

Wellness

Healthy eating

Choosing nutritious foods

There is much truth in the saying ‘you are what you eat’ as the amount and type of food you eat has a major impact on your health. Eating a healthy, well-balanced diet can reduce your risk of a range of chronic diseases, help your weight, and boost your mental health.

What is a healthy, balanced diet?

A healthy, balanced diet means eating a wide variety of foods from the five food groups daily – that is, vegetables and legumes/beans; fruit; grain (cereal) foods; protein foods; as well as dairy and/or alternatives.

For more information, you can refer to the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating on the Eat for Health website. The guide shows what a well-balanced diet looks like and gives examples of the major foods in each group.

Key nutrients in your diet are:

- **Carbohydrates** – are broken down to the sugar glucose, the body’s main energy source. Healthy, nutritious carbohydrates include wholegrain bread and cereals, vegetables and fruit. Unhealthy examples include ‘table’ sugar (sucrose).
- **Proteins** – are another energy source and are vital for cell growth and repair. Protein is found in lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, legumes/beans, nuts and seeds, and dairy products.
- **Fats** – are not only a concentrated source of energy, but the body uses them in making certain hormones and to absorb vitamins A, D, E, and K.
- **Vitamins and minerals** – have many varied functions, all of which are important to keep your body functioning properly. Fruit, veg and legumes are an important source of these.

You are what you eat - make it count

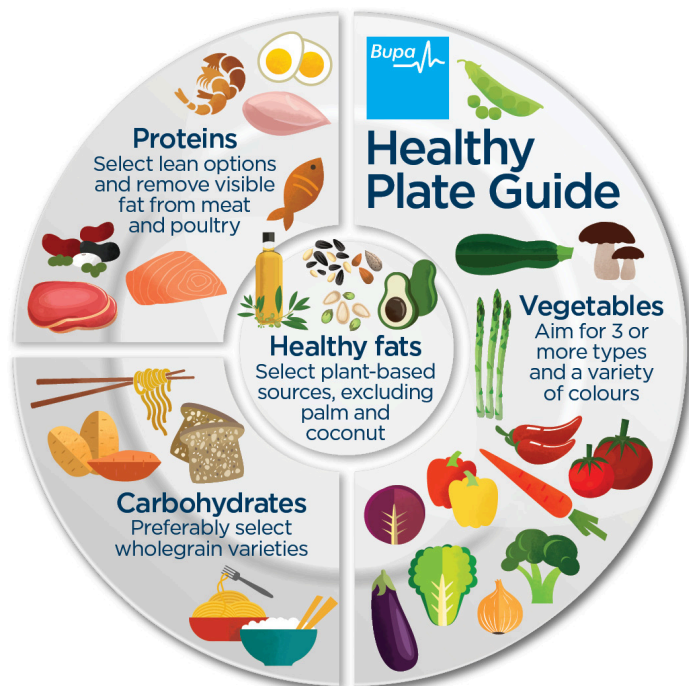
If you frequently make unhealthy food and drink choices, you increase your risk of chronic health problems such as obesity, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and high cholesterol. In turn, these can mean you are more likely to have heart attacks and strokes. And, if you don’t eat enough fruit and veg you increase your risk of getting cancer.

Here are a few simple adjustments you can make to your diet to help prevent these and other health problems.

- **Eat less added sugar** – cakes, pastries, chocolates and soft drinks are examples of treat/sometimes foods; and gradually reduce the amount of sugar you add to your tea or coffee or your breakfast cereal.
- **Eat less fat** – try low-fat dairy and spreads, use lean cuts of meat or cut off the excess fat from meat. But don’t just watch how much fat you eat, be mindful of the type of fat too, as some fats are better for you than others. Saturated fat found in dairy products, meat and even coconut oil raises cholesterol levels, as do trans fats. Monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats found in olive oil, nuts and oily fish like salmon and tuna tend to lower cholesterol and are actually considered an important part of a healthy diet.
- **Eat less salt (sodium)** – eat fewer processed foods like chips, salami and bacon, and use ‘reduced-salt’ or ‘no added salt’ products (e.g. reduced-salt soy sauce).
- **Eat more fruit and veg** – of all colours and varieties.

- **Get enough fibre every day** – it's essential to keep your digestive system healthy. Insoluble fibre is good for your bowel health and is found in wholegrains, fruits and vegetables. Soluble fibre helps lower cholesterol and is commonly found in oats, beans and legumes/lentils.
- **Eat fewer processed and packaged foods** – these foods are often high in unhealthy fat, added sugar and salt.
- **Don't overdo the alcohol** – alcohol can contribute to weight gain, has little nutritional value and can be harmful to your health.
- **Watch your meal portion sizes** – otherwise you will find it hard to maintain a healthy weight, even if you eat more healthily and particularly if you don't exercise much.

Healthy plate guide



Use this Healthy Plate Guide to help you create well-balanced meals. Make most of your meal non-starchy (green leafy or raw salad) vegetables – ½ of your plate. Dish up some carbohydrates for fuel, preferably wholegrain – ¼ of your plate. Include some lean protein power, limiting red meat and avoiding processed meats – ¼ of your plate. Add some healthy fats, in moderation. Eating varied foods along these lines, in the recommended amounts, helps ensure your

body gets all the nutrients it needs to stay healthy.

Choosing healthier options made easy

The free FoodSwitch app from The George Institute for Global Health can help you choose healthier foods when shopping. Simply scan the barcodes of packaged foods to bring up the individual colour-coded ratings for the total fat, saturated fat, salt and sugar content of the product. Red signals the least healthy choice, amber an acceptable choice and green the healthier choice. It also suggests healthier options for similar foods.

Find out more at: georgeinstitute.org/projects/foodswitch

Further Information

-  **Eat for Health**
www.eatforhealth.gov.au
-  **Dietitians Association of Australia**
www.daa.asn.au
-  **Nutrition Australia**
www.nutritionaustralia.org


Sources:

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