

## Meal Plans and Food Guides: Nutrition Maps to Good Health

You are just leaving the doctor's office after your yearly checkup. Your blood pressure is a little higher than the doctor would like and your cholesterol is elevated. The doctor warns you must lose some weight and hands you a tear off diet sheet on your way out the door. He also suggests you see a registered dietitian. With some reluctance, you make the appointment. What happens next?

The dietitian will spend some time talking with you about your individual food likes and dislikes, your normal daily schedule and eating patterns. How often do you eat out? How are your food preparation skills? Does grocery shopping stress you out?

Gathering a little physical information is necessary to formulate a meal plan such as height, current weight, sex and age. Other information to be collected includes current medications, discussion of any chronic disease conditions and current exercise habits.

The third area of discussion is setting realistic weight goals to prevent roller coaster dieting and thinking about the type of eater you are. A meal plan defines portions, meals and snacks so an eating experience has a beginning and an end. Knowing the type of eater you are helps increase your awareness of food and fullness while eating and avoiding pitfalls such as rushed or emotional eating.

When the appointment is finished, you should emerge with a meal plan and activity suggestions specifically designed for you. It will contain a suggested calorie level, but allow for all types of foods. Some people will mistakenly call this a "diet," but it is not. A diet tends to be very restricted, may cut out whole food groups and is short-term with little lifestyle change happening. Meal plans are actually a roadmap for long term healthy eating and lifestyle change that you can follow for a lifetime. Have you wanted to start the journey of a healthy lifestyle but didn't know how to start? Just like AAA can provide you with a map to your favorite vacation destination, a registered dietitian can help you down the road of good health.