

## What is a healthy diet?

Eating is one of life's pleasures. Enjoy a wide variety of foods and follow the suggestions in the eating pyramid (see below) and you will consume the nutrients and energy a healthy adult needs. No food or meals are "good" or "bad". It is what you eat over a period of time that counts.

By selecting foods that make up a balanced diet you may avoid or reduce the probability of many illnesses and delay the effects of aging.

A healthy diet and keeping fit has many benefits for you –

- Helps in maintaining an ideal weight
- Reduces the risk of many common health problems eg. diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, some cancers, gallstones and constipation
- Improves the immune system and helps to fight off infections
- Helps to cope with stress

## The Healthy Eating Pyramid

Use the Healthy Eating Pyramid to assist in making your food choices. Remember, variety is important.

The 'Eat Most' foods at the bottom of the pyramid are low in fat, high in fibre and are best to 'fill you up'. Foods in this group are grains, including wheat, oats, rice, barley, rye, corn, vegetables and fruit. The grains may be eaten whole, ground into flour for breads and cereals or milled and made into ready-to-eat breakfast cereals. These foods are a rich source of energy, fibre, minerals, vitamins and phytochemicals. Legumes such as baked beans, lentils, split peas, kidney beans, Lima beans and chick peas contribute to protein and iron. The iron from this group is not as available to the body as iron in red meat, but this can be improved by eating these foods with other foods containing ascorbic acid (vitamin C).

Choose wisely from the 'Eat Moderately' foods. Foods in this group are rich in protein and a variety of vitamins and minerals. Milk, cheese and yoghurt are excellent sources of calcium. Meat, chicken, fish and eggs are good sources of protein, iron, and some vitamins. As many of the foods in this group are high in fat choose the leaner cuts and fat-reduced varieties.

The 'Eat Least' foods. These foods are high in sugar, fat, salt or alcohol. In small amounts, as part of a balanced diet, foods from this group should not cause concern. Too much or too often can affect your health, waistline and your feeling of well-being.

## What is a serve? How Much Should You Eat Each Day?

'Serve size' varies a lot. The following is a guide to commonly used 'serve sizes' and the number of serves of that food which is recommended per day.

### **Breads, cereal and pasta**

Serve size: 1 slice bread or 1/2 cup cooked or ready to eat cereal

Recommended per day: Bread and Cereals: 5 serves

### **Vegetables**

Serve size: 1/2 cup cooked vegetables, 1 small potato or 1 cup salad

Recommended per day: Vegetables: 5 serves

**Fruit**

Serve size: 1 medium piece of fruit, 1 cup cooked or canned fruit or 1/2 cup juice (choose juice less often)

Recommended per day: Fruit: 2 serves

**Meat, fish, poultry, eggs and legumes**

Serve size: 70-100g cooked meats, 1/2 cup cooked legumes, 2 small eggs, 1/3 cup nuts

Recommended per day: Meat, fish, poultry: 1 serve

**Milk, yogurt and cheese**

Serve size: 1 cup (250 ml), 2 slices (40 g) cheese, or 200 g yogurt

Recommended per day: Milk, soy milk, cheese or yogurt: 2 serves

**A Note About Fats and Oils!**

All fats are at the top of the pyramid and should be limited. Unsaturated fats such as are found in many margarines and spreads, when included in a low-fat eating plan, may be beneficial. These are usually labelled 'Polyunsaturated' or 'Monounsaturated' and include sunflower, safflower, corn and soybean oils which are polyunsaturated or olive, canola and peanut oils that are mainly monounsaturated. Saturated fats are the type that can increase the risk of heart disease and should be avoided as much as possible or eaten in small amounts only.

**Vitamin and Mineral Supplements**

Most Australians should be able to get the vitamins and minerals they require by regularly eating a wide variety of foods chosen from the bottom two sections of the Healthy Eating Pyramid. Vitamin supplements will not make up for eating poorly. If you think you may be at risk and need extra supplements talk to your doctor or dietitian.

Many people eat three meals a day. Others prefer five or six small meals or snacks. Either is fine. However, it is difficult to meet your body's needs if you eat only one or two meals a day. Breakfast is an important meal and an opportunity to start the day with often foods from the bottom section of the Healthy Diet Pyramid. Eating breakfast has been proven to help control and even lose weight.

**Some Points to Remember**

Keep a watch on your weight

Only eat what you need - balance what you eat with what you do

Eat some fibre with every meal

Eat less fat, sugar, and salt

Take a little alcohol only