Food Tracking Apps and the HEED Eating Pattern

We recommend the HEED plate as a food-based model of eating that will help you get the nutrients your body needs. The Healthy Eating Every Day book provides instructions and downloadable worksheets to help you track your dietary intake in relation to the HEED plate food groups.

But many people like the convenience of recording what they eat in a mobile app or other online tool. If you've looked at or have been using a food tracking app, you've noticed that the feedback provided is based on nutrients, not the food groups we encourage you to use in the HEED program.

How do you use the nutrition information from a food tracking app or online tool while still adhering to the HEED program?

There are several approaches you can take. To help you decide which path to take, first review the nutrients your app tracks for you.

- If it includes only a few nutrients, then choose option 1 below.
- If it includes many different nutrients—carbohydrate, fat, protein, and at least four vitamins and minerals (e.g., vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, iron)—choose option 2.

Option 1: Revisit Your App

Since your app gives you information on just a few nutrients, it won't be enough to determine whether you're getting the nutrients you need from what you're eating. We recommend you take one of the following actions:

- Find another app that provides a more comprehensive listing of nutrients (then choose option 2). Some apps will provide additional nutrient information for a monthly or annual subscription fee.
- Go to http://Choosemyplate.gov/MyPlatePlan to get a MyPlate Plan and download the MyPlate Daily Checklist for your recommended calorie level. It's a really simple way of logging what you're eating and seeing what food groups you're missing. You can then adapt your meals and snacks throughout the day to ensure you stay on track to meeting your daily food intake goals.
- Instead of using an app or online tool, track your food intake using the HEED Daily Food Log found in appendix B of your book and use the following instructions for assessing your diet. (Don't forget to look at appendix E to find a daily calorie level that's right for you.)

Assessing Your Diet Using the HEED Daily Food Log

People often think their diets are healthier than they actually are. The best way to know whether you're getting enough of the food groups and nutrients you need is to analyze what you eat in a typical day and compare it to what's recommended for you.

There are many tools that can help you do this, from mobile apps to websites to paper-and-pencil methods. The following instructions provide the general steps for analyzing your diet using the HEED Daily Food Log found in appendix B. The HEED Daily Food Log is a great tool that you'll use throughout the program to track your eating habits. Session 3 of the Healthy Eating Every Day book goes into more detail.

Here's how to get the most out of analyzing your diet:

1. Choose a typical day (or days) to keep track of all the food and beverages that you eat. After each meal or snack, record everything you ate and drank on the HEED Daily Food Log. Begin with breakfast and add lunch, dinner, and snacks throughout the day. Be sure to include the amount eaten, the food group it belongs to, and the amount of the food group each item corresponds to. You can look at the list on page 11 and table 1.2 for food group amount equivalents. Food labels and online websites such as Calorie King or restaurant websites can provide information on saturated fat and added sugars in foods. Be sure to pay special attention to portion sizes so that you don't underestimate or overestimate these nutrients. (Don't worry about the Optional columns on the Daily Food Log at this time.)
2. If you're waiting until later to record your day's food intake on the Daily Food Log, use a pad of paper or a notes page on your smartphone to write down what you eat throughout the day. Don't rely on memory. Be sure to list the amount of each food that you ate.
3. Measure foods, especially in the beginning, until you get familiar with what a proper portion looks like.
4. It may be difficult to estimate the food group equivalents for mixed dishes or to figure out what food group some items fall into. That's OK. You're just trying to get an estimate, so do the best you can.
5. After you've recorded all the foods for the day, add up your amounts for each food group and record them in the My Amounts Today column. Fill in one circle for each 1/2 cup or 1 ounce equivalent depending on the food group. Use table 1.3 to determine the recommended amount of each food group you need and enter that in the second column of the table. You can now compare what you ate during the day to what you should be eating for a healthy, balanced diet.
6. Record your results in the HEED Assessment Log in appendix A. Together with the goal assessment that you'll do in session 2, you'll have a good idea of the areas you need to work on to bring your diet into balance.

From Human Kinetics, 2017, *Healthy eating every day,* 2nd ed. (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics).

Option 2: Full Speed Ahead

If you chose this option, your preferred app tracks a good list of nutrients. How close do you come to achieving 100% of the recommended intake for each nutrient tracked in the app? If you're close on most days, then chances are you're making good food group choices and eating a balanced diet. Keep doing what you're doing. However, if your intake is consistently and significantly lower or higher than the recommended levels cited in your app, you have some work to do.

If you're low in some nutrients, you need to eat more foods that are rich in those nutrients or add foods that are good sources of the lagging nutrients. For example, if you're consistently low in calcium, you should look at adding more milk, calcium-fortified dairy alternatives, yogurt, low-fat cheese, and dark leafy greens such as spinach or kale to your diet.

On the flip side, if you're getting significantly more of some nutrients than your body needs, you need to trim down the amounts or frequency with which you eat certain foods. For example, if your app is telling you that you're eating too much fat, you'll need to find ways to scale back on your intake of oils, margarine, butter, mayonnaise, and other high-fat foods.

Once you've identified the nutrients that are too low or too high in your diet, use the following websites to find food sources for your target nutrients and adjust your intake accordingly.

- WebMD Food Sources for Vitamins and Minerals: www.webmd.com (search for "vitamin and mineral sources")
- Washington State University myNutrition Nutrition Basics: https://mynutrition.wsu.edu/nutrition-basics

As you can see, diet assessment is quite a balancing act, especially when you try to understand what you're eating at a nutrient level. It may take several attempts to figure out the best eating pattern that provides the right amount of nutrients that your body needs.