

# Coaching higher-activated patients: Diet and nutrition

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Use this guide to coach higher-activated patients (PAM® Levels 3 and 4) on nutritional best practices, overcoming behaviors that don't support their health goals and finding ways to self-reward for achieving their personal goals.

## Build knowledge:

Increase the patient's knowledge of diet and nutrition best practices.

- Ask the patient to create a list of the foods and beverages they consume in a typical 24-hour period, including portion sizes. Use the list to analyze their current nutrient intake and diet patterns. **Suggest improvements** that may improve their nutrition, such as reducing excess sugar, sodium, unhealthy fats and alcohol—or adding foods with high-quality proteins, fiber and whole grains.
- If the patient feels comfortable, help them **calculate their daily calorie needs** to reach or maintain a healthy body weight. Based on their list, do they typically go over or under their daily calorie goal?
  - Discuss the benefits of reading nutrition labels to identify serving sizes, calories per serving and amounts of sugar, salt and fats per serving. Acknowledge that factors like activity levels might influence how much food they need to consume on a given day. Suggest using a nutrition app or calorie-tracking tool, if appropriate.

## Build skills:

Help the patient develop new problem-solving skills to navigate diet and nutrition set-backs.

- Work with the patient to **analyze their favorite restaurant meal**. Together, brainstorm ways to make the meal more supportive of their health needs (e.g., add a quality protein source if their order doesn't include one, order broiled instead of fried, leave off or order butter on the side, share their dessert, etc.).
  - Review a copy of the menu and online nutrition information to see if there are other options they might like to try.
- Discuss the patient's typical **grocery shopping, meal planning and cooking habits**. What are their barriers to planning and preparing healthy meals? Identify practical shortcuts to overcome these barriers (e.g., using coupons, finding quick and easy recipes, planning meals at the beginning of the week, etc.).

## Build skills:

Help the patient develop new problem-solving skills to navigate diet and nutrition set-backs.

- You may find that **food access is a challenge**. Limited transportation, low or unstable income, body-image struggles and lack of available grocery stores might prevent a patient from following a nutrient-dense diet. Discuss potential solutions to these problems.
- Affirm that everyone encounters situations in which they choose foods and beverages that don't align as well with health goals, especially on holidays, while on vacation or during stressful times. **Come up with ideas together** to help the patient navigate these setbacks.
  - Some ideas may include packing their own snacks for travel, eating a nutritious meal before a party or going for a walk the next time they feel an urge to eat due to stress.

## Build confidence:

Help the patient set their own diet and nutrition goals and find ways to self-reward.

- Higher-activated patients are good at setting their own goals—as long as the goals are appealing and achievable. **Focus on making interesting suggestions**, such as adding more nutritional variety to their diet by exploring unfamiliar foods. How would it feel to try a new fruit or vegetable each week? Then, help them find recipes that incorporate those items.
- Encourage the patient to find healthy ways to self-reward for meeting their diet and nutrition goals, but make sure the rewards do not entail food or beverage consumption. Look for rewards that **reinforce healthy behaviors**, such as participating in a favorite sport or relaxation activity or socializing with friends.
- Continue to **celebrate successes** to keep the patient motivated!