

# 6 Optimal Choices for Home Chow

## In This Chapter

Make the Most of  
Meals at Home

Grocery Shopping

Recipe Modification

Decoding Nutrition Labels

Breakfast

Lunch

Dinner

Fruits and Vegetables

## 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.

**T**he 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 here for more details on the 10 Tips for Grocery Shopping.](#)

five food groups and provide foods from at least three food groups (a grain, vegetable and/or fruit, and meat and/or dairy) to ensure nutrient requirements are being met.

[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.

### 10 Tips for Grocery Shopping

1	Plan ahead by using a shopping list.
2	Shop the perimeter of the store to include all food groups.
3	Buy a colorful array of fresh fruits and vegetables.
4	Buy whole grains with good sources of dietary fiber.
5	Buy fat-free or low-fat dairy products.
6	Buy lean protein sources.
7	Consider meat alternatives, such as beans, nuts, grains and soy products.
8	Buy heart healthy fats such as olive and canola oils.
9	Choose beverages that do not contain corn syrup and sugar.
10	Choose comfort foods with discretion by reviewing Nutrition Labels.

## 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 6–1. Sensible Substitutions

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

## 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

☀ [Click here for more recipe modification techniques.](#)

☀ [Click here for helpful a substitution list.](#)

☀ [Click here for a look at easy to cook recipes from Cooking Light Magazine.](#)

☀ [Click here for a look at easy to cook recipes from the American Diabetes Association.](#)



Sample label for  
Macaroni & Cheese.

<b>Nutrition Facts</b>	
①	Serving Size 1 cup (228g) Servings Per Container 2
②	Amount Per Serving <b>Calories 250</b> Calories from Fat 110
	<b>% Daily Value*</b>
③	<b>Total Fat 12g</b> <b>18%</b>
	Saturated Fat 3g <b>15%</b>
	Trans Fat 3g
③	<b>Cholesterol 30mg</b> <b>10%</b>
	<b>Sodium 470mg</b> <b>20%</b>
	<b>Total Carbohydrate 31g</b> <b>10%</b>
	Dietary Fiber 0g <b>0%</b>
	Sugars 5g
	<b>Protein 5g</b>
④	Vitamin A <b>4%</b>
	Vitamin C <b>2%</b>
	Calcium <b>20%</b>
	Iron <b>4%</b>
⑤	* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.
	Calories:      2,000      2,500
	Total Fat      Less than 65g      80g
	Sat Fat      Less than 20g      25g
	Cholesterol      Less than 300mg      300mg
	Sodium      Less than 2,400mg      2,400mg
	Total Carbohydrate      300g      375g
	Dietary Fiber      25g      30g

- ① Start here.
- ② Check calories.
- ③ Limit these nutrients.
- ④ Get enough of these nutrients.
- ⑤ Footnote.
- ⑥ Quick guide to % DV:  
5% or less is low.  
20% or more is high.

☀ Click here for more information on nutrition labels.

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 breakfast-related studies have shown that jump-starting the day with breakfast is beneficial. Despite its benefits, breakfast may be the meal most often neglected or skipped. If a car can't run without fuel, how can a body? Breakfast is the body's early-morning refueling stop. After 8–12 hours without food, the body needs glucose (also known as blood sugar). A bowl of cereal with low-fat milk, toasted whole grain breads, and a piece of fresh fruit are easy, quick, and nutrient-dense selections that can be eaten at home.

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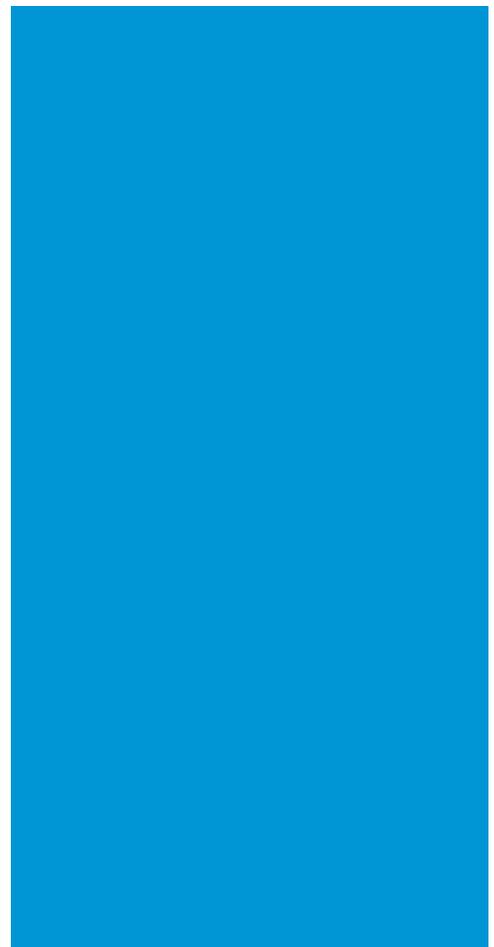
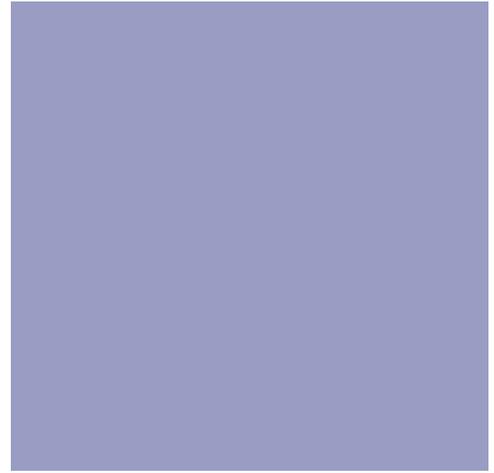
Breakfast eaters are likely to have more strength and endurance, favorable body weight, and better concentration and problem-solving ability than non-breakfast eaters.

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## Lunch: How to Make the Grade

A sure way to eat a nutritious lunch is by bringing it from home. Week-day brown bagging also saves you money. More importantly, you have control over what and how much is eaten and, how the food is prepared. Many non-traditional lunches can be made at home by selecting foods and beverages from the shopping tips offered in the commissary. Some useful ideas include:

- **Vegetables:** Pack them raw or lightly steamed (then chilled) with a small container of dip or salad dressing.
- **Hummus:** Use as a dip or a sandwich spread.
- **Stuffed Tomatoes or Bell Peppers:** Add tuna, chicken, egg, pasta, or rice.
- **Salads:** Don't forget salads along with sandwiches.
- **Sushi Rolls:** A terrific lunchbox fare.
- **Trail Mix:** Make a trail mix with raisins or other dried fruit combined with a whole-grain cereal or air-popped popcorn.



- **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.

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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.

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[Click to determine how much fruit and vegetables you need each day.](#)

Table 6–2. Reasons to Eat A Variety of Fruits and Vegetables Each Day

Packed with vitamins and minerals.

Reduces the risk of heart disease, stroke, and some cancers.

An excellent source of fiber and antioxidants.

Helps maintain a healthy weight.

Taste delicious and a variety to choose from.

