



اختار الصحة Choose Wisely



► In today's digital world, technology is part of many aspects of our daily lives. Our food choices and physical activity levels are influenced not only by our personal decisions, but also by the digital environment around us, which can shape our habits and behaviors in ways we may not always notice. Although this digital era brings some challenges, it also provides new opportunities to make healthier choices and adopt positive lifestyle habits. This guide is designed to help you understand how the digital environment can affect your health behaviors and support you in making informed, balanced decisions that fit your needs and lifestyle, so you can stay in control of your health



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Remember
Every click leads to a
choice, and every **choice**
shapes **a habit**



How Smart Applications Influence Our Lifestyle



Over the past few decades, rapid changes have transformed the way people live, work, and interact with their environment. These changes have affected many aspects of daily life, including eating habits and levels of physical activity

► Nutrition Transition

The nutrition transition refers to long-term changes in dietary patterns and physical activity levels that often occur alongside major economic, social, and technological developments.

► The Shift Toward Physical Inactivity

One of the most significant changes has been the shift from active lifestyles to more sedentary ways of living. Digital technologies, convenient services, and modern transportation have become essential parts of daily life, reducing the amount of physical effort required for many everyday activities.

According to data from the World Health Organization (2022), the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have some of the highest obesity rates in the world, with an estimated 31% to 43% of the population classified medically as living with obesity.

Technology, however, can also be part of the solution. Fitness applications and wearable devices can support more active lifestyles and help reduce the risk of noncommunicable diseases. A 2024 study found that users of applications that include motivational features such as challenges, points, and leaderboards maintained higher levels of physical activity for longer periods, with activity levels increasing by 28%.



Smart applications have also improved access to nutrition and health information, helping people make healthier choices by

1

Making it easier to find and compare food options and monitor calorie intake.

2

Supporting meal planning and organization.

3

Tracking physical activity and encouraging regular exercise.

These technologies can also save time and effort, creating greater opportunities to focus on health and engage in physical activity in a more flexible and organized way.

Healthy Living Within Your Budget

A Balanced Main Meal with High Nutritional Value

Healthy eating is based on key principles that help meet the body's nutritional needs and support overall health

Adequacy

Consuming sufficient amounts of essential nutrients, including macronutrients and micronutrients, to support normal body functions and prevent nutrient deficiencies.

Balance

Maintaining a balance between energy intake and energy expenditure, while including appropriate amounts of carbohydrates, proteins, and healthy fats

Limiting excessive intake of foods and ingredients that may increase health risks when consumed in large amounts.

Moderation

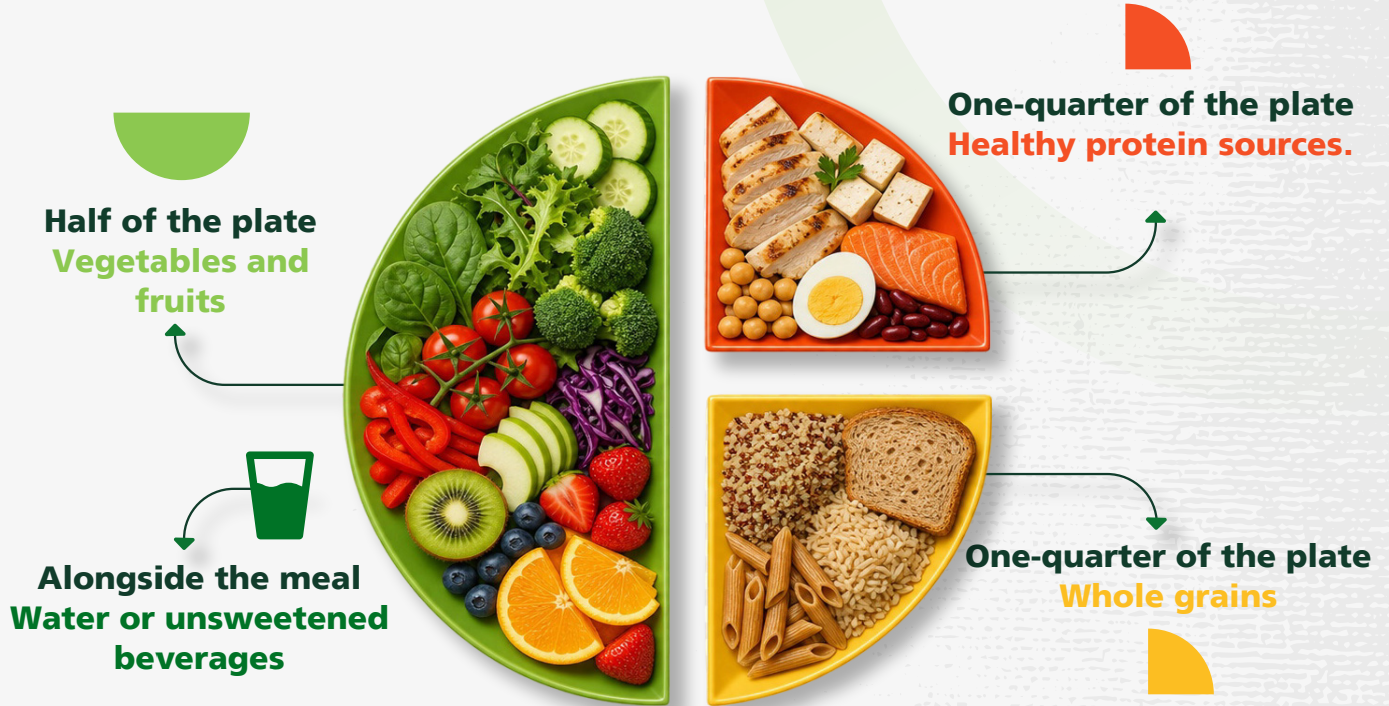
Choosing a wide range of nutritious foods from different food groups to ensure a balanced intake of nutrients

Variety



Building a Healthy Plate

The Healthy Plate concept can be adapted to local foods and dietary traditions:



Healthy fats can be included through unsaturated oils, such as olive oil, or by consuming moderate amounts of nuts



Healthy Snacks

Although snacks are smaller than main meals, they can contribute valuable nutrients throughout the day. Healthy snack options include



Boiled eggs



Yogurt



Fresh vegetables (such as cucumber or carrots) with hummus



moderate portion of nuts (such as almonds, pistachios, or



Fruit (such as dates, apples, or oranges)

Make Physical Activity Part of Your Day with Simple Steps



Global statistics reveal a significant gap in physical activity levels. One in four adults and three in four adolescents (11–17 years) do not meet the recommended minimum level of physical activity.

Adults should aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity each week, such as brisk walking. This goal can be achieved through simple, accessible activities that do not require expensive equipment or gym memberships, including



Using activity and step-tracking applications to monitor progress and stay motivated



Doing simple home-based exercises, such as walking and stretching, or following exercise videos available online



Choosing stairs instead of elevators whenever possible



Walking with family or friends to support both physical health and social connection



Walking in parks or indoor shopping malls, depending on weather conditions and seasons

Every step counts. Small changes in your daily routine can contribute to better health and long-term well-being.

Eating Healthy Can Be Affordable

Dietary guidelines across the Gulf countries encourage consumption of a variety of foods from the main food groups, including vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and healthy protein sources. These nutritious choices can be easily incorporated into daily meals at an affordable cost through proper planning, mindful shopping, and home meal preparation

Healthy ✓ Choices Don't Have to Cost More

Your hand can serve as a practical and convenient tool for estimating food portion sizes when measuring cups, standard utensils, or a food scale are not available.

Note: This method provides an approximate estimate of portion sizes for everyday use and can help build awareness of appropriate food quantities at home and when eating out.



Portion Guide	Food Group	Examples
 One cupped hand	 Grains and Starches	Rice, pasta, jareesh, bulgur
 Palm of the hand (excluding fingers)	 Red Meat and Legumes	Lamb, camel meat, beans, lentils
 Entire hand including fingers	 Poultry and Fish	Chicken, fish
 Palm of the hand (excluding fingers)	 Fruits	Apples, grapes
 Two cupped hands together	 Vegetables	Leafy greens, mixed salad
 Index and middle fingers	 Cheese	White cheese, halloumi cheese
 Tip of the thumb	 Healthy Fats	Olive oil, tahini

Although this method is simple and practical, food scales and standard measuring cups and spoons remain the most accurate tools for estimating portion sizes. Individuals living with health conditions, such as diabetes or cardiovascular disease, should consult a qualified healthcare professional for personalized dietary guidance.

Physical Activity in the Digital Era

Simple Ways to Move More Every Day



Physical activity is not limited to gyms or sports facilities. It can be incorporated into daily life at any time and in many different ways, including



Using health applications and wearable devices to monitor daily activity and support long-term motivation



Reducing prolonged sitting by participating in household activities or playing with children



Walking or cycling instead of using motorized transportation for short trips

Digital health technologies have become an important tool for personal health management and can contribute to meaningful improvements in physical activity levels.

A 2022 study found that the use of wearable devices increased daily step counts by an average of 2,200 steps per person. In addition, applications that include motivational features, such as challenges, rewards, and goal tracking have been associated with higher levels of physical activity and improvements in Body Mass Index (BMI).

Are You Buying Mindfully or Under Decision Pressure?



What Is Decision Fatigue?

Decision fatigue is a psychological and behavioral state that occurs when mental energy becomes depleted after making many decisions throughout the day. As a result, a person may find it more difficult to think clearly and make balanced, healthy choices.

Signs of Decision Fatigue

1

Mental energy decreases

2

Concentration and decision-making ability decline

3

Self-control becomes more difficult to maintain over time.

Possible Consequences

When experiencing decision fatigue, people may be more likely to choose convenient, high-calorie foods with lower nutritional value because they appear to be the easiest option at the time.



This may lead to

**Increased calorie
intake**

**Less healthy
eating habits**

**A greater likelihood of
weight gain over time**

Simple Ways to Reduce Decision Fatigue



**Plan meals
in advance**



**Organize your refrigerator
and make healthy options
more visible**



**Keep balanced,
ready-to-eat healthy foods
available when needed**

Simple **Strategies** for Making Informed Purchasing Decisions



Smart Planning

- ▶ Plan your meals for the week in advance and stick to a shopping list to help reduce emotional or impulse purchases.
- ▶ Preparing meals at home is often more cost-effective and provides greater control over ingredients and nutritional quality
- ▶ Avoid shopping when hungry, as this may increase the likelihood of purchasing unplanned foods with lower nutritional value

Shop Smart: Balance Quality and Value



Choose foods that offer both good nutritional value and affordable



Include whole grains and legumes, which are often more affordable and nutrient-dense than many



Consider frozen fruits and vegetables as practical options, as they retain their



Compare prices by weight or volume to identify the most economical option



Choose locally grown seasonal fruits and vegetables whenever possible, as they are often fresher and more



Buy staple foods, such as grains, nuts, and legumes, in bulk when appropriate

Budget-Friendly Healthy Choices



Diversifying protein sources, such as beans, lentils, and eggs, can provide important nutrients at a lower cost



Use leftovers to create new meals instead of discarding them



Growing herbs or certain vegetables at home may help reduce food costs over time



Limiting reliance on fast food can benefit both your health and your budget

Meal Preparation Strategies



Preparing meals in advance can save time and reduce the need for ordering food from outside the home



Proper food storage helps extend shelf life and reduce both food and financial waste

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), approximately one-third of all food produced for human consumption is lost or wasted each year

Choosing portions that match your nutritional needs not only supports your health but also helps reduce food waste.

The Digital Food Environment: How to Use It **Wisely**



The digital food environment refers to all digital influences that may affect our food choices and daily eating behaviors, including

1

Online food marketing

2

Food advertising on social media platforms

3

Food delivery and grocery delivery applications

4

Digital platforms that provide nutrition and health information

Research shows that the digital environment has become an important factor in shaping dietary behaviors, particularly among adolescents and young adults

At the same time, food delivery applications have become part of modern lifestyles. However, their impact on health depends largely on how they are used

When used appropriately these applications can support healthier eating habits by providing information on calories, ingredients, and allergens, helping users compare food options and make choices that better align with their health needs.

Studies have also shown that food marketing through social media is among the most influential forms of marketing affecting consumer food choices

Tips for Smarter Digital Food Choices

Use app features such as healthy food filters and personalized notifications to help identify options that better meet your nutritional needs. Be aware that attractive images, one-click ordering, and impulse purchasing can influence food choices.

Review ingredients and nutritional information carefully, as some meals may contain high amounts of sodium, saturated fat, or added sugars

Pay attention to side items and extras, such as sauces and sugar-sweetened beverages, which can significantly increase calorie intake



Making the Digital Environment **Work for You**



The digital environment can influence many of our daily decisions, adopting a few simple practices can help support more informed and mindful choices

Manage Notifications

- Reduce or customize notifications from food delivery applications according to your needs and preferences.
- Research in behavioral economics suggests that frequent notifications may increase attention to food-related cues and encourage unplanned purchasing decisions.

Make Decisions More Mindfully

- Consider not saving payment methods in applications if you are prone to impulse purchases.
- This extra step provides additional time to reflect on and review your decision before completing a purchase.

Be Aware of Digital

- When viewing food advertisements, remember that they are often tailored based on your interests and previous online activity
- Understanding how digital marketing works can help you make more informed choices and reduce the influence of momentary triggers.

Use Technology to Support Healthy Habits

- Take advantage of applications that help monitor overall diet quality and healthy lifestyle habits, rather than focusing solely on calorie tracking.
- These tools can enhance nutrition knowledge and support decisions based on individual needs and informed choices

Role of Health Taxes in Promoting Healthier Choices

Health taxes are preventive public health measures designed to **reduce obesity and chronic diseases** by encouraging healthier dietary choices and reducing the consumption of products associated with health risks, such as sugar-sweetened beverages.

Across the Gulf region, taxes are applied to selected products, including a **50%** tax on soft drinks and a **100%** tax on energy drinks.

When healthier options become more competitive in terms of cost, consumers are more likely to choose alternatives that better support their health. This principle underpins many nutrition and public health policies worldwide.



Health taxes also contribute to improving population health and reducing health inequalities by encouraging healthier consumption patterns and decreasing reliance on products with lower nutritional value.

Mindless Eating



Mindless eating refers to eating in response to external or environmental cues rather than genuine physical hunger. As a result, individuals may consume more or less food than intended because their eating decisions are influenced by their surroundings rather than their body's actual needs.

Two key mechanisms can contribute to mindless eating:

Consumption Norms

People often determine what they consider an "appropriate" amount of food based on factors such as plate size, package size, or even the amount of food consumed by others. This process frequently occurs without conscious awareness.

Consumption Monitoring

Consumption monitoring refers to a person's ability to notice and keep track of how much food they have eaten. This is generally easier in calm and distraction-free environments. However, distractions such as watching television, using a mobile phone, or engaging in conversations while eating can reduce awareness of food intake, potentially leading to overeating without realizing it.

Eating Speed and Its Impact on Health



During digestion, the body uses energy through a process known as the Thermic Effect of Food (TEF), which refers to the energy required to digest, absorb, and process nutrients. In addition to what we eat, the speed and manner in which we eat are associated with several important health outcomes and the prevention of noncommunicable diseases.

How Fast Eating May Affect Health

- 1 Eating quickly may lead to a more rapid rise in blood glucose and insulin levels, which may increase the risk of insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes.
- 2 The body needs time to send fullness signals from the digestive system to the brain. Eating too quickly may result in consuming more food than needed before feeling satisfied.
- 3 Fast eating has been associated with an increased likelihood of overeating and subsequent weight gain.

A 2026 study reported an association between emotional eating defined as eating in response to emotions rather than physical hunger and higher Body Mass Index (BMI) as well as increased body weight.

Slowing down while eating, paying attention to hunger and fullness cues, and minimizing distractions during meals can help support healthier eating habits.

The Difference Between Hunger and the Desire to Eat



How Does Fullness Work?

The feeling of fullness depends on the gut-brain axis. When the stomach is filled with food, it sends signals to the brain through nerve pathways. These signals are followed by chemical and hormonal responses that help you feel satisfied.

The Role of Hormones

After eating, the intestines release hormones such as GLP-1 (Glucagon-Like Peptide-1) and PYY (Peptide YY). These hormones tell the brain to reduce appetite and the desire to keep eating.

Why Do Distractions Affect Fullness?

Satiety requires ongoing communication between the digestive system and the brain. However, distractions such as screens or mental stress can disrupt this process.

- ▶ Eating while distracted makes people rely more on external cues, such as the size of their plate or how much food is available, instead of their body's natural hunger and fullness signals.
- ▶ Distraction also weakens memory of how much food was eaten, which can lead to feeling hungry again later, even after consuming enough energy.

When mental distraction is high, the brain pays less attention to natural fullness signals and focuses more on outside influences. This can delay the feeling of being full and affect how much food a person eats.

The average person makes more than **226 food-related decisions** every day

However, when asked to estimate how many decisions they make, most people guessed only around 15 or 20. This suggests that more than **90%** of our dietary decisions are made unconsciously (automatically) or influenced by environmental cues, rather than through conscious choice

What Are Sugar Substitutes (Sweeteners)?

Sugar substitutes are substances used to add a sweet taste to foods and beverages while providing few or no calories. They are generally grouped into three main categories



Nutritive sweeteners

such as xylitol

Provide fewer
calories than sugar



Natural sweeteners

such as stevia

Derived from
plant sources



Artificial sweeteners

such as aspartame

Produced through
industrial processes

Sugar substitutes are considered safe when consumed within the recommended limits established by relevant health authorities

However, the priority remains following a balanced and healthy eating pattern. Water should be the first choice for hydration, while the consumption of sweetened foods and beverages should be limited overall

Food Labels That Help You Make Better Choices

► Nutrition Claims

Some foods and beverages with low nutritional value may carry marketing claims such as diet, light, sugar-free, no added sugar, low-fat, or 0% fat, which may create the impression that they are the healthier choice.

Before making a purchase, read the Nutrition Facts label carefully. A nutrition claim on the package does not necessarily mean that a product is the best option.

Nutrition claims often highlight only one aspect of a product and may not reflect its overall nutritional quality, including



Total calories



Total carbohydrate content



Amount and type of fat



Sodium content



Other ingredients and food additives

As a result, a product may have a positive nutrition claim but still not be the healthiest choice when its full nutritional profile is considered

In contrast, foods with high nutritional value are characterized by the natural balance of their ingredients and help provide fiber, protein, vitamins, and minerals without relying on prominent marketing claims.

► For example

- Instead of “sugar-free” breakfast cereals, choose oats with milk and fresh fruit
- Instead of “diet” biscuits, choose an appropriate portion of nuts
- Instead of some “diet” desserts, choose dates or moderate amounts of dark chocolate

What Is the Difference Between Juice, Nectar, and Fruit Drink?

Juice

Contains 100% fruit juice,
with no added sugar or
preservatives



Nectar

Typically contains about
30% fruit, with water,
sugar, and other
ingredients added
within permitted limits



Fruit Drink

Typically contains about
10% fruit, along with larger
amounts of water, sugar,
and other added ingredients



Making Healthy Choices Despite Social and Work-Related Pressures

Understanding the Influence of Social Pressure

Our food choices and levels of physical activity are often influenced by the social environments around us, whether at home, among friends, or in the workplace. People may find themselves following the eating habits or activity patterns of those around them, even when these do not align with their health goals.

Why Can It Be Difficult to Say No?

- ▶ Fear of embarrassment or social discomfort
- ▶ A desire to please others
- ▶ Social norms and expectations

Skills to Help You Maintain Healthy Choices

1	Self-Awareness	■ Ask yourself: Am I truly hungry, or am I eating out of courtesy or because of social pressure?
2	Reframing the Situation	■ Remember that politely declining food or invitations does not conflict with showing respect or appreciation for others.
3	Portion Management	■ Choosing moderate portions and eating slowly can help you maintain a balanced diet while still enjoying social occasions.
4	Positive Support	■ Having someone who shares your health goals can strengthen your commitment to healthy habits.

The Workplace and Your Healthy Choices

The workplace is not only where daily tasks are completed; it can also influence eating habits and physical activity levels through the work environment, food availability, and social interactions among colleagues.

Tips for Maintaining Healthy Habits at Work

Plan meals and snacks ahead of time and keep healthy options readily available

Review menu options before ordering and choose more balanced meals

Limit sugar-sweetened beverages and high-calorie foods

Maintain regular mealtimes and avoid skipping meals

Eat slowly and minimize distractions while eating

Create a supportive environment by keeping water accessible and reducing the availability of sweets

Become familiar with the healthy food options available in and around your workplace

Set a clear health goal and monitor your progress regularly

Avoid feeling pressured to follow eating habits that do not align with your health goals

Practice mindful eating and remind yourself of the importance of maintaining good health

Discover healthy options in your workplace

Remember: While you may not always be able to control your surroundings, you can develop skills that help you make healthier, more informed, and sustainable

اختار الصحة Choose Wisely

**Every Healthy Choice Today Contributes
to a Healthier Tomorrow**

► **Prioritize healthy habits** ◀

**and make daily choices that support
your body and overall well-being.**

