The Abs Diet

Let others lose. You are going to gain. Muscle tone, better health, a great sex life . . . Abs are just the start

By David Zinczenko

You have abs.

Yes, you.

When you think of abs, you may think of Brad Pitt or Janet Jackson. Your cynical side may also think of airbrushing, starvation diets, and an exercise regimen so time-consuming it would violate labor laws. Your conclusion: You have a better chance of scaling Mount Everest in a Speedo than you do of developing great abs.

But as the editor-in-chief of Men’s Health magazine, I know you can have the midsection of your dreams. Listen: I analyze health and fitness information the way brokers analyze the market. And I’ve talked to and heard from thousands of folks who have shared their weight-loss success stories with Men’s Health. So I’ve seen the plus side of the equation. But I’ve lived the negative, as well. I know what it’s like to feel fat.

As a latchkey kid growing up in the early ’80s, I made every mistake in the book. I ate fast food instead of smart food. I played video games when I should’ve been playing outside. By the time I reached age 14, I was carrying 212 pounds of torpid teenage tallow on my 5-foot, 10-inch frame. But I got lucky. When I graduated from high school, I enlisted in the Naval Reserve, where the tenets of fitness were pounded into me, day after day after day. Soon after I graduated from college, I joined Men’s Health and learned the importance of proper nutrition and—just as important—the health threats inherent in carrying around too much fat in your gut. If you have a bulging belly, it means your internal organs, including your heart, are literally packed in fat. It’s like renting a room to an arsonist.

Whether you want to change your body to improve your health, your looks, your athletic performance, or your sex appeal, this plan—which I call the Abs Diet—offers you a simple promise: It can transform your body so you can accomplish all of those goals. It won’t just enhance your life; it will save it.
Here we lay down the nutrition plan that will cut your body fat. And in “Seven Days to a Six-Pack” on page 61, we teach you all the exercises you need to change your life (and the size of your pants).

Start here: The following guidelines are your six-pack, to go.

THE ABS DIET QUICK GUIDE

Most guys who are embarking on a new mission begin with one fundamental question: When do we eat?

Good question. Most diets are all about what foods you’ll cut out. This one is all about what you’ll include. And that’s good news, because if you want to emerge on the other side of this plan with a new body, you must have the flexibility and freedom to keep yourself from getting hungry and the knowledge that you can eat well no matter what.

So let’s ring the dinner bell.

Guideline 1: Eat Six Meals a Day

Didn’t I tell you this isn’t about deprivation?

We’re so used to hearing people talk about eating less food that it’s become weight-loss doctrine. The new philosophy I want you to keep in mind is “energy balance.”

Researchers at Georgia State University developed a technique to measure hourly energy balance—that is, how many calories you’re burning versus how many calories you’re taking in. The researchers found that if you keep your hourly surplus or deficit within 300 to 500 calories at all times, you’ll best be able to change your body composition by losing fat and adding lean muscle mass. People with the largest energy imbalances (those whose calorie surpluses or shortfalls topped 500 calories from hour to hour) were the fattest, while those with the most balanced energy levels were the leanest. So if you eat only your three squares a day, your energy levels are all over the place. That kind of eating plan is great—if your dream is to be the next Chris Farley. But if you want to look slimmer, feel fitter, and live longer, then eat more often. Simply alternate your meals with snacks (we give you a ton of food suggestions on the pages that follow), and you’ll keep your stomach full, which will reduce the likelihood of a diet-destroying binge.

Guideline 2: Drink Smoothies Regularly

A blender may be the ultimate weight-loss power tool. Smoothies—blended mixtures of milk, low-fat yogurt, whey powder, ice, and other good stuff—can act as meal substitutes and potent snacks. They require little time; the berries, flavored whey powder, or peanut butter will satisfy your sweet cravings; and their thickness takes up space in your stomach. A University of Tennessee study found that men who added three servings of yogurt a day to
their diets lost 61 percent more body fat and 81 percent more stomach fat over 12 weeks than did men who didn’t eat yogurt. Researchers speculate that the calcium helps the body burn fat and limits the amount of fat your body can make. So drink an 8-ounce smoothie for breakfast, as a meal substitute, or as a snack before or after your workout.

**Guideline 3: Know What to Drink—And What Not To**

There are many ways that alcohol can get you into trouble, and not just at the intern luncheon. Alcohol doesn’t make you feel full or decrease the amount of food you’ll eat. But it does encourage your body to burn as much as 36 percent less fat and make you store more of the fat you eat. And it can inhibit your production of testosterone and human growth hormone—two hormones that help burn fat and build muscle.

Okay, so water isn’t exciting, but drinking about eight glasses of it a day has a lot of benefits. It helps keep you satiated (often what we interpret as hunger is really thirst). It flushes the waste products your body churns out when processing protein or breaking down fat. And it transports nutrients to your muscles, to keep your metabolism clicking. Otherwise, the best drinks you can have are low-fat milk and green tea (or, if you must, no more than two glasses of diet soda a day).

**Guideline 4: Focus on the Abs Diet Power 12**

The Abs Diet encourages you to focus on (not restrict yourself to) a generous market basket of food types—the Abs Diet Power 12—to fulfill your core nutritional needs. These foods are so good for you, in fact, that they’ll just about single-handedly exchange your fat for muscle (provided you’ve kept your receipt). Just as important, I’ve designed the Power 12 to include thousands of food combinations. (You’ll find a few here and more at www.menshealth.com/absdietchallenge.) The more of them you eat, the better your body will be able to increase lean muscle mass and avoid storing fat. Just follow these simple rules of thumb.

- Include two or three of these foods in each of your three major meals and at least one of them in each of your three snacks.
- Diversify your food at every meal to get a combination of protein, carbohydrates, and fat.
- Make sure you sneak a little bit of protein into each snack.

*(continued on page 17)*
LOSE YOUR GUT

ABS DIET POWER 12
And now, here are the Power 12. Feel free to eat along as you read.

THE ABS DIET POWER 12 KEY

How to read the key: The icons demonstrate which important roles each food can play in maintaining optimum health.

Builds muscle
Foods rich in muscle-building plant and animal proteins qualify for this seal of approval, as do foods rich in certain minerals, such as magnesium, linked to proper muscle maintenance.

Helps promote weight loss
Foods high in calcium and fiber (both of which protect against obesity), as well as foods that help build fat-busting muscle tissue, earn this badge of respect.

Strengthens bone
Calcium and vitamin D are the most important bone builders, and they protect the body against osteoporosis.

Lowers blood pressure
Any food that has potassium, magnesium, or calcium and is low in sodium can help lower blood pressure.

Fights cancer
Research has shown a lower risk of some types of cancer among people who maintain low-fat, high-fiber diets. You can also help foil cancer by eating foods that are high in calcium, beta-carotene, or vitamin C. In addition, all cruciferous (cabbage-type) and allium (onion-type) vegetables earn the cancer-protection symbol because research has shown that they help prevent certain kinds of cancer.

Improves immune function
Foods with folate, the mineral zinc, and vitamins A, B6, C, and E boost the body's ability to resist disease.

Fights heart disease
Artery-clogging cholesterol can lead to trouble if you eat foods containing primarily saturated and trans fats, while foods that are high in monounsaturated or polyunsaturated fats will actually help protect your heart by keeping your cholesterol levels in check.
1. Almonds and Other Nuts

(eaten with skins intact)

**Superpowers:** Building muscle, fighting food cravings

**Secret weapons:** Protein, monounsaturated fats, vitamin E, folate (in peanuts), fiber, magnesium, phosphorus

**Fight against:** Obesity, heart disease, muscle loss, cancer

**Sidekicks:** Pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, avocados

**Impostors:** Salted or smoked nuts (high in sodium, which can spike blood pressure)

These days, you hear about good fats and bad fats the way you hear about good cops and bad cops. One’s on your side, and one’s going to beat you silly. Oreos fall into the latter category, but nuts are clearly out to help you. They contain the monounsaturated fats that clear your arteries and help you feel full.

All nuts are high in protein and monounsaturated fat. But almonds are like Jack Nicholson in *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest:* They’re the king of the nuts. Eat as much as two handfuls a day. If you eat 2 ounces of almonds (about 24 of them), it can suppress your appetite—especially if you wash them down with 8 ounces of water.

For a quick popcorn alternative, spray a handful of almonds with nonstick cooking spray and bake them at 400°F for 5 to 10 minutes. Take them out of the oven and sprinkle them with either a brown sugar and cinnamon mix or cayenne pepper and thyme.

2. Beans and Other Legumes

(including soybeans, chickpeas, and pinto, navy, kidney, and lima beans)

**Superpowers:** Building muscle, helping burn fat, regulating digestion

**Secret weapons:** Fiber, protein, iron, folate

**Fight against:** Obesity, colon cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure

**Sidekicks:** Lentils, peas, bean dips, hummus, edamame

**Impostors:** Refried beans, which are high in saturated fats; baked beans, which are high in sugar

Most of us can trace our resistance to beans to some unfortunately timed intestinal upheaval (third-grade math class; a first date gone awry). But beans are, as the famous rhyme says, good for your heart; the more you eat them, the more you’ll be able to control your hunger. Black, lima, pinto, navy—it’s your pick. They’re all low in fat, and they’re packed with protein, fiber, and
8 **LOSE YOUR GUT**

iron—nutrients crucial for building muscle and losing weight. Gastrointestinal disadvantages notwithstanding, they serve as one of the key members of the Abs Diet cabinet because of all their nutritional power.

In fact, if you can replace a meat-heavy dish with a bean-heavy dish a couple of times a week, you’ll be lopping a lot of saturated fat out of your diet and replacing it with higher amounts of fiber.

3. **Spinach and Other Green Vegetables**

Superpowers: Neutralizing free radicals (molecules that accelerate the aging process)

Secret weapons: Vitamins including A, C, and K; folate; beta-carotene; minerals including calcium and magnesium; fiber

Fight against: Cancer, heart disease, stroke, obesity, osteoporosis

Sidekicks: Cruciferous vegetables like broccoli and brussels sprouts; green, yellow, red, and orange vegetables such as asparagus, peppers, and yellow beans

**ABS DIET SUCCESS STORY**

“Four pounds a week . . . gone for good.”

**Name:** Paul McComb  
**Age:** 28  
**Height:** 5’9”  
**Starting weight:** 180  
**Weight 6 weeks later:** 155

Once Paul McComb left college and gained some weight, he figured the extra heft was his to keep for life. But when he walked into a nutrition store and stepped on a scale that told him how much he weighed (180 pounds) and how much he should weigh (155), something changed: his attitude.

So McComb went on the Abs Diet—and lost 25 pounds.

He made significant changes by doing such things as eliminating his four or five daily Cokes and skipping the midnight chips. He says the transition was easy. “The Abs Diet had me eating six times a day, so I didn’t feel like snacking on chips,” he reports.

McComb says the key to his success was planning meals around the Abs Diet Powerfoods so he wasn’t tempted by vending machines and snack bars. He’d eat turkey on multigrain bread for lunch, have whole-wheat pasta or chicken for dinner, and snack on peanut butter and chocolate milk. He was happy that he didn’t have to count calories, watch carbs, or give up the foods he loves. “Understanding the Powerfoods concept and how these foods work together helped me eat—a lot—and still watch the weight come off.”
Impostors: None, as long as you don’t fry them or smother them in fatty cheese sauces.

You know vegetables are packed with important nutrients, but they’re also a critical part of your body-changing diet. I like spinach in particular because one serving supplies nearly a full day’s vitamin A and half of your vitamin C. It’s also loaded with folate—a vitamin that protects against heart disease, stroke, and colon cancer. Dress a sandwich with the stuff, or stir-fry it with fresh garlic and olive oil. Broccoli is high in fiber and more densely packed with vitamins and minerals than almost any other food.

If you hate vegetables, hide them. Puree them and add them to marinara sauce or chili. The more you chop, the less you taste, and the easier it is for your body to absorb nutrients.

4. Dairy Products

(fat-free or low-fat milk, yogurt, cheese, cottage cheese)

Superpowers: Building strong bones, firing up weight loss

Secret weapons: Calcium, vitamins A and B₁₂, riboflavin, phosphorus, potassium

Fight against: Osteoporosis, obesity, high blood pressure, cancer

Sidekicks: None

Impostors: Whole milk, frozen yogurt

Dairy is nutrition’s version of a typecast actor. It gets so much good press for strengthening bones that it garners little attention for all the other stuff it does well. Just take a look at the mounting evidence that calcium is a prime belly-buster. A University of Tennessee study found that dieters who consumed between 1,200 and 1,300 milligrams of calcium a day lost nearly twice as much weight as those taking in less calcium. Researchers think the mineral probably prevents weight gain by increasing the breakdown of body fat and hampering its formation.

Low-fat yogurt, cheeses, and other dairy products can play a key role in your diet. But I recommend milk as your major source of calcium. Liquids take up lots of room in your stomach, so your brain gets the signal that you’re full. Sprinkling in chocolate whey powder can help curb sweet cravings.

5. Instant Oatmeal

(unsweetened, unflavored)

Superpowers: Boosting energy and sex drive, reducing cholesterol, maintaining blood-sugar levels
Secret weapons: Complex carbohydrates and fiber
Fights against: Heart disease, diabetes, colon cancer, obesity
Sidekicks: High-fiber cereals like All-Bran and Fiber One
Impostors: Sugary cereals

Oatmeal can propel you through sluggish mornings, and you can down a bowl a couple of hours before a workout to feel fully energized by the time you hit the weights, or eat some at night to avoid a late-night binge. It couldn’t be easier to prepare—just add water. Buy the unsweetened, unflavored variety, and use other Powerfoods such as milk and berries to enhance the taste.

Oatmeal contains soluble fiber, meaning it attracts fluid and stays in your stomach longer than insoluble fiber does. It also works like a bouncer for your body, showing troublemakers the door. For example, soluble fiber helps remove LDL cholesterol from your circulatory system.

Another cool fact about oatmeal: Preliminary studies indicate that eating oatmeal raises the levels of free testosterone in your body, boosting your sex drive and enhancing the body’s ability to build muscle and burn fat.

6. Eggs

Superpowers: Building muscle, burning fat
Secret weapons: Protein, vitamins A and B₁₂
Fight against: Obesity
Sidekicks: Egg Beaters, which have fewer calories than eggs and no fat, but just as much of the core nutrients
Impostors: None

For a long time, eggs were considered pure evil, and doctors were more likely to recommend tossing eggs at passing cars than throwing them into omelet pans. That’s because just two eggs contain enough cholesterol to put you over your daily recommended value. Though you can cut out some of that by removing part of the yolk and using the white, more and more research shows that eating an egg or two a day will not raise your cholesterol levels. In fact, we’ve learned that most blood cholesterol is made by the body from dietary fat, not dietary cholesterol. That’s why you should take advantage of eggs and their powerful makeup of protein.

The protein found in eggs has the highest “biological value” of protein—a measure of how well it supports your body’s protein need—of any food. In other words, the protein in eggs is more effective at building muscle than is protein from other sources, even milk and beef. Eggs also contain vitamin B₁₂, which is necessary for fat breakdown.
7. Turkey and Other Lean Meats

(lean steak, chicken, fish)

**Superpowers:** Building muscle, improving the immune system

**Secret weapons:** Protein, iron, zinc, creatine (beef), omega-3 fatty acids (fish), vitamins B₆ (chicken and fish) and B₁₂, phosphorus, potassium

**Fight against:** Obesity, mood disorders, memory loss, heart disease

**Sidekicks:** Shellfish, Canadian bacon, omega-3-rich flaxseed

**Impostors:** Sausage, bacon, cured meats, ham, fatty cuts of steak like T-bone and rib eye

A classic muscle-building nutrient, protein is the base of any solid diet plan. Turkey breast is one of the leanest meats you’ll find, and it packs nearly one-third of your daily requirements of niacin and vitamin B₆. Beef, another classic muscle-building protein, is the top food source of creatine—a substance your body uses to make new muscle fibers. Look for round or loin cuts (code for extra-lean); New York strip is less fatty than prime rib.

(continued on page 14)

**ABS DIET SUCCESS STORY**

“I cut my body fat in half in just 6 weeks.”

**Name:** Bill Stanton  
**Age:** 40  
**Height:** 5'8"  
**Starting weight:** 220  
**Weight 6 weeks later:** 190

Bill Stanton, a security consultant, had been pumping iron since he was 15. But even with his rigorous weight training, he kept getting fatter: By the time he reached 40, he had ballooned to 220 pounds on his 5-foot-8 frame. Why? Because Stanton’s diet and exercise routine consisted of doing bench presses and squats, then finishing the night with chicken wings and booze.

“My pants were fitting me like a tourniquet, and it was like I was in a bad marriage. I was living comfortably uncomfortable,” Stanton says. “The Abs Diet challenged me to get on the program, step up to the plate, and step away from the plate.”

After following the Abs Diet for 6 weeks, Stanton lost 30 pounds—and has cut his body fat from 30 percent to 15 percent.

“I work out at Sports Club LA, where people are really focused on looking great,” he says. “Even there, guys and girls come up to me. One guy said, ‘You are kicking butt. Everybody sees that transformation. You’re inspiring a lot of people.’”

Stanton has changed his physique so dramatically that he’s even been accused of taking steroids. “I take that as a compliment,” he laughs.
POWER EATING WITH THE POWER 12

What's better than eating one belly-busting food? Eating five in one dish. These five recipes can get you through day 1 of your new mission to find your abs. Go to www.menshealth.com/absdietchallenge to satisfy yourself for day 2 and onward.

Halle’s Berry Smoothie
(number of Powerfoods: 4)

- ¾ c instant oatmeal, nuked in water or skim milk
- ½ c skim milk
- ¾ c mixed frozen berries
- 2 tsp whey powder
- 3 ice cubes, crushed

Blend all ingredients in a blender. Makes 2 8-ounce servings.

Per serving: 144 calories, 7 grams (g) protein, 27 g carbohydrates, 1 g fat (0 g saturated), 0 g fiber, 109 milligrams (mg) sodium

Eggs Beneficial Breakfast Sandwich
(number of Powerfoods: 5)

- 1 large whole egg
- 3 large egg whites
- 1 tsp ground flaxseed
- 2 slices whole-wheat bread, toasted
- 1 slice Canadian bacon
- 1 tomato, sliced, or 1 green bell pepper, sliced

Scramble the whole egg and egg whites in a bowl. Add the flaxseed to the mixture. Fry it in a nonstick skillet treated with nonstick cooking spray and dump it onto the toast. Add the bacon and tomato, pepper, or other vegetables of your choice. Wash it all down with 8 ounces of orange juice, and make it the high-pulp kind. More fiber that way. Makes 1 serving.

Per serving: 399 calories, 31 g protein, 46 g carbohydrates, 11 g fat (3 g saturated), 6 g fiber, 900 mg sodium

The I-Am-Not-Eating-Salad Lunch Salad
(number of Powerfoods: 4)

- 2 oz grilled chicken
- 1 c romaine lettuce
- 1 tomato, chopped
1 small green bell pepper, chopped
1 medium carrot, chopped
3 Tbsp 94 percent fat-free Italian dressing or 1 tsp olive oil
1 Tbsp grated Parmesan cheese
1 Tbsp ground flaxseed

Chop the chicken into small pieces. Mix all the ingredients together and store in the fridge. Eat on multigrain bread or by itself. Makes 1 serving.

Per serving: 248 calories, 16 g protein, 33 g carbohydrates, 8 g fat (2 g saturated), 10 g fiber, 875 mg sodium

Salmon Rushdie Dinner
(number of Powerfoods: 5)

2 Tbsp olive oil
1 Tbsp lemon juice
½ tsp salt
½ tsp ground black pepper
1 Tbsp ground flaxseed
1 clove garlic
4 6-oz salmon fillets
1 c cooked rice
Green vegetable of choice

In a baking dish, combine the oil, lemon juice, salt, pepper, flaxseed, and garlic. Add the fish, coat it well, cover it, and refrigerate for 15 minutes. Preheat your oven to 450°F. Line a baking sheet with foil and coat it with nonstick cooking spray. Remove the fish from the marinade and place the fish skin-side down on the baking sheet. Bake for 9 to 12 minutes. Serve with the rice and a green vegetable. Makes 4 servings.

Per serving: 433 calories, 42 g protein, 19 g carbohydrates, 20 g fat (3 g saturated), 3 g fiber, 252 mg sodium

The Gobbler Snack
(number of Powerfoods: 2)

3 slices low-sodium deli turkey breast
1 1/2 slices fat-free cheese

Roll the turkey breast with the cheese. (Low-fat string cheese makes a nice roller, too.) Stuff in pie hole. Makes 1 serving.

Per serving: 93 calories, 14 g protein, 7 g carbohydrates, 1 g fat (0.5 g saturated), 0 g fiber, 990 mg sodium
To cut down on saturated fats even more, concentrate on fish like tuna and salmon, because they contain a healthy dose of omega-3 fatty acids as well as protein. A bonus benefit: Researchers in Stockholm found that men who ate no fish had three times the risk of prostate cancer of those who ate it regularly. It’s the omega-3s that inhibit prostate-cancer growth.

8. Peanut Butter

(All-natural, sugar-free)

Superpowers: Boosting testosterone, building muscle, burning fat
Secret weapons: Protein, monounsaturated fat, vitamin E, niacin, magnesium
Fights against: Obesity, muscle loss, wrinkles, cardiovascular disease
Sidekicks: Cashew and almond butters
Impostors: Mass-produced sugary and trans fatty peanut butters

Yes, PB has its disadvantages: It’s high in calories, and it isn’t served in four-star restaurants. But it’s packed with heart-healthy monounsaturated fats that can increase your body’s production of testosterone, which can help muscles grow and fat melt. Three tablespoons a day should guarantee the benefit without overloading on the fat.

9. Olive Oil

Superpowers: Lowering cholesterol, boosting the immune system
Secret weapons: Monounsaturated fat, vitamin E
Fights against: Obesity, cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure
Sidekicks: Canola oil, peanut oil, sesame oil
Impostors: Other vegetable and hydrogenated vegetable oils, trans fatty acids, margarine

No need for a long explanation here: Olive oil and its brethren will help control your food cravings; they’ll also help you burn fat and keep your cholesterol in check. Do you need any more reason to pass the bottle?

10. Whole-Grain Breads and Cereals

Superpowers: Preventing your body from storing fat
Secret weapons: Fiber, protein, thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, vitamin E, calcium, magnesium, potassium, zinc
Fight against: Obesity, cancer, high blood pressure, heart disease
Sidekicks: Brown rice, whole-wheat pretzels, whole-wheat pastas
Impostors: Processed bakery products like white bread, bagels, and doughnuts; breads labeled wheat instead of whole wheat

There’s only so long a person can survive on an all-protein diet or an all-salad diet or an all-anything diet. You crave carbohydrates because your body needs them. The key is to eat the ones that have all their heart-healthy, belly-melting fiber intact. Whole-grain carbohydrates can play an important role in a healthy lifestyle. Whole-grain bread keeps insulin levels low, which keeps you from storing fat.

11. Extra-Protein (Whey) Powder

Superpowers: Building muscle, burning fat
Secret weapons: Protein, cysteine, glutathione
Fights against: Obesity
Sidekick: Ricotta cheese
Impostor: Soy protein

Whey protein contains essential amino acids that build muscle and burn fat. But it’s especially effective because it has the highest amount of protein for the fewest number of calories, making it fat’s kryptonite. But that’s not all. Whey protein can help protect your body from prostate cancer. It’s a good source of cysteine, which your body uses to build a prostate cancer–fighting antioxidant called glutathione. Adding just a small amount of whey protein to your diet may increase glutathione levels in your body by as much as 60 percent.

12. Raspberries and Other Berries

Superpowers: Protecting your heart, enhancing eyesight, improving memory, preventing cravings
Secret weapons: Antioxidants, fiber, vitamin C, tannins (cranberries)
Fight against: Heart disease, cancer, obesity
Sidekicks: Most other fruits, especially apples and grapefruit
Impostors: Sugary jellies

Depending on your taste, any berry will do (except Crunch Berries). I like raspberries, as much for their power as for their flavor. One cup packs 6 grams of fiber and more than half of your daily requirement of vitamin C.

Blueberries are one of the most healthful foods you can eat. They beat out 39 other fruits and vegetables in the antioxidant-power ratings. And
ABS DIET SNACKS

Most diet plans portray snacking as a failure. I want you to think of snacking as exactly the opposite—as a key to success! But the secret to effective snacking is doing so at the optimum time—about 2 hours before you’re scheduled to eat your next meal. That’ll be enough time to head off hunger pangs and keep you full enough to avoid a meltdown at mealtime. Pick from any of the categories below, but make sure you toss in some protein.

**Protein**

- 2 tsp reduced-fat peanut butter
- 1 oz almonds
- 3 slices low-sodium deli turkey breast
- 3 slices deli roast beef

**Dairy**

- 8 oz low-fat yogurt
- 1 c 1 percent milk or chocolate milk
- ¾ c low-fat ice cream
- 1½ slices fat-free cheese
- 1 stick string cheese

**Fruits or Vegetables**

- 1 oz raisins
  - Unlimited raw vegetables (celery, baby carrots, broccoli)
- 1½ c berries
- 4 oz cantaloupe
- 1 large orange
- 1 can (11.5 oz) low-sodium V8 juice

**Complex Carbohydrates**

- 1 or 2 slices whole-grain bread
- 1 bowl oatmeal or high-fiber cereal
strawberries (along with grapefruit, peaches, apples, and oranges) contain another valuable form of fiber called pectin that can make you feel fuller for hours.

**THE ABS DIET QUICK GUIDE (continued)**

**Guideline 5: Stop Counting**

Though calorie burning is paramount to losing fat, calorie counting will make you lose focus and motivation. The great news is that when you zero in on the Abs Diet Powerfoods, you’ll be healthy and won’t feel hungry as often. Plus, the most energy-efficient foods are almost like doormen at a nightclub: They’re not going to let in any of the riffraff without your approval.

**Guideline 6: For One Meal a Week, Forget the Guidelines**

I would never advocate cheating on your spouse or your taxes. But I want you to cheat on this diet. Take one meal during the week and forget everything about good carbohydrates and good fats. Have whatever it is—pizza, buffalo wings—that you miss the most. Think of this cheat meal as the carrot at the end of a good week of eating. Enjoy your meal of gluttony, but please, don’t make the carrot literally a carrot.

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Eat Right Every Time

Life is an all-you-can-eat buffet. Pick the wrong foods and you expand your gut, harm your heart, and shave years off your life. Make the right choices and you look better, feel better, and feast longer. What’ll it be, friend?

By David Zinczenko

Like sleep and daily Britney Spears gossip, most of us take eating for granted. Insert food into mouth, chew, and swallow. Game over. But when you consider that 65 percent of American adults are overweight or obese, the game’s not even close; fat wins in a rout. Why? Because we’ve become a nation that considers drive-thrus fine dining, that saves money by ordering two pizzas instead of one, that’s been snowed into thinking bacon is a diet food, and that builds its food pyramids on top of a “family-size” order of 50 wings.

When we eat—whether it’s at home or on the road, on vacation or at the ballpark—we forget that we have choices. See, it’s a fallacy that easy eating has to mean greasy eating. Truth is, you can learn how to make smart food choices without sacrificing taste or splitting your pants. I know most people don’t have a lot of time to whip up elaborate meals. Part of the reason I wrote The Abs Diet, and why it has quickly helped so many people, is that we all need easy eating—but not in its current form: one fat bomb, hold the pickles. There’s a better way. Just build your home meal plan around the Abs Diet Power 12 foods (as we showed you on page 6): almonds and other nuts, beans and other legumes, spinach and other green vegetables, dairy products, instant oatmeal, eggs, turkey and other lean meats, peanut butter, olive oil, whole-grain breads and cereals, extra-protein (whey) powder, and raspberries and other berries. When you’re on the road, follow our directions to healthy eating (below). It’s like an emergency diet kit from FEMA: When nutritional disaster is in the forecast, we’ll help you dodge the heavy winds.

ON THE ROAD

If you’re one of those guys who consume more meals behind the wheel of a car than they do at the head of the table, we can help you arrive safe and skinny. Here’s the best stuff we found when we vetted the restaurant-chain gang and scouted around the generic eateries you’ll find in any town.

At the Sandwich Shop

Strategy: Opt for whole-wheat bread. Go easy on the cheese, heavy on the vegetables and lean meats (turkey, ham, roast beef).
SCHLOTZSKY’S DELI

**Eat This:**
Dijon Chicken Sandwich (small)
329 calories, 4 grams (g) fat (saturated-fat content not available), 1,456 milligrams (mg) sodium

Fresh Fruit Salad (small)
86 calories, 1 g fat (saturated fat NA), 22 mg sodium

**Not That:**
The Original Sandwich (small)
525 calories, 24 g fat (saturated fat NA), 1,781 mg sodium

SUBWAY

**Eat This:**
6-Inch Roast Beef Sub
290 calories, 5 g fat (2 g saturated), 920 mg sodium

Oatmeal Raisin Cookie
200 calories, 8 g fat (2.5 g saturated), 170 mg sodium

**Not That:**
6-Inch Meatball Marinara Sub
560 calories, 24 g fat (11 g saturated), 1,610 mg sodium

At the Fast-Food Joint

**Strategy:** Beware special sauces and creamy dips. Likewise, inspect your salad; at some burger joints, they’re worse than the burgers. And above all, don’t fall for combo meals, which add cost, trans fats, and liquid obesity (high-fructose corn syrup).

CHICK-FIL-A

**Eat This:**
Chargrilled Chicken Sandwich
270 calories, 3.5 g fat (1 g saturated), 940 mg sodium

Carrot & Raisin Salad
170 calories, 6 g fat (1 g saturated), 110 mg sodium

GUILTY PLEASURE MEN FEEL GUILTIEST INDULGING IN:

Fast Food
Not That:
Chicken Deluxe Sandwich (fried)
  420 calories, 16 g fat (3.5 g saturated), 1,300 mg sodium
Waffle Potato Fries (small)
  270 calories, 13 g fat (3 g saturated), 115 mg sodium

MCDONALD’S

Eat This:
Chicken McGrill
  400 calories, 16 g fat (3 g saturated), 1,010 mg sodium
Side Salad with Low-Fat Balsamic Vinaigrette
  55 calories, 3 g fat (0 g saturated), 740 mg sodium

Not That:
Bacon Ranch Salad with Crispy Chicken (includes dressing)
  520 calories, 31 g fat (8 g saturated), 1,560 mg sodium

WENDY’S

Eat This:
Chili (small)
  220 calories, 6 g fat (2.5 g saturated), 780 mg sodium
Sour Cream and Chives Hot Stuffed Baked Potato
  330 calories, 5 g fat (3.5 g saturated), 40 mg sodium

Not That:
Spicy Chicken Fillet Sandwich
  510 calories, 19 g fat (3.5 g saturated), 1,480 mg sodium

At the Diner (7 a.m.)

Strategy: Eggs are a potent Powerfood. So regardless of which greasy spoon you’re at, start your day with plain eggs, whole-wheat toast, and lean grilled meat.

Eat This:
2 poached eggs
  148 calories, 10 g fat (3 g saturated), 295 mg sodium
1 slice plain wheat toast
  128 calories, 2.5 g fat (0 g saturated), 160 mg sodium
1 slice Canadian bacon
  44 calories, 2 g fat (1 g saturated), 365 mg sodium

Not That:
Western omelet
  520 calories, 39 g fat (13 g saturated), 1,280 mg sodium
Plain biscuit
280 calories, 12 g fat (3 g saturated), 760 mg sodium

2 sausage links
250 calories, 22 g fat (6 g saturated), 370 mg sodium

At the Italian Restaurant

Strategy: Ask for fiber-filled whole-wheat pasta. Or look for entrées that feature lean protein or vegetables as their centerpiece, instead of cheese and carbs.

Eat This:
Minestrone (1 cup)
100 calories, 1 g fat (0 g saturated), 610 mg sodium

Chicken Marsala
460 calories, 25 g fat (7 g saturated), 790 mg sodium

Not That:
Antipasto (half order)
315 calories, 24 g fat (8 g saturated), 1,480 mg sodium

Lasagna
960 calories, 53 g fat (21 g saturated), 2,060 mg sodium

At the Sports Bar

Strategy: Order before alcohol impairs your judgment.

Eat This:
Salted nuts (1 ounce)
168 calories, 15 g fat (2 g saturated), 190 mg sodium

Or
Plain buffalo wings (half order)
350 calories, 24 g fat (8 g saturated), 510 mg sodium

Not That:
Cheese fries with ranch dressing (1 cup)
750 calories, 54 g fat (23 g saturated), 1,225 mg sodium

Nor
Stuffed potato skins with sour cream (4 skins)
630 calories, 48 g fat (24 g saturated), 650 mg sodium

At the Mexican Restaurant

Strategy: Mexican restaurants can be good places to get vegetables, like the pile of grilled onions and peppers that comes with an order of fajitas. Just be careful of extra cheeses and refried beans, which are packed with fat.
Eat This:
12 chips with salsa (2 ounces)
340 calories, 17 g fat (3 g saturated), 410 mg sodium
Chicken fajitas with lettuce and pico de gallo
850 calories, 30 g fat (6 g saturated), 2,100 mg sodium
Side of black, kidney, or pinto beans
120 calories, 2 g fat (0 g saturated), 400 mg sodium

Not That:
12 chips with queso dip (2 ounces)
440 calories, 25 g fat (7 g saturated), 920 mg sodium
Chicken chimichanga
1,100 calories, 50 g fat (15 g saturated), 3,300 mg sodium
Side of refried beans
200 calories, 6 g fat (2 g saturated), 550 mg sodium

At the Chinese Restaurant

Strategy: You’re in for a big dose of salt, whatever you do, so factor that into your daily meal plan. And pack half your meal away in a to-go box; a single portion will feed you twice.

Eat This:
Egg-drop soup
60 calories, 3 g fat (1 g saturated), 1,000 mg sodium
Stir-fried vegetables
750 calories, 19 g fat (3 g saturated), 2,150 mg sodium

Not That:
Chicken or pork egg roll
200 calories, 10 g fat (1 g saturated), 450 mg sodium
General Tso’s chicken
1,600 calories, 60 g fat (10 g saturated), 3,200 mg sodium

AT THE GROCERY STORE

Strategy: Make a list before you shop. Be specific: Instead of writing “snacks” and buying the entire Dolly Madison collection, write “yogurt” or “sliced almonds.” This way, you’ll buy only what you need, instead of the crap they’re trying to palm off on you. (For more grocery-cart must-haves, go to www.menshealth.com/absdietchallenge.)

Produce

Work the greens: Green vegetables form a crucial part of the Abs Diet. Most produce is just as nutritious frozen as it is fresh, so be judicious. If you rarely use vegetables, buy frozen. If you burn through greens like Ernie Els, stick with fresh.
MIXED-GREENS SALAD BLEND

*Best buy:* The more colors, the more antioxidants. Look for one with red radicchio, pale green endive, and dark green spinach.

BROCCOLI

*Best buy:* Tight buds mean fresh broccoli.

NUTS

*Best buy:* Look for unroasted and unsalted loose nuts, to cut sodium.

Meat

*Your muscle maker:* The Abs Diet is partial to turkey, but that doesn’t mean other meats are off-limits. The key is getting the most lean protein for the least amount of saturated fat. Turkey does the job exceptionally well—but only if you buy breast meat. Mixed ground turkey can contain as much saturated fat as beef.

FRESH TURKEY OR CHICKEN CUTLETS

*Best buy:* Check the label for sodium; some raw meats are plumped with a salt solution you don’t need.

FRESH SALMON

*Best buy:* Fillet cuts (the oblong strips) cook quicker and more evenly than steaks (the U-shaped cuts).

LEAN GROUND BEEF

*Best buy:* Pick the 95 percent lean to dodge saturated fat. Mix in vegetables like chopped onions or spinach to add moisture and flavor.

Dairy products

*The great white help:* Think of the dairy section as fat-loss central—if you play the percentages.

1 PERCENT MILK AND REDUCED-FAT YOGURT

*Best buy:* Horizon and Stonyfield Farm organic varieties. Cow antibiotics are for sick cows, not healthy guys.

EGGS

*Best buy:* Eggland’s Best. They’re fortified with an extra shot of heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids.
SHREDDED CHEESES

*Best buy:* Sargento Reduced Fat Shredded Cheese. Why grate your own? These melt evenly, unlike most other low-fat cheeses.

And when you’re in the health food store or GNC, pick up this great muscle-boosting, fat-cutting by-product of the dairy industry . . .

WHEY PROTEIN

*Best buy:* Look for protein powder that also includes casein, another dairy-based muscle builder.

Canned Foods

*What’s in storage:* Canned foods are guy foods—they last forever. Just watch out for sodium, the hypertensive preservative.

CANNED TOMATOES

*Best buy:* Del Monte Diced Tomatoes, No Salt Added—low sodium and no high-fructose corn syrup.

TUNA

*Best buy:* StarKist Premium Chunk White Albacore Tuna in Water. Water cuts the fat, but the no-draining-needed bag seals the deal.

PEANUT BUTTER

*Best buy:* Crazy Richard’s Natural. Peanuts—and just a touch of salt—are its only ingredients.

OLIVE OIL

*Best buy:* Extra virgin, which means the goods haven’t been damaged by mixing with other lesser oils.

Grains and baked goods

*The incredible bulk:* Fiber is crucial to weight loss, and the best place to find it is in whole-grain baked goods. If the first ingredient listed isn’t “whole grain” or “whole wheat,” keep looking.

WHOLE-WHEAT BREAD

*Best buy:* Pepperidge Farm or Milton’s. Both offer a variety of high-fiber whole-wheat breads.

PASTA

*Best buy:* De Cecco Whole Wheat. Although it’s high in fiber, this brand isn’t too tough or chewy.
OATS

Best buy: Arrowhead Mills Steel Cut Oats will take 7 to 9 minutes in the microwave, but they pack a potent 16 grams of fiber per 1/2 cup.

Frozen foods

Cold comfort: Shop here last, and you’ll likely make it home with your ice cream intact. “Ice cream?” you say. Right. This plan is designed for human beings rather than robots.

BERRIES AND FRUIT

Best buy: Cascadian Farm Organic. Go organic. Berries and fruit often top the lists of high-pesticide produce.

WAFFLES

Best buy: Van’s Gourmet Flax. Slightly sweet whole-wheat flavor, with 1.6 grams of omega-3 fatty acids.

ICE CREAM

Best buy: Edy’s Slow Churned Light Ice Cream is sweet and creamy, and it has half the fat and one-third the calories of regular.

AT HOME

The Abs Diet recommends eating six meals a days to keep your belly full and your energy levels up. So your jaws have a lot of work to do. Start with these 15 meal makers, which incorporate as many of the Abs Diet Powerfoods as possible. So sharpen your cutlery. It’s time to eat.

Breakfasts

The Super Bowl of Breakfast

1 egg; 1/4 c oatmeal; 1 c 1 percent milk; 1 tsp vanilla whey-protein powder; 1 tsp ground flaxseed; 1 Tbsp chopped pecans or sliced almonds; 1/2 c mixed berries; 1/2 banana, sliced; 1 Tbsp plain yogurt

Makes 1 serving.

Powerfood count: 8

How to make it: Stir up the egg, then add the oatmeal, milk, whey-protein powder, flaxseed, nuts, and berries in a microwavable bowl and nuke

FOOD THE AVERAGE GUY IS MOST LIKELY TO BINGE ON IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT: Ice Cream
for 2 minutes. Remove and let cool for a minute or two. Top with the banana and yogurt.

Per serving: 587 calories, 30 g protein, 76 g carbohydrates, 17 g fat (5 g saturated), 13 g fiber, 254 mg sodium

**Jam Session**
1 whole-wheat toaster waffle; 2 Tbsp peanut butter; 1/4 c slightly crushed blueberries, blackberries, or raspberries
Makes 1 serving.
*Powerfood count: 3*
*How to make it:* Prepare the waffle according to the package directions. Spread the peanut butter on the waffle, cup the waffle in your hand, add the berries, then squeeze lightly. Think of it as a blueberry breakfast taco.

Per serving: 308 calories, 12 g protein, 24 g carbohydrates, 21 g fat (3.5 g saturated), 5 g fiber, 212 mg sodium

**Foxy Lox**
1 toasted whole-wheat English muffin, 2 Tbsp part-skim ricotta, 1 slice tomato, 1 oz smoked salmon
Makes 1 serving.
*Powerfood count: 3*
*How to make it:* Spread each muffin half with the cheese and top with the tomato and salmon.

Per serving: 214 calories, 15 g protein, 29 g carbohydrates, 5 g fat (2 g saturated), 5 g fiber, 1,027 mg sodium

**Smoothies**

**Punk'd Pie**
1/2 c canned pumpkin, 3/4 c instant oatmeal nuked in water, 1/4 c unsalted pecans, 2 Tbsp low-fat vanilla yogurt, 2 tsp vanilla whey-protein powder, 1 tsp ground flaxseed, 3 ice cubes
Makes 2 servings.
*Powerfood count: 5*
*How to make it:* Blend all of the ingredients together.

Per serving: 270 calories, 9 g protein, 29 g carbohydrates, 12 g fat (1 g saturated), 6 g fiber, 19 mg sodium

**Honey-Nut Cheery Oats**
3/4 c instant oatmeal nuked in water, 1/4 c 1 percent milk, 1 Tbsp peanut butter, 2 tsp whey-protein powder, 1 tsp ground flaxseed, 1 tsp honey, 6 ice cubes
Makes 2 servings.
*Powerfood count: 5*
*How to make it:* Blend all of the ingredients together.

Per serving: 206 calories, 11 g protein, 26 g carbohydrates, 6 g fat (1 g saturated), 4 g fiber, 51 mg sodium
The Neapolitan
\[\frac{3}{4} \text{ c 1 percent chocolate milk, } \frac{1}{2} \text{ c vanilla yogurt, } \frac{3}{4} \text{ c sliced strawberries,} \]
1 tsp ground flaxseed, 2 tsp vanilla whey-protein powder, 3 ice cubes
Makes 2 servings.
Powerfood count: 5
How to make it: Blend all of the ingredients together.
Per serving: 154 calories, 9 g protein, 25 g carbohydrates, 2 g fat (1 g saturated), 2 g fiber, 114 mg sodium

Lunches

You’re Fired! Wrap
1 Tbsp Dijon mustard, 1 whole-wheat tortilla, \(\frac{2}{3}\) c chopped cooked chicken, desired amount of hot sauce, \(\frac{1}{4}\) c diced tomato, \(\frac{3}{4}\) c mixed greens, 2 Tbsp shredded reduced-fat Mexican-blend cheese
Makes 1 serving.
Powerfood count: 4
How to make it: Spread the mustard down the center of the tortilla. Add the remaining ingredients. Fold the outside edges in, then roll.
Per serving: 244 calories, 30 g protein, 28 g carbohydrates, 6 g fat (2 g saturated), 3 g fiber, 1,089 mg sodium

El Tequila Ensalada
2\(\frac{1}{2}\) c mixed greens, \(\frac{1}{4}\) c drained black beans, 1 chopped Roma tomato, 1 sliced green onion, 1 tsp diced cilantro, \(\frac{1}{2}\) sliced avocado, 1 tsp olive oil, 1 Tbsp tequila or, for the less stout of heart, lime juice
Makes 1 serving.
Powerfood count: 5
Per serving: 325 calories, 8 g protein, 23 g carbohydrates, 21 g fat (3 g saturated), 13 g fiber, 250 mg sodium

Day-after-Thanksgiving Wrap
2 Tbsp cranberry relish, 1 whole-wheat tortilla, 3 slices turkey, 1 slice Muenster cheese, \(\frac{3}{4}\) c mixed greens
Makes 1 serving.
Powerfood count: 4
How to make it: Spread the cranberry relish down the center of the tortilla. Add the remaining ingredients. Fold the outside edges in, then roll.
Per serving: 311 calories, 24 g protein, 40 g carbohydrates, 11 g fat (6 g saturated), 3 g fiber, 1,063 mg sodium

Snacks

Berry Easy Parfait
1 c plain yogurt, \(\frac{1}{2}\) c mixed berries, 1 tsp ground flaxseed
Makes 1 serving.
GIVE ME ABS OR GIVE ME DEATH
How belly fat kills

Step 1: The Breakdown

After you eat a calorie- and fat-laden meal, your small intestine breaks fat molecules down into glycerol and fatty acids, which end up in your bloodstream.

Step 2: The Breakout

Fatty acids circulate through your entire body and are absorbed into fat cells, where they’re reassembled into fat molecules and stored for the next famine. Excess glucose and amino acids are also absorbed by fat cells and converted to fat molecules. If the famine doesn’t come, you grow.

Step 3: The Love-Handle Connection

Men are most likely to accumulate fat under the skin in the abdominal area, giving them a beer belly or love handles. Some unlucky guys store it as visceral fat, the kind that globs around your internal organs. If your gut is round and firm, your waist is bigger than your hips, or you wear a size 40 or larger, you’re one of the latter. The theory: Your body is looking for someplace else to store excess fat—namely, your organs, or worse, within your muscles, heart, liver, or pancreas.

Step 4: Moving In for the Kill

There’s a correlation between a guy’s visceral fat and a host of ill-health markers, such as insulin resistance, high LDL cholesterol, low HDL cholesterol, elevated triglyceride levels, and even high blood pressure. The reason: Your liver taps into the pool of fat surrounding it for energy. Using it produces cholesterol, which in turn gunks up your arteries, leaving you at risk of strokes, heart disease, and diabetes. Back slowly away from the doughnut and nobody gets hurt.

Powerfood count: 3

Per serving: 204 calories, 14 g protein, 27 g carbohydrates, 5 g fat (2.5 g saturated), 4 g fiber, 173 mg sodium

94 Percent Fat-Free Microwave Popcorn (Pop Secret, 3 c)

120 calories, 4 g protein, 26 g carbohydrates, 2 g fat (0 g saturated), 4 g fiber, 380 mg sodium

Roasted Almond Granola Bar (Nature Valley)

190 calories, 4 g protein, 28 g carbohydrates, 7 g fat (1 g saturated), 2 g fiber, 170 mg sodium
Dinners

**Sergeant Pepper Beef**

6 oz flank steak (about half of one); 1/2 green or red bell pepper, cut lengthwise into strips; 2 green onions, sliced; 3 Tbsp reduced-sodium soy sauce; desired amount of hot sauce; 1 tsp sugar; 1/3 c cashew pieces

Makes 2 servings

*Powerfood count: 4*

*How to make it:* Cut the meat diagonally and across the grain into thin strips (freezing it for 20 minutes first helps). Place in a large ziplock bag with all the other ingredients except the cashews. Shake well to combine. Dump into a skillet that’s preheated over medium-high. Cook, turning often, for 5 to 6 minutes or until the meat reaches desired doneness. Top with the nuts.

Per serving: 363 calories, 29 g protein, 14 g carbohydrates, 22 g fat (7 g saturated), 2 g fiber, 870 mg sodium

**The Aqua Man**

1/2 c trimmed asparagus; 1/2 c matchstick carrots; 1 clove garlic, crushed; 1 tsp olive oil; juice of 1 lemon; 1/2 tsp lemon rind; salt and pepper to taste; 2 tilapia fillets

Makes 2 servings

*Powerfood count: 3*

*How to make it:* In a small bowl, mix the vegetables with the oil, lemon juice and rind, and salt and pepper. Arrange the fish in a small, shallow, microwaveable baking dish. Pour the vegetable mixture over each fillet. Wrap tightly in plastic wrap, pricking a couple of times with a fork or toothpick. Microwave for 3 to 4 minutes, or until the fish flakes with a fork.

Per serving: 137 calories, 29 g protein, 14 g carbohydrates, 3 g fat (1 g saturated), 2 g fiber, 215 mg sodium

**Mighty Meat Muffins**

1 egg, 1 lb lean ground beef, 1 1/2 Tbsp balsamic vinegar, 1/2 c oats, 1/4 c minced onion, salt and pepper to taste.

Makes 3 servings

*Powerfood count: 3*

*How to make it:* In a large bowl, whisk the egg. Add everything else and mix it with your hands until well blended. Divide the mixture evenly into a 6 c, nonstick muffin pan. Bake for 25 minutes in an oven that’s preheated to 375°F. Serve with mustard.

Per serving: 349 calories, 35 g protein, 13 g carbohydrates, 16 g fat (6 g saturated), 1.5 g fiber, 329 mg sodium

Contributors: Phillip Rhodes, Ted Spiker. Researcher: Erin Hobday

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Global Thinning

Boost your health and drop pounds with these powerful eating strategies from around the world

By Phillip Rhodes

Every nation has its weapons in the nutrition wars. For the Chinese, it's antioxidant-rich green tea. The French have their red wine. In Italy, it's olive oil—bottles and bottles of the stuff.

Americans? We tend toward fad diets and expensive shortcuts like gastric-bypass surgery. But we're also big on openness and acceptance. So, in the best melting-pot tradition, we asked international nutrition experts, cooks, and the editors of our overseas editions of Men's Health for healthy-eating tips from their homelands. It was like having a dozen ethnic-restaurant menus slipped under our door, but with the healthiest items circled.

Then we culled out our favorites, compiling the best and most useful information from around the globe for fighting disease and battling the bulge. Like that exchange student who broke your heart back in 11th grade, it could change your life.

ARGENTINA

Secret weapon: Great beef. An Argentine is likely to eat 30 pounds more beef each year than you do—without raising his risk of heart disease. How's that? “The beef in America is grain-fed, but in Argentina the cattle eat only grass, which is natural for a cow,” says Alicia Rodriguez, chef and co-owner of Chimichurri, an Argentine steakhouse in New York City. “The beef has about half the calories and a lot less fat and cholesterol.” In fact, one independent test found that a 4-ounce cut of American beef contained 10.8 grams of saturated fat and 328 calories, while the same cut of Argentine beef had 2.5 grams saturated fat and 140 calories.


AUSTRALIA

Secret weapon: Smart fast food. “Most of our fast-food outlets offer healthier choices that aren’t available in the United States,” says Sharon Natoli, director of Food & Nutrition Australia. A typical Aussie breakfast: “a low-fat fruit smoothie along with raisin toast or a fruit salad, which are much healthier options than coffee and a doughnut.” Their hamburgers “come
covered with salad. It could be plain lettuce, tomato, and onion, with or without the addition of beetroot, pineapple, or cucumber,” she says.

American translation: Toss the bun, low-carb style, and “ask for more salad on your burgers,” says Natoli. Skip the cheese and mayo and pile on leafy greens, tomato, onion, and pickles. It could start a healthy habit: Did you know you can eat leafy greens without ground beef?

GERMANY

Secret weapon: Some kind of healthy wheat beer, right? Actually, no. “In 2003, for the first time, Germans drank more water than beer,” says Kirsten Segler, nutrition editor of Men’s Health Germany. “Germans on average drank 129 liters of water but only 117.5 liters of beer.” The quality of tap water equals and sometimes exceeds that of bottled water, she says. Just like here!

American translation: If the Germans can cut back, so can you. And get creative with water. “A lot of German people prefer a mixture of apple juice and water if they want some flavor,” says Segler. “We call it Apfelschorle.” We call it a smart idea.

GREECE

Secret weapons: Lemon and oregano. Lemon was originally used in Greece to kill bacteria, says Elena Paravantes, RD, a member of the Hellenic Dietetic Association. “Today, Greeks add it to anything. Not only is lemon an excellent source of vitamin C [a potent antioxidant], but it has fewer calories than other citrus fruit,” she says.

American translation: Paravantes recommends whipping up a batch of the ultimate free-radical-fighting salad dressing or meat marinade. “Just mix lemon juice with olive oil, oregano, and garlic,” says Paravantes. There’s your dressing. You can toss that bottle of goopy ranch now.

INDIA

Secret weapon: The original smoothie, the lassi. “Smoothies in America have fruit syrups and unnecessary sugar,” says Suvir Saran, author of Indian Home Cooking. “Our smoothies are made with yogurt and fresh fruit or spices.” That’s it. The wholesome combination delivers calcium, vitamin C, and protein, which helps keep you feeling satisfied so you’ll eat less during the meal. The dairy also neutralizes chili peppers’ burn—which will come in handy if your Indian-restaurant order includes the word “vindaloo.”

American translation: “Put yogurt in a blender with a few slices of mango or orange,” Saran says. It’s that easy.
LATIN AMERICA

Secret weapon: Shopping socially. “In Central and South America, you do your shopping on a daily basis, and it becomes a social thing. You find friends; you talk to people. It’s like going to happy hour,” says Claudia Gonzalez, MS, RD, a spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association. It’s also an active pursuit that could prompt you to eat more fresh fruit and vegetables.

American translation: Instead of the monthly run to Sam’s Club or Costco for frozen dinners in bulk, stop at the market—or better yet, a farm stand—once or twice a week for your meats, fruits, and vegetables. Get to know the farmer. Maybe he has a daughter.

OKINAWA

Secret weapons: Shiitake mushrooms and other low-calorie, nutrient-dense foods like soy, seafood, and sweet potatoes. Bradley Willcox, MD, who coauthored The Okinawa Diet Plan with his brother, Craig Willcox, PhD, says shiitakes are among the most nutritious of mushrooms. They’re a good source of protein, their calorie content is negligible, and “compounds found in shiitake mushrooms have been shown to lower blood-cholesterol levels and high blood pressure,” he says. Which helps explain why these islands off Japan are home to more centenarians per capita than anywhere else on Earth.

American translation: Buy shiitakes fresh or dried (rehydrate them with hot water for 15 minutes). Chop them into soups, salads, and pasta dishes, or just brush them with oil and slap them on the grill. “With its meatlike quality, this mushroom acts as a meat replacement,” Craig Willcox promises. Beats raw fish, right?