¼ cup</td>
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<tr>
<td>All-purpose flour, 1 cup</td>
<td>All-purpose flour, ½ cup + whole wheat flour, ½ cup</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pasta</td>
<td>Whole wheat pasta</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaporated milk</td>
<td>Evaporated skim (fat-free) milk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chocolate chips, 1 cup</td>
<td>Mini chocolate chips, ½ cup</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cheese, regular</td>
<td>Low-fat or fat-free cheese</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bacon</td>
<td>Lean Canadian bacon or ham</td>
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<tr>
<td>Broth</td>
<td>Low-sodium broth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sour cream</td>
<td>Non-fat plain yogurt, 1 cup + 2 Tbsp lemon juice + 1 Tbsp skim milk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Frying in fat</td>
<td>Bake, broil, grill, poach, or stir fry</td>
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**Decoding Nutrition Labels**

Food labels are a valuable source of nutrition information at the grocery store. However, they can be quite intimidating if you don’t know how to read them. In a recent study, researchers discovered that though most participants felt confident they understood nutritional labels and could use
them to make healthy choices, only 37% of participants could correctly calculate the total grams of carbohydrate in a 20 oz soda.

The section below shows how to navigate around a food label to determine whether the food is a healthy choice. When shopping for groceries, the labels of food should be read and compared to determine which is healthiest.

**Ingredient List**

By federal regulation, any food made with more than one ingredient must carry an ingredient list on the label. The ingredients are listed in descending order according to weight, so the first ingredient is found in the largest amount.

**Serving Size**

The place to start when looking at the Nutrition Facts label is the serving size. It indicates a normal portion and how many servings are in the package. Always compare the label serving size with the amount that is actually eaten.

**% Daily Value (DV)**

Briefly discussed in Chapter 4, Percent of Daily Values appears on the label of most foods. It represents how much one serving contributes nutritionally to a 2,000-calorie-a-day diet. For example, a food is defined as “healthy” if it provides at least 10% of one or more of vitamins A or C, iron, calcium, protein, or fiber. A DV of 20% or more is considered high; try to aim high for vitamins, minerals and fiber.

**Points to Consider:**

- Depending on age, gender, and activity level, more or less than 2,000 kcal a day may be needed; so more or less than 100% DV may be required. Most Warfighters require at least 3,000 kcal/day, so 150% DV is needed.
- When energy requirements are unknown, the % DV offers a good reference point. If a food item lists 50% DV for cholesterol, a serving of this food provides 50% of the daily cholesterol needs for the 2,000 calorie diet.
- A DV of 5% or less is considered low; try to aim for low in total fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol.

**Daily Values Footnote**

This reference chart applies to healthy people requiring 2,000–2,500 calories daily, and shows daily maximum amounts for total fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium. Remember, these numbers may not be exact for you as you may require more or less calories daily.
Descriptors—Nutrient Content

Terminology on products is important for consumers to know and understand. Click here to view terms that may appear on product packaging; these terms are regulated by FDA labeling criteria.

**Breakfast: Off to a Healthy Start!**

Forty years of breakf...
• **Fruit:** Grab several pieces of fruit to go and try some with low-fat yogurt.

Lunch is a great time to eat fruits and vegetables. Both fresh fruits and vegetables are nutrient packed, satisfying foods that will replenish glycogen, and help with hydration.

[Click for Tips on Brown Bagging Ideas.]

### Dinner: Fueling for the Night

Dinner should not be the largest meal of the day. However, food records provided by Warfighters indicate that most calories consumed, especially during the workweek, occur in the evening hours. This is because other meals and snacks have not been consistently eaten throughout the day. Lack of time preparing for dinner and poor planning are also issues. Although planning takes time, and shopping for foods is a must, many nutritious meals can be prepared ahead of time or within 30 minutes after getting home. The following are quick dinner strategies:

- Buy pre-cooked meats to heat in the microwave.
- Use meats and fish in vacuum bags with pasta or rice.
- Use bagged lettuce, baby carrots, and spinach.
- Mix canned chili beans with diced tomatoes and precooked chicken.
- Use canned fruit in natural juices with chocolate syrup as a dessert.
- Prepare a double batch and freeze half for another meal.

Other examples of easy, yet nutritious, dinner ideas include:

- Whole grain pasta or rice with lean meat/fish and vegetables.
- Whole grain rice and beans with salsa.
- Sirloin steak, baked potato, and salad.
- Salmon, sweet potato, and vegetables.
- Pizza with Canadian bacon and vegetables.
- Caesar salad with chicken and garlic toast.
- Sandwiches made with whole grain bread, lean meat, lettuce, and tomato (grain, meat and vegetable groups).

Cooking foods, such as rice, pasta, and other grains, in large quantities can provide the staples for quick meal planning throughout the week. Adding lean meats and vegetables to the grill are other ways to end the day with a nutritious meal before bedtime.
Fruits and Vegetables—More Matters

Current evidence shows that diets rich in fruits and vegetables are associated with improved health, reduced risk of chronic diseases, and some types of cancer. Fruits and vegetables are high in fiber and water, and low in calories. The term “nutrient density” has been used several times, and another important term is “energy density.” The relationship between the number of calories in a food and the weight or volume of the food is called “energy density.” Although people have difficulty limiting the amount of calories they eat, most seem to be able to limit the volume, due to satiety, or the feeling of fullness. Fruits and vegetables provide good substitutes for energy-dense foods, and provide satiety with fewer calories. Eating several servings of fruits and vegetables will aid in weight management and provide the nutrients required for good health and disease prevention.

Calcium, potassium, fiber, magnesium, and vitamins A, C and E are the nutrients most lacking in the diet. Fruits and vegetables are rich in these nutrients, and half of your plate should consist of fruits and vegetables.

It is important to get as many servings of fruit and vegetables a day as possible to maximize performance and health. According to the latest research, men, on average, consume less fruit and vegetables than required for good health and cancer prevention. For instance, most men consume less than four servings of fruits and vegetables each day, despite needing almost twice that amount. Every Warfighter should consume at least 2.5 cups of fruit and 4 cups of vegetables. This is not always possible during deployments, but it is when at home. Eat at least six servings of fruits and vegetables a day and choose a variety to benefit from the different vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients each choice offers. Fruits and vegetables are the super foods that will promote health and performance, maintain weight, and provide fluid for hydration, as just a few of the benefits.

A 25-year old male exercising more than 1 hour per day needs 2.5 cups of fruit and 4 cups of vegetables every day.

Click to determine how much fruit and vegetables you need each day.