

A Balanced Diet

What does it mean?

We're often told to eat a "balanced" diet. This isn't just about eating the right foods – it means the food you choose should meet your nutritional needs without providing too much or too little of any nutrients. It's important to eat a healthy, balanced diet and live an active lifestyle to reduce the risk of heart disease, diabetes, certain cancers and obesity.



Balancing your diet doesn't have to be difficult. Here are three great tips to help you make better food choices so you can improve your health and feel your best.

Tips for achieving a balanced diet:

1. Know how many calories you need

Calories measure the amount of energy that a food or beverage provides and the amount of energy that is used in a physical activity. Most adults require 1600-2200 calories each day, depending on their age, gender and activity level. Eating the appropriate amounts of calories from a variety of foods and staying active promotes a healthy weight.

2. Recognize the importance of all food groups

- **Vegetables:** Eat a variety of dark green, red, orange, yellow and white vegetables to get a broad range of nutrients. Vegetables are good sources of potassium, fiber, folate, vitamin C, vitamin A, phytochemicals and antioxidants. They are low in fat and calories and contain no cholesterol.
- **Fruits:** Eat a variety of blue, orange, yellow, red and purple fruit to get a broad range of nutrients. Fruits are a good source of potassium, vitamin C, fiber, folate, phytochemicals and antioxidants. They are low in fat, sodium and calories, and contain no cholesterol.
- **Grains:** There are two types of grains – **whole grains** and **refined grains**. Refined grains have been milled, which removes the bran, germ, dietary fiber, iron and many B vitamins. Whole grains contain bran, germ and their naturally occurring nutrients. As part of a healthy diet, whole grains may help with weight management and may reduce the risk of heart disease and diabetes.

*Turn over for more
Balanced Diet information.*



- **Proteins:** This includes meats, poultry, fish, eggs, nuts, seeds and soy products. Choose lean proteins such as poultry, fish and lean cuts of meat. These foods are good sources of protein, B vitamins (thiamine, niacin, riboflavin and B6), vitamin E, iron, zinc and magnesium. Vegetable sources of protein such as beans and nuts have no cholesterol and are good sources of fiber.
- **Dairy:** Milk, cheese, yogurt, milk-based desserts and calcium-fortified milk alternatives such as soy, almond or rice milk are included in the dairy group. Dairy foods provide calcium, protein, potassium and riboflavin; some are fortified with vitamin D. Select fat-free or low-fat versions because many dairy foods can be sources of saturated fat and cholesterol.
- **Fats:** Fats are a necessary part of a healthy diet. They contribute to vitamin absorption, supply energy and protect vital organs. Limit saturated fats, trans fats and dietary cholesterol as these fats contribute to heart disease risk. Sources of these include butter, whole milk, ice cream, fried foods, commercial baked goods and high-fat meats like bacon. Choose healthier fats such as monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats. Monounsaturated fats provide you with vitamin E and are found in olives, avocados, almonds and various oils (such as olive, canola and peanut). Polyunsaturated fats provide you with omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids and are found in walnuts, flaxseeds and fatty fish.

3. Practice portion control

Portion sizes have gotten bigger in the last few decades, so it's not surprising that more than half of our country's population is overweight. Research shows that people unintentionally eat more calories when faced with larger portions, so it is important to pay attention to portion sizes at each meal.

Use the above tips along with the [ChooseMyPlate.gov](https://www.choosemyplate.gov) guidelines to learn the right foods and portion sizes for your balanced diet plan.

For more information on nutrition services offered by the Katz Institute for Women's Health, please call **(516) 881-7060** or email **womensnutrition@nshs.edu**.