



# Member Pulse

## Digest

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## **Gluten-Free and Fabulous**

When you love good food, a doctor's order to follow a gluten-free diet can be upsetting. But thanks to a number of gluten-free options on the market, you can still enjoy healthy, satisfying meals. Being gluten-free just means you need to get a little more creative in the kitchen and start cooking with both naturally gluten-free and gluten-free alternatives. This list of acceptable foods is a good starting point. (A dietician can provide more guidance.)

### **Naturally gluten-free foods**

- Unprocessed beans, seeds and nuts (in their natural form)
- Fresh meats, eggs, fish, and poultry (in their natural form)
- Fruits and vegetables
- Most dairy products
- Buckwheat, amaranth, millet, quinoa, sorghum, and teff
- Corn, cornmeal and hominy
- Flax
- Gluten-free flours (rice, soy, corn, potato, bean)
- Rice
- Soy
- Arrowroot and tapioca

### **Foods to always avoid**

- Barley, rye and triticale
- Wheat (e.g. bulgur, durum flour, farina, graham flour, kamut, semolina, spelt)

### **Avoid these foods unless labeled gluten-free**

- Beer
- Cakes, pies and candies
- Breads and cereals
- Crackers, cookies and croutons
- Imitation meat or seafood
- Pastas

- Processed lunch meats
- Salad dressings and gravies
- Sauces, including soy sauce
- Seasoned rice mixes
- Soups and soup bases

Now that you understand the basics of a gluten-free diet, the following tips can help you apply this knowledge to dining out, shopping, cooking, and generally living well, gluten-free:

- When dining out, look at the restaurant's menu online first to see if they have gluten-free options. At the restaurant, ask if they have a gluten-free menu or if they can make a certain dish gluten-free for you.
- Do some online research and see if you can find natural food stores or even an entirely gluten-free store in your neighborhood. Many grocery stores also have a gluten-free section or "natural foods" section. Your local grocery store may even have a list of their products that are gluten-free, which can come in handy when you're scanning the aisles. Many stores also attach a "gluten-free" label on the shelf beside the product. If you live in an area without many gluten-free options, consider ordering gluten-free foods online.
- Eating gluten-free at restaurants can be expensive. With the Academy of Culinary Nutrition's list of top 50 gluten-free blogs, you can learn to make your own gluten-free meals:  
<http://www.culinarynutrition.com/top-50-gluten-free-blogs/>.
- When you are traveling, it may be difficult to find gluten-free foods. Consider packing some staples for the trip, such as gluten-free bread, gluten-free oatmeal or gluten-free energy bars.
- Before you buy food, check out the product reviews at online retail sites, such as Amazon (www.amazon.com). You can find everything from highly-rated, gluten-free instant oatmeal to beloved bread mixes.
- As a final tip, don't feel shy about being gluten-free. While saying you're gluten-free may have been a conversation killer in the past, the diet is becoming more common. Chances are, if you mention you are gluten-free at a dinner party, you'll soon be swapping recipes with someone else.



## Menu Planning Made Simple

It's 5:00 p.m. – do you know what you're having for dinner? If so, you're probably less stressed, with the ingredients ready and waiting for a healthy meal you actually have time to prepare. If not, you may be dreading coming home to an empty refrigerator, tempting you to give in to pleas for fast food or pizza.

Preparing healthy meals during the week really can be easy if you have a good plan. Here are some tips to help you get started. To find recipes for all of the dishes mentioned below, plus hundreds of other healthy recipes, visit your Employee Assistance Program's [Wellness Resource Center](#).

### What *is* a healthy meal, anyway?

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) dietary guidelines can be found at [ChooseMyPlate.gov](#). The USDA recommends that you focus on fruits, vary your veggies, make at least half your grains whole, go lean with protein, and eat calcium-rich foods.

### Don't forget about breakfast!

If you have kids, you've probably explained the importance of eating a healthy breakfast many times. Do you follow your own advice? Whole-grain cereal with milk and fruit is a healthy, easy choice, but here are some ideas to make breakfast a bit more interesting:

- Have homemade muffins in your freezer, made with whole grains and fruit or vegetables (check out recipes for rhubarb and berry nut muffins, blueberry muffins with hazelnuts and pumpkin spice muffins).
- Make a smoothie with fat-free or low-fat yogurt, a banana, and your choice of fresh or frozen fruit.
- For a low-fat breakfast packed with protein and vitamins, try a frittata or omelet with egg whites and veggies left over from last night's dinner.

### Beyond PB&J

With a little creativity, sandwiches or wraps with whole-grain bread or tortillas can be nutritious and convenient brown bag staples. Swapping bananas, raisins and/or apple slices for jelly can transform a peanut butter sandwich into a nutritional powerhouse. Shredded carrots, sliced cucumbers and grilled eggplant or zucchini will liven up your turkey sandwich, or perhaps convince you to skip the turkey altogether.

Lunch doesn't have to come between two slices of bread, though. Instead, you can try:

- Salad in a jar – Layer salad ingredients in a glass jar, putting the salad dressing and sturdiest ingredients (shredded carrots, beans, lentils, etc.) at the bottom and the most delicate ingredients (lettuce, spinach, etc.) at the top. When it's time for lunch, upend the jar into a bowl and enjoy.
- Take a dip – Prepare a healthy, high-protein dip (such as black-eyed pea hummus, white bean spread with spinach and red peppers, or creamy feta spread) and pack it with sliced vegetables and whole-grain pita wedges.
- Warm up – If you have a microwave at work, leftover casserole, chili or soup can make a hearty lunch the next day. If you'd like to pack soup or chili in an insulated container, the USDA recommends filling the container with boiling water first, to heat it thoroughly, and then (after pouring out the water) adding the food while it's piping hot. Close the container quickly and keep it closed until lunchtime to keep the food at 140°F or above.

### **Dinner in advance**

Buying dinner from your store's freezer section is convenient, but commercially prepared frozen meals are often high in sodium and nutritionally out of balance. Why not make your own frozen meals? You'll save money and will know exactly what ingredients were used to prepare your meal. Here are some dishes that freeze well:

- Soups and stews – Check out recipes for white bean soup, lentil barley stew and spinach soup with tomato.
- Chili – Go vegetarian with black bean or sweet potato chili, or add lean cuts of chicken, turkey or beef.
- Casseroles and one-pot meals – In addition to your family's favorites, try some new additions, like barley, turkey and butternut squash casserole; spicy pumpkin curry with black-eyed peas; or black bean and chicken enchiladas.

### **A few warnings**

- Watch out for ingredients that don't freeze well, like potatoes, cream and ricotta cheese, sour cream, and salad greens.
- Wrap, label and date foods carefully before freezing. Frozen foods will taste better if they're frozen quickly, so avoid stacking items in the freezer during the freezing process.
- Move frozen foods to the refrigerator in the morning or the night before to thaw for that night's dinner. Never thaw frozen food at room temperature.

### **Salads with a shelf life**

A green salad with fresh vegetables is healthy, tasty and convenient, but leftovers don't keep too well. Here are a few nutritionally rich salads that you can make ahead of time and keep in your fridge for a few days:

- Quinoa salad with roasted autumn vegetables
- Black beans with corn and tomatoes
- Mediterranean lentil salad

### **Make it work**

Now that you have some ideas, it's time to make a plan. Involve family members in menu planning, shopping and food preparation – teamwork makes everything more fun. The [Wellness Resource Center](#) has some very yummy (and healthy) dessert recipes, too!



## **Caffeine: How much is too much?**

Caffeine has its perks, but it can pose problems, too. Find out how much is too much and if you need to curb your consumption.

If you rely on caffeine to wake you up and keep you going, you aren't alone. Caffeine stimulates the central nervous system, alleviating fatigue, increasing wakefulness, and improving concentration and focus.

### **When to consider cutting back**

For most healthy adults, moderate doses of caffeine — 200 to 300 milligrams (mg), or about two to four cups of brewed coffee a day — aren't harmful. But some circumstances may warrant limiting or even ending your caffeine routine. Read on to see if any of these apply to you.

### **You drink 4 or more cups a day**

Although moderate caffeine intake isn't likely to cause harm, too much can lead to some unpleasant effects. Heavy daily caffeine use — more than 500 to 600 mg a day — may cause:

- Insomnia
- Nervousness
- Restlessness
- Irritability
- Stomach upset
- Fast heartbeat
- Muscle tremors

### **Even a little makes you jittery**

Some people are more sensitive to caffeine than are others. If you're susceptible to the effects of caffeine, just small amounts — even one cup of coffee or tea — may prompt unwanted effects, such as restlessness and sleep problems.

How you react to caffeine may be determined in part by how much caffeine you're used to drinking. People who don't regularly drink caffeine tend to be more sensitive to its negative effects. Other factors may include body mass, age, medication use and health conditions such as anxiety disorders. Research also suggests that men are more susceptible to the effects of caffeine than are women.

## You're not getting enough sleep

Most adults need seven to eight hours of sleep each night. But caffeine can interfere with this much-needed sleep. Chronically losing sleep — whether it's from work, travel, stress or too much caffeine — results in sleep deprivation. Sleep loss is cumulative, and even small nightly decreases can add up and disturb your daytime alertness and performance.

Using caffeine to mask sleep deprivation can create an unwelcome cycle. For example, you drink caffeinated beverages because you have trouble staying awake during the day. But the caffeine keeps you from falling asleep at night, shortening the length of time you sleep.

## You're taking certain medications and supplements

Certain medications and herbal supplements may interact with caffeine. Here are some examples.

- **Some antibiotics.** Ciprofloxacin (Cipro) and norfloxacin (Noroxin) — types of antibacterial medications — can interfere with the breakdown of caffeine. This may increase the length of time caffeine remains in your body and amplify its unwanted effects.
- **Theophylline (Theo-24, Elixophyllin, others).** This medication — which opens up bronchial airways by relaxing the surrounding muscles (a bronchodilator) — tends to have some caffeine-like effects. Taking it along with caffeinated foods and beverages may increase the concentration of theophylline in your blood. This can cause adverse effects, such as nausea, vomiting and heart palpitations.
- **Echinacea.** This herbal supplement, which is sometimes used to prevent colds or other infections, may increase the concentration of caffeine in your blood and may increase caffeine's unpleasant effects.

Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about whether caffeine might affect your medications. He or she can say whether you need to reduce or eliminate caffeine from your diet.

## Curbing your caffeine habit

Whether it's for one of the reasons above — or because you want to trim your spending on pricey coffee drinks — cutting back on caffeine can be challenging. An abrupt decrease in caffeine may cause caffeine withdrawal symptoms such as headaches, fatigue, irritability and nervousness. Fortunately, these symptoms are usually mild and resolve after a few days.

To change your caffeine habit more gradually, try these tips:

- **Keep tabs.** Start paying attention to how much caffeine you're getting from foods and beverages. It may be more than you think. Read labels carefully. Even then, your estimate may be a little low because not all foods or drinks list caffeine. Chocolate, which has a small amount, doesn't.
- **Cut back.** But do it gradually. For example, drink one fewer can of soda or drink a smaller cup of coffee each day. Or avoid drinking caffeinated beverages late in the day. This will help your body get used to the lower levels of caffeine and lessen potential withdrawal effects.
- **Go decaf.** Most decaffeinated beverages look and taste the same as their caffeinated counterparts.
- **Shorten the brew time or go herbal.** When making tea, brew it for less time. This cuts down on its caffeine content. Or choose herbal teas that don't have caffeine.
- **Check the bottle.** Some over-the-counter pain relievers contain caffeine — as much as 130 mg of caffeine in one dose. Look for caffeine-free pain relievers instead.

## The bottom line

If you're like most adults, caffeine is a part of your daily routine. And most often it doesn't pose a health problem. But be mindful of those situations in which you need to curtail your caffeine habit.



## Food and Mood

According to WebMD, growing research suggests that your diet may affect your mood.<sup>1</sup> The following foods (and nutrients) may not only be good for your mood, they can also help your overall health:<sup>2</sup>

- **Omega-3s:** Omega-3s may protect us from chronic stress damage. Canned light tuna, sardines, flaxseed, and chia seeds are all good sources of omega-3s.<sup>3</sup>
- **Complex carbs:** Carbs trigger the brain to make more serotonin, a feel-good, calming chemical. Complex carbs provide a steady supply of serotonin. By keeping blood sugar levels stable, complex carbs can also help you feel balanced. Whole-grain breads, pastas and cereals (including oatmeal) are all good sources of complex carbs. Avoid simple carbs, such as sugary foods and drinks.<sup>2</sup>
- **Vitamin C:** Oranges are packed with vitamin C. Studies suggest this vitamin can lower stress hormone levels while making the immune system stronger.<sup>2</sup>
- **Magnesium:** Low magnesium can contribute to headaches, fatigue and premenstrual syndrome (PMS). Green, leafy vegetables, cooked soybeans, pumpkin seeds, and salmon are all good sources of magnesium.<sup>2</sup>
- **B vitamins:** Vitamin B-12 and other B vitamins play a role in mood and other brain functions. Low levels of B-12 and other B vitamins such as vitamin B-6 and folate may be linked to depression.<sup>4</sup> Vitamin B-12 can be found in animal products such as fish, lean meat, poultry, eggs, and low fat and fat-free milk. Fortified cereal is also a good source of B-12 and other B vitamins.
- **Polyphenols:** Eating a diet rich in polyphenols (found in colorful fruits, vegetables, spices, teas and wines) may support brain health and help battle brain-related disorders. For example, green tea and turmeric have been associated with better brain function, better mood and protection against various brain diseases.<sup>5</sup>
- **Tryptophan:** Tryptophan helps production of serotonin in the brain. Try to incorporate tryptophan-rich foods in your diet, such as pumpkin seeds, sesame seeds and kidney beans.<sup>6</sup>
- **Calcium:** Calcium can ease tension, anxiety and mood swings linked to PMS. Try a glass of warm skimmed or low-fat milk before bed.<sup>7</sup>

**Healthy eating habits**

Mayo Clinic recommends that you eat small meals often, drink plenty of water, avoid caffeine, limit alcohol, and include protein with breakfast.<sup>8</sup> In addition, it's best to avoid sugary "comfort foods." Research shows that they don't provide any more of a mood boost than eating a neutral food or no food. (Polyphenol-rich dark chocolate is an exception and may boost your mood.)<sup>9</sup>

The right eating habits combined with eating nutrient-rich foods can help you to feel your best.

**Getting Started is Easy!**  
**Call your EAP for more information**