

Nutrition 101: How to Eat Healthy

Most health experts recommend eating a balanced, healthy diet to maintain or lose weight. But what is a healthy diet?

The basic components of a healthy diet include the right amount of.

- Protein (found in meat, poultry, dairy products, eggs and beans)
- Fat (found in animal and dairy products, nuts, oils, and fried food)
- Carbohydrate (found in fruits, vegetables, pasta, rice, grains and peas, beans and other legumes, sweets)
- Vitamins (such as vitamins A,B,C, D, E and K)
- Minerals (such as calcium, potassium and iron)
- Water

What Are Calories?

Of these six nutrients, only carbohydrates, proteins and fats provide calories. A calorie is a measurement, just like a teaspoon or an inch. Calories are the amount of energy released when your body breaks down food. The more calories a food has, the more energy it can provide to your body. When you eat more calories than you need, your body stores the extra calories as fat. Even a fat-free food can have a lot of calories and can be stored as fat.

What Are Proteins?

Proteins are nutrients that are essential to the building, maintenance and repair of body tissue such as the skin, the internal organs and muscle. Proteins are also the major components of our immune system and hormones.

Proteins are made up of substances called amino acids -- 22 are considered vital for health. Of these, the adult body can make 14; the other 8 (called essential amino acids) can only be obtained from what we eat.

Proteins are found in all types of food, but only meat, eggs, cheese and other foods from animal sources contain complete proteins, meaning they provide the 8 essential amino acids.

Your daily diet must contain enough protein to replenish these amino acids. Thus, if you are vegetarian and do not eat food from animal sources, you need to eat a variety of plant proteins in combination to ensure that you get enough of the essential amino acids.

The new dietary reference values for protein for adults are 0.8 grams per kilogram of body weight. This translates to approximately 0.36 grams of protein per pound and may range from 10-35% of your total body weight.

However, over the course of a day, the average American diet includes almost double the protein needed to help maintain a healthy body. Using the chart below, you can easily calculate how much protein your body needs.

Adult Weight	Suggested Daily Grams of Protein
100	36
125	45
150	54
175	63
200	72
225	81

Is Any Fat Healthy?

A certain amount of fat in the diet *is* good and necessary to be healthy. Adults should get 20-35% of their calories from fat. However, nutrition experts agree that most Americans should eat less fat than they currently do. Research shows that excessive intake of fat, especially saturated fat, and cholesterol increases the risk of heart disease. Eating too much fat can cause excess body weight, since a gram of fat has about twice as many calories per gram as carbohydrates (see below) and proteins. (There are 9 calories per gram of fat compared to 4 calories for protein and carbohydrates.)

Fat is made up of compounds called fatty acids or lipids. Depending on their chemical structure, these fatty acids are called monounsaturated, saturated or polyunsaturated. Saturated fats are the "fattest" fats and are the unhealthiest fats to eat.

Problems with too much dietary fat come when 10% or more of your daily calories come from saturated fats such as those found in meats, high fat dairy products and butter and cooked or made with hydrogenated fats. This practice may lead to high blood cholesterol levels and, heart disease.

What Are Carbohydrates?

Carbohydrates provide fuel for the body in the form of glucose. Glucose is a sugar that is the primary means of energy for all of the body's cells. Adults should get 45-64% of their calories from carbohydrates.

Carbohydrate sources include many foods that are nutrient-rich such as whole grains, fruits, vegetables and legumes, as well as foods such as candy, pastries, cookies, and flavored beverages (soft drinks and fruit drinks) which provide insignificant amounts of vitamins, minerals and other essential nutrients.

What Are Vitamins?

Vitamins help with chemical reactions in the body. In general, vitamins must come from the diet; the body doesn't make them.

There are 13 vitamins essential to the body. They are divided into two categories. soluble (vitamin C and all the B vitamins) and fat-soluble (vitamins A, D, E, and K). The fat-soluble vitamins are more easily stored by the body. Thus, you do not need large amounts of these vitamins since they can easily become toxic and cause a variety of problems.

Because the water-soluble vitamins aren't stored for long in the body, we must consume them daily. And, although taking large doses of these vitamins isn't necessarily dangerous, it may be **wasteful as the body eliminates** the excess water-soluble vitamins in the urine.

What Are Minerals?

Minerals, like vitamins, must come from the diet; the body doesn't make them. Many minerals are vital to the proper function of the body and must be taken in relatively large amounts (such as calcium, potassium and iron.) Others, like trace minerals (zinc, selenium, and copper), are only needed in small amounts to maintain good health.

How Does Water Promote Health?

Although it has no food value, the body can't survive without water - it is essential in keeping the brain adequately hydrated. Water is the most plentiful substance in the body, accounting for 55%-65% of body weight, but because the body can't store water, we must constantly replenish it.

How Much Nutrients Do I Need to Stay Healthy?

A healthy diet should consist of.

- 45% to 65% carbohydrates
- 10% to 35% protein
- 20% to 35% fat, with no more than 10% saturated fat

The Food Pyramid published by the USDA makes it easy to envision just how much of each food type you should eat.

Each section of the pyramid represents a food group; the size of the group corresponds to the number of recommended servings. The base of the pyramid represents the grain group. These are carbohydrate-rich foods. bread, cereal, rice and pasta. You should eat 6-11 servings per day of these foods. The next tier of the pyramid includes vegetables and fruit. You should eat 3-5 servings per day of vegetables and 2-4 servings per day of fruit. These are good sources of vitamins, minerals, and fiber. The next level is protein. dairy products, meat, poultry, fish, dry beans, eggs, and nuts. You should eat 2-3 servings per day of foods from the milk group and 2-3 servings per day of foods from the meat, egg, bean, and nut group. The top level of the pyramid is fats, oils, and sweets; these should be used sparingly.

The pyramid calls for eating a variety of foods to get all of the nutrients you need, and, at the same time, the right amount of calories to maintain a healthy weight. If you're watching your weight, eat the *minimum* number of recommended servings. If you need to gain weight, eat the *maximum* number of servings. And, keep in mind as to what constitutes a serving. Most serving sizes are smaller than you think. Be sure to read the [food labels](#) carefully to determine the accurate [portion size](#).

Also, try to choose nonfat and lean foods as often as possible. For example, choose nonfat or 1% milk instead of 2% or whole milk; lean meat instead of fatty meat; and breads and cereals that are not processed with a lot of fat.

But you don't have to completely avoid all foods that have fat, cholesterol or sodium. It's your average over a few days, not in a single food or even a single meal that's important. If you eat a high-fat food or meal, balance your intake by choosing low-fat foods the rest of the day or the next day. Read the food labels on everything you eat to help you "budget" your fat, cholesterol and sodium over several days.

Next. [Emotional Eating >](#)

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