

Nutrition News

Department of Human Nutrition

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Nutrient-Dense Foods or Nutrient-Rich Foods?

Which is it? The phrase “nutrient-rich foods” is a consumer-friendly way to describe nutrient-dense foods. The Dietary Guidelines advise consumers to eat a variety of nutrient-dense foods and beverages within the basic food groups while choosing foods that limit the intake of saturated and *trans* fat, cholesterol, added sugars, salt and alcohol.

Nutrient-dense foods are defined as “foods that provide substantial amounts of vitamins, minerals and other nutrients with relatively few calories.” Low nutrient-dense foods supply calories but relatively small amounts of micronutrients and sometimes none at all.

Concern that most Americans are overweight, yet undernourished, has refocused on the long-standing, underutilized concept of nutrient density to make healthier food choices. There is widespread support for nutrient density in scientific, academic,

government, and industry communities.

The nutrient-dense or nutrient-rich food categories outlined by the Nutrient Rich Foods Coalition, My Pyramid and the Dietary Guidelines include:

- Whole, fortified and fiber-rich grain foods
- Vibrantly colored vegetables and potatoes
- Brightly colored fruits and 100% fruit juice
- Fat-free and lowfat milk, cheese and yogurt
- Lean meats, skinless poultry, fish, eggs, beans and nuts

To enjoy these nutrient-rich foods, shop the perimeter of the grocery store. These are common, everyday foods that are easy to find in local markets. They are affordable, especially if purchased in season or locally. Smart choices are the foods with the lowest amounts of solid fats or added sugars: for example, fat-free (skim) milk instead of whole milk and unsweetened rather

than sweetened applesauce. Also, consider how food is prepared. For example, choose skinless baked chicken instead of fried chicken and choose fresh fruit instead of a fruit pastry.

Consumers need to choose foods according to nutrient density so they can get the most nutrition for their calories. With sedentary lifestyles and poor food choices, many Americans exceed their caloric needs without meeting their nutrient requirements for B vitamins, vitamins A, C and E, calcium, magnesium, zinc and iron.

The Nutrition Facts label is a guide to help consumers make the most nutrient-rich food choices while staying within their daily calorie budget. Read labels on packaged foods and look for Nutri-Facts posters and brochures for fresh foods such as produce, fish and meat to help select foods that provide the greatest nutritional “punch.”

The Nutrient Rich Foods Coalition is a partnership that brings together leading scientific researchers, health professionals, communications experts, and agricultural commodity organizations. Members represent 15 agricultural commodity organizations reflecting the five basic food groups. The coalition is dedicated to helping people learn to get more nutrition from their calories by eating the nutrient-rich way. It supports research leading to science-based and consumer-tested educational materials for use by health professionals.

Live Well! Enjoy Nutrient-Rich Foods is an educational guide to assist in teaching and communicating the concept of a nutrient-rich approach to choosing a healthful diet. “Live Well” can be accessed online at: <http://www.nutrientrichfoods.org/documents/toolkit.pdf>.

For a one-page handout on nutrient-dense food choices, scroll down to page 3 of this issue of Nutrition News, or visit <http://www.mypyramid.gov/STEPS/recycling%20bin/nutrientdensefoodchoices.html>

References: www.MyPyramid.gov, Achieve Better Health with Nutrient Rich Foods Resource Guide 2010, www.NutrientRichFoods.org, 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans

For more information about healthy eating, contact your local extension office. The Food Assistance Program can help people of all ages with low income buy nutritious foods for a better diet. To find out more, call toll-free 1-888-369-4777. Contents of this publication may be freely reproduced for educational purposes. All other rights reserved. In each case, credit **Kathy Walsten**, BS, Nutrition Educator, Family Nutrition Program, Department of Human Nutrition; Kansas State University; Nutrient-Dense Foods or Nutrient-Rich Foods?, April 2010.

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Steps to a Healthier Weight

Making nutrient-dense food choices

Here are some foods that contain extra calories from solid fats and added sugars and some “smarter” replacements. Choices on the right side are more nutrient-dense — lower in solid fats and added sugars. Try these new ideas instead of your usual choices. This guide gives sample ideas — it is not a complete list. Use the Nutrition Facts label to help identify more alternatives.

Instead of...	Replace with...
<p>Milk Group Sweetened fruit yogurt Whole milk Natural or processed cheese</p>	<p>Plain fat-free yogurt with fresh fruit Lowfat or fat-free milk Lowfat or reduced- fat cheese</p>
<p>Meat Group Beef (chuck, rib, brisket) Chicken with skin Lunch meats (such as bologna) Hot dogs (regular) Bacon or sausage Refried beans</p>	<p>Beef (loin, round) fat trimmed off Chicken without skin Lowfat lunch meats (95% to 97% fat free) Hot dogs (lower fat) Canadian bacon or lean ham Cooked or canned kidney or pinto beans</p>
<p>Grain Group Granola Sweetened cereals Pasta with cheese sauce Pasta with white sauce (alfredo) Croissants or pastries</p>	<p>Reduced fat granola Unsweetened cereals with cut-up fruit Pasta with vegetables (primavera) Pasta with red sauce (marinara) Toast or bread (try whole grain types)</p>
<p>Fruit Group Apple or berry pie Sweetened applesauce Canned fruit packed in syrup</p>	<p>Fresh apple or berries Unsweetened applesauce Canned fruit packed in juice or "lite" syrup</p>
<p>Vegetable Group Deep-fried french fries Baked potato with cheese sauce Fried vegetables</p>	<p>Oven-baked “french fries” Baked potato with salsa Steamed or roasted vegetables</p>
<p>Solid Fats and Added Sugars Cream cheese Sour cream Regular margarine or butter</p>	<p>Light or fat-free cream cheese Plain lowfat or fat free yogurt Light-spread margarines, diet margarine</p>
<p>Sugar-sweetened soft drinks Sweetened tea or drinks Syrup on pancakes or french toast Candy, cookies, cake, or pastry Sugar in recipes</p>	<p>Seltzer mixed with 100% fruit juice Unsweetened tea or water Unsweetened applesauce or berries as a topping Fresh or dried fruit Experiment with reducing amount and adding spices (cinnamon, nutmeg, etc.)</p>