

Healthy, Balanced Nutrition

Foods are broken down into different food groups based on the nutrients they provide. A healthy diet includes a combination of foods from the different food groups so you consume the nutrients needed to stay healthy. It is best to choose a variety of foods from each of the food groups in the appropriate portion sizes. A healthy diet and adequate hydration is important for maintaining energy, strength, skin integrity, and preventing or reducing chronic diseases such as heart disease and diabetes.

Food Groups

The Protein Group

The protein group provides protein, iron, B-vitamins, calories and fat. Protein is important to help heal wounds and maintain muscle mass. This food group includes beef, pork, fish, chicken, turkey, eggs, dried peas/beans, nuts/nut butters, and soy products.

- Choose lean/low fat meats instead of fatty meats to avoid unhealthy fats.
- Choose grilled, broiled, or roasted meats instead of those that are breaded or fried.
- Take the skin off poultry or buy it skinless.
- Limit to one egg yolk per day and add extra egg whites if desired.

The Fruit Group

The fruit group gives the body essential nutrients including vitamins, minerals, carbohydrates and fiber. It includes fresh, frozen, canned, and dried fruits as well as fruit juice. Fresh fruits are usually the best choices from this group.

- Try a piece of fruit for dessert instead of unhealthy sweets.
- Eat a piece of fruit with peanut butter or a low fat cheese as a healthy snack.
- Choose a piece of fresh fruit instead of drinking juice.
- Avoid canned fruit in syrup and choose fresh fruit or canned fruit in juice instead.

The Vegetable Group

Vegetables are a good source of vitamins, minerals, carbohydrate, and fiber. This group is divided into non-starchy and starchy vegetables. Starchy vegetables have a similar carbohydrate and caloric content to the grain group. Nonstarchy vegetables are lower in carbohydrate and calories so they can help you feel full without causing weight gain. Examples of non-starchy vegetables are greens/lettuce, broccoli, green beans, onions, carrots, etc. Examples of starchy vegetables include corn, green peas, and potato.

- Try to include two and a half cups of vegetables per day with at least one nonstarchy vegetable at lunch and dinner.
- Aim for a variety of different colored vegetables in your daily diet.
- Avoid adding fatty sauces, butter, gravy, full fat salad dressing or salt to your vegetables.
- Choose vegetables that are raw, steamed, or roasted instead of fried.

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- Fresh or frozen vegetables tend to have less salt than canned vegetables so choose those more often if you are limiting your sodium intake.
- If you are taking Coumadin medication, keep your intake of high vitamin K vegetables consistent day to day or avoid eating them.

The Grain Group

The grain group gives the body fiber, carbohydrates, protein, iron and B-vitamins. Fiber is important to help with bowel regularity, blood sugar control for diabetes, and heart health. This group includes bread, hot and cold cereal, noodles, rice, pasta, cornmeal, flour, and crackers. Fiber is found in whole wheat crackers, whole grain breads and cereals, brown rice, oatmeal, and bran cereals.

- Make at least half your grains “whole grains”: look for “whole” before grain in the list of ingredients.
- Choose foods with greater than or equal to 3 grams of fiber on the nutrition facts label.
- It is especially important to monitor your portion sizes of this group to control your blood sugar if you have diabetes.

The Dairy Group

The dairy group gives the body protein, carbohydrate, fat, calcium, B-vitamins, vitamin A and vitamin D. This group includes milk, yogurt, and cheeses.

- Choose lowfat or fat-free dairy products to get the good nutrients without the unhealthy fat. For example, switch from whole/2% milk to skim/1% milk.
- For bone health, choose 2-4 servings per day.
- If you are lactose intolerant or don't tolerate cow's milk, try lactose-free products or soy milk.

Oils/Fat Group

A small amount of oils or fats are required for energy, metabolism, and hormones. Fat is found in oils, animal fats, margarines, avocados, and nuts. There are healthy and unhealthy fats. Healthy fats tend to be liquid at room temperature and are called monounsaturated or polyunsaturated fats. Unhealthy fats tend to be solid at room temperature and are called saturated or trans fats.

- Choose more healthy fats like oils, fat in fish, nuts, and avocado.
- Limit solid fats like butter, stick margarine, shortening, and lard.
- Choose lean/low fat meats and dairy products and remove the skin and fat from meats.
- Read the Nutrition Facts Label and choose most of your foods that contain less than 3 grams of saturated fat, no trans fat, and less than 200 milligrams of cholesterol.
- Avoid products with hydrogenated or partially hydrogenated oils in the ingredients list.
- Remember to watch portion sizes because even healthy fats like oils are high in calories.
- Choose lowfat or reduced-fat condiments.

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Fluids

Adequate hydration is necessary for preventing dehydration, skin breakdown, kidney stones/urinary tract infections, and constipation.

Include at least 8 cups of non-caffeinated fluids per day in your daily diet to maintain adequate hydration unless instructed differently by your doctor.

Key Points for a Healthy Diet

- Eat a variety of foods in the correct portion sizes.
- Consume a diet low in fat, saturated fat and cholesterol. Choose foods with less than 3 grams of saturated fat, zero trans fat, and less than 200 milligrams of cholesterol.
- Consume a diet low in sodium and salt. Choose foods with less than 140 milligrams of sodium.
- Consume a diet low in sugar and higher in fiber.
- Consume a diet rich in whole grains, fruits and vegetables.
- Regulate your food intake with physical activity to maintain or achieve your weight goals. Adjust your portion sizes to help with weight control.
- Limit fried foods, fast foods, and junk foods.
- Don't drink your calories. Limit high sugar beverages and juice to 8 fluid ounces per day.
- Plan ahead so you have healthy food options available and eat regularly scheduled meals to help fuel your body, maintain your metabolism, and avoid getting overly hungry.

The Plate Method from myplate.gov: It is important to consume balanced meals to get the right amount of nutrients from all the different food groups. Try using the plate method shown below to make your food and portion size choices to keep your meals balanced.

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