

Assessing Dietary Balance in the Post-SuperTracker Era

Tracking food intake and assessing dietary balance are cornerstones to improving eating patterns. The HEED program previously recommended the SuperTracker as a free digital alternative to the HEED Daily Food Log (appendix B) for dietary tracking and assessment. By now you're probably aware that the USDA has discontinued supporting the SuperTracker website and tools.

So now what?

First, recall that SuperTracker was just one tool for diet tracking and assessment. We liked it because it was free, accurate, and gave feedback using food groups that aligned with the HEED food groups. There are several food-group-related tools still available, and we describe how to use them in a later section. These tools can be downloaded and printed for daily use.

However, the vast majority of diet assessment tools now available to your participants are nutrient focused, so participants who choose to use them may require help from you to adapt these tools to the HEED approach. In addition, digital tools available via a website or mobile device add an element of convenience for some and present a technology challenge for others.

The bottom line? Become familiar with the approaches described here so you can help your participants experiment with the different tools to find the one that is right for them.

Food Group Assessment and Feedback Options

We continue to prefer the assessment and feedback tools that are based on the food groups, even though they may be considered "old school" in some people's minds. They align with the six HEED goals and HEED's principles: "focus on foods first" and "eat a balanced and varied diet." Your participants can choose one of the following food logging and assessment options:

- *The HEED Daily Food Log.* Your participants can use appendix B and the instructions on the following page: [Assessing Your Diet Using the HEED Daily Food Log](#). (Remind your participants to look at appendix E to find a daily calorie level that's right for them.)
- *MyPlate.* Your participants can go to <http://Choosemyplate.gov/MyPlatePlan> to get a MyPlate Plan and download the MyPlate Daily Checklist for the recommended calorie level. It's a really simple way for participants to log what they're eating and see what food groups they're missing. They can then adapt their meals and snacks throughout the day to ensure they stay on track for meeting their daily food intake goals.
- *Apps.* Your participants can track their food intake using a food tracking mobile app or online tool.

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.

Nutrient Assessment and Feedback Options

If your participants prefer to track their dietary choices using one of the many mobile apps or online tools, give them the following recommendations:

- *Choose one that gives feedback on many different nutrients.* These should include carbohydrate, fat, protein, and at least four vitamins and minerals (e.g., vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, iron). Having more data points will provide better insight into the status of their nutrient intake and the quality of their diet overall.
- *Identify which nutrients require attention.* According to the participant's food logs, which nutrients are consistently and significantly below or above the recommended levels that are cited in the app or online tool? *Consistently* means it is above or below the recommended level on most days when the participant logs a full day's intake. *Significantly* means the intake is less than 50% or more than 150% of the recommended level.
- *Interpret what the nutrient feedback means with regard to food choices.*
 - If the intake of some nutrients is too low, the participant needs to eat more foods that are rich in those nutrients or add foods that are good sources of those nutrients. For example, if consistently low in calcium, the participant should add more milk, calcium-fortified dairy alternatives, yogurt, low-fat cheese, and dark leafy greens such as spinach or kale to their regular diet.
 - If the intake of some nutrients is too high, the participant needs to reduce the amounts or frequency of intake for certain foods. For example, if the app or online tool indicates that too much fat is being consumed, the participant will need to find ways to scale back on the intake of oils, margarine, butter, mayonnaise, and other high-fat foods.
- *Plan ways to modify food intake to improve nutrient intake.* Once a participant has identified nutrients that are consistently higher or lower than the recommendations, he or she needs to review the completed food logs and identify which foods to adjust. The following websites list suggested food sources for different nutrients:
 - WebMD Food Sources for Vitamins and Minerals: www.webmd.com (search for "food sources for vitamins and minerals")
 - Washington State University myNutrition Nutrition Basics: <https://mynutrition.wsu.edu/nutrition-basics>
- *Continue tracking and comparing.* Diet assessment is quite a balancing act, especially when trying to understand dietary balance from a nutrient perspective. That's why we recommend tracking and assessing diet using a food group framework. Remind your participants that it may take several attempts at assessing nutrient intake, adapting food choices, and reassessing nutrients to figure out the best eating pattern that will provide the right amount of nutrients their bodies need.

Final Words of Advice

We have provided a participant tip sheet called Food Tracking Apps and the HEED Eating Pattern, which will help your participants use a nutrient-focused dietary assessment tool with the HEED program.

Remember that you should refer participants to a registered dietitian if they have any of the following special needs:

- Have difficulty translating nutrients to food groups (and therefore are at risk for being out of dietary balance)
- Want more specific guidance on using a nutrient-focused approach to diet monitoring
- Have prediabetes, food allergies, high blood pressure, heart disease, or other medical conditions that require more diligent dietary monitoring

If you need additional assistance in helping your participants implement the HEED program in the post-SuperTracker era, please reach out to Jennifer Mulcahey at jenniferm@hkusa.com or 1-800-747-4457.