

# Coaching lower-activated patients: Diet and nutrition

Phreesia



Use this guide to coach lower-activated patients (PAM® Levels 1 and 2) on nutrition basics, potential connections between their diet and health and how to make healthier diet choices.

## **Build knowledge:** Educate the patient on the basics of nutrition.

- First, **assess the patient's understanding of nutrition.** Ask them what they think are nutritious foods. What do they typically eat or avoid, and why?
- Review the main food groups, then share examples that fit into each group. Discuss the **concept of "nutrient density,"** or the amount of health-promoting nutrients per calories consumed. Provide examples of some foods and beverages that are nutrient-dense and some that are not. Stress the importance of drinking water to stay hydrated.
- Ask the patient to create a list of the foods and beverages they consume in a typical 24-hour period. Underline the items that are nutrient-dense, and circle the ones that are less so. Are any food groups left out? Use the list to **identify potential nutritional pitfalls** (excess sugar, fats and salt; or low protein, fiber and whole grains.).
  - Avoid labeling foods with stigmatizing terms like "good" or "bad" or vague terms like "healthy" or "unhealthy." Be specific about why certain foods may be better choices.
- Discuss recommended portion sizes. Compare typical portions consumed to ideal portion sizes. Which portion sizes are too small, too big or just right? Ask patients to **consider what portion sizes feel best for them**, and acknowledge that factors like activity levels might influence how much food they need on a given day.

## Build skills:

Help the patient make connections between their diet and their health.

- Ask the patient if there are any foods that they have been told to **avoid or prioritize**. If there are, ask the patient if they know why they were told to do so. Help the patient connect these foods with their health and ensure they understand why it's important to follow these directions.
- Find out what the patient currently believes about the **relationship between their diet and how they feel**. Do they see a connection between food and beverages and their physical health, emotional well-being, energy levels, mobility, coping skills, etc.?
  - Explain that a diet high in certain nutrients can help their bodies function better—while a diet higher in other nutrients may cause harm.
- Explain that everyone encounters situations in which they choose foods and beverages that don't help them feel their best. Help the patient identify their own triggers that lead to those situations. **Discuss some ways to respond differently** (e.g., grabbing a healthy snack, going for a walk, talking with a friend).

## Build confidence:

Encourage the patient to make one small improvement to their diet.

- Discuss the patient's main motivation for wanting to improve their health (e.g., more energy, improved mood, etc.). How would it feel to make **one small dietary change** over the next week to help them progress toward their goal?
- **Work with the patient** to identify one small dietary change they might like to make. Examples might include replacing typical desserts with fresh fruit, finding snack alternatives that may be higher in nutrients than the patient's typical snack choices or drinking more water instead of high-sugar beverages.
- Identify a **nutrient-dense recipe** the patient would like to try. Together, create a grocery list so they can shop for the ingredients to cook the meal.
  - Emphasize how making small dietary changes, such as trying recipes that support a varied diet, can make a big difference in improving their mental and physical health.
- Talk about the patient's next trip to purchase food. Talk through what it would take for them to **substitute a typical choice** for one that's higher in nutrients.
- Remember to identify a goal that is **meaningful to the patient!**