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## Healthy eating

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### Summary

- Eating a wide variety of healthy foods helps to keep you in good health and to protect against chronic disease.
  - Eating a well-balanced diet means eating a variety of foods from each of the five food groups daily, in the recommended amounts.
  - It is also important to choose a variety of foods from within each food group.
  - Takeaway foods, cakes, biscuits and soft drinks are examples of foods usually high in saturated fat, added salt or added sugars. They should be considered as extras to your usual diet and only eaten occasionally and in small amounts.
  - Daily food serves are different for children, teenagers, women and men.
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Healthy eating means eating a wide variety of foods from each of the five major food groups, in the amounts recommended. The Australian Dietary Guidelines provide up-to-date advice about the types and amount of foods that we need to eat for our health. These are shown in the [Australian Guide to Healthy Eating](#).

Eating a variety of foods from the five major food groups provides a range of different nutrients to the body, promotes good health and can help reduce the risk of disease – as well as keeping your diet interesting with different flavours and textures!

Many of the foods that often feature regularly in modern diets do not form part of the five food groups. These foods, sometimes referred to as 'junk' foods, 'discretionary choices' or 'occasional foods' can be enjoyed sometimes, but should not feature regularly in a healthy diet. Fats and oils are high in kilojoules (energy) but necessary for a healthy diet in small amounts.

No matter where you're starting, it's easy to make little changes to bring your eating closer in line with the Australian Dietary Guidelines. Just focus on eating foods from the five major food groups and reducing your intake of occasional foods.

### Five major food groups

The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating groups the foods that should make up our daily diets into five major food groups.

The five food groups are:

- vegetables and legumes or beans
- fruit
- lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds, legumes or beans
- grain (cereal) foods, mostly wholegrain or high cereal fibre varieties
- milk, yoghurt, cheese or alternatives, mostly reduced fat.

Foods are grouped together because they provide similar amounts of key nutrients. For example, key nutrients of the milk, yoghurt, cheese and alternatives group include calcium and protein, while the fruit group is a good source of vitamins, especially vitamin C.

Eating a varied, well-balanced diet means eating a variety of foods from each of the five food groups daily, in the recommended amounts. Because different foods provide different types and amounts of key nutrients, it is important to choose a variety of foods from within each food group. As a bonus, choosing a **variety** of foods will help to make your meals interesting, so that you don't get bored with your diet.

### Occasional foods

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Some foods do not fit into the five food groups because they are not necessary for a healthy diet. These foods are called 'discretionary choices' (sometimes referred to as 'junk foods') and they should only be eaten occasionally. They tend to be too high in saturated fat, added sugars, added salt or alcohol, and have low levels of important nutrients like fibre. These foods and drinks can also be too high in kilojoules (energy). Regularly **eating more kilojoules than your body needs** will lead to weight gain.

Examples of 'discretionary choices' or occasional foods are:

- sweet biscuits, cakes, desserts and pastries
- processed meats and fatty, salty sausages, savoury pastries and pies, with a high fat or salt content
- takeaway foods such as hot chips, hamburgers and pizza
- sweetened condensed milk
- alcoholic drinks
- ice cream and other ice confections
- confectionary and chocolate
- commercially fried foods
- potato chips, crisps and other fatty and/or salty snack foods including some savoury biscuits
- cream, butter and spreads which are high in saturated fats
- sugar-sweetened soft drinks and cordials, sports and energy drinks.

It's okay to have some of these foods now and then as an extra treat. But if these foods regularly replace more nutritious and healthier foods in your diet, your risk of developing obesity and chronic disease, such as heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and some forms of cancer, increases.

### **Healthy fats**

The Australian Dietary Guidelines include a small allowance for healthy fats each day (around 1–2 tablespoons for adults and less for children).

Consuming unsaturated (healthy) fats in small amounts is an important part of a healthy diet. It helps with:

- the absorption of vitamins (A, D, E and K)
- reducing your risk of heart disease
- lowering your cholesterol levels – if the healthy fats replace saturated (bad) fats in your diet.

There are two main types of unsaturated fats:

- monounsaturated fats – found in olive and canola oil, avocados, cashews and almonds
- polyunsaturated fats, such as:
  - omega-3 fats – found in oily fish
  - omega-6 fats – found in safflower and soybean oil, and Brazil nuts.

The best way to include healthy fats in your diet is to replace saturated fat that you may currently be eating (such as butter and cream) with a healthier, unsaturated fat option (such as olive oil or a polyunsaturated margarine).

Learn more about **fats and oils**.

### **How much do I need from each food group each day?**

How much you need from each food group each day depends on your age, gender and activity levels. The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating outlines how many serves you and your family need each day, and standard serve sizes for foods and drinks.

### **Daily serves needed by children and teenagers**

<b>Children and adolescents</b>	<b>Grain (cereal) foods, mostly wholegrain</b>	<b>Vegetables and legumes or beans</b>	<b>Fruit</b>	<b>Milk, yoghurt, cheese or alternatives (mostly reduced fat)</b>	<b>Lean meat and poultry, fish, eggs, nuts and seeds, legumes or beans</b>
Toddlers 1–2 years*	4	2–3	½	1-1½	1
Children 2–3 years	4	2½	1	1½	1
Children 4-8 years	4	4½	1½	2 (boys), 1½ (girls)	1½
Children 9-11 years	5 for boys 4 for girls	5	2	2 ½ for boys 3 for girls	2 ½
Adolescents 12-13 years	6 for boys 5 for girls	5 ½ for boys 5 for girls	2	3 ½	2 ½
Adolescents 14-18 years	7	5 ½ for boys 5 for girls	2	3 ½	2 ½
Pregnant and breastfeeding girls under 18 years	8	5	2	3½	3½
Breastfeeding girls under 18 years	9	5½	2	4	2½

*\*An extra serve (7–10g) per day of unsaturated spreads or oils or nut or seed paste is included as whole nuts and seeds are not recommended for children of this age due to potential choking risks.*

#### **Daily serves needed by women**

<b>Women</b>	<b>Grain (cereal) foods, mostly wholegrain</b>	<b>Vegetables and legumes or beans</b>	<b>Fruit</b>	<b>Milk, yoghurt, cheese or alternatives (mostly reduced fat)</b>	<b>Lean meat and poultry, fish, eggs, nuts and seeds, legumes or beans</b>
19-50 years	6	5	2	2 ½	2 ½
51-70 years	4	5	2	4	2
Pregnant	8 ½	5	2	2 ½	3 ½

Breastfeeding	9	7 ½	2	2 ½	2 ½
70+ years	3	5	2	4	2

### Daily serves needed by men

Men	Grain (cereal) foods, mostly wholegrain	Vegetables and legumes or beans	Fruit	Milk, yoghurt, cheese or alternatives (mostly reduced fat)	Lean meat and poultry, fish, eggs, nuts and seeds, legumes or beans
19-50 years	6	6	2	2 ½	3
51-70	6	5 ½	2	2 ½	2 ½
70+ years	4 ½	5	2	3 ½	2 ½

### What counts as a daily food serve?

Standard serve sizes vary according to the type of food and the food group.

#### Vegetables – daily serve

One standard serve of vegetables is about 75 g (100–350 kJ) or:

- ½ cup cooked vegetables (for example, broccoli, carrots, spinach or pumpkin)
- ½ cup cooked dried or canned beans, peas or lentils (preferably with no added salt)
- 1 cup of green leafy or raw salad vegetables
- ½ cup sweet corn
- ½ medium potato or other starchy vegetables (such as sweet potato)
- 1 medium tomato.

#### Fruit – daily serve

One standard serve of fruit is about 150 g (350 kJ) or:

- 1 medium piece (for example, apple, banana, orange, pear)
- 2 small pieces (for example, apricots, plums, kiwi fruit)
- 1 cup diced or canned fruit (no added sugar).

Only occasionally, one standard serve of fruit can be:

- 125 ml (½ cup) fruit juice (no added sugar)
- 30 g dried fruit (e.g. 4 dried apricot halves, 1½ tablespoons of sultanas).

#### Grain (cereal) foods – daily serve

Choose mostly wholegrain or high cereal fibre varieties of grain foods.

One standard serve is (500 kJ) or:

- 1 slice (40 g) of bread
- ½ medium roll (40 g) or flatbread

- ½ cup (75-120 g) cooked rice, pasta, noodles, barley, buckwheat, semolina, polenta, bulgur or quinoa
- ½ cup (120 g) cooked porridge
- ¼ cup (30 g) muesli
- 2/3 cup (30 g) breakfast cereal flakes
- 3 (35g) crispbreads
- 1 crumpet (60 g)
- 1 small (35 g) English muffin or scone.

**Lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds and legumes/beans – daily serve**

One standard serve is (500–600 kJ):

- 65 g cooked lean red meat such as beef, lamb, veal, pork, goat or kangaroo (about 90–100 g raw)
- 80 g cooked poultry such as chicken or turkey (100 g raw)
- 100 g cooked fish fillet (about 115 g raw weight) or 1 small can of fish
- 2 large (120 g) eggs
- 1 cup (150 g) cooked dried or canned legumes/beans such as lentils, chick peas or split peas (preferably with no added salt)
- 170 g tofu
- 30 g nuts, seeds, peanut or almond butter or tahini or other nut or seed paste (no added salt)\*.

\*Only to be used occasionally as a substitute for other foods in the group.

**Milk, yoghurt, cheese and/or alternatives – daily serve**

Milk, yoghurt and cheese should mostly be reduced fat.

One standard serve (500–600 kJ) is:

- 1 cup (250 ml) fresh, UHT long-life, reconstituted powdered milk or buttermilk
- ½ cup (120 ml) evaporated milk
- 2 slices (40 g) or one 4 x 3 x 2 cm cube (40 g) of hard cheese, such as cheddar
- ½ cup (120 g) ricotta cheese
- ¾ cup (200 g) yoghurt
- 1 cup (250 ml) soy, rice or other cereal drink **with at least 100 mg of added calcium per 100 ml.**

If you do not eat any foods from this group, the following foods contain about the same amount of calcium as a serve of milk, yoghurt, cheese or alternatives:

- 100 g almonds with skin
- 60 g sardines, canned, in water
- ½ cup (100 g) canned pink salmon with bones
- 100 g firm tofu (check the label – calcium levels vary).

Be mindful that some of these contain more kilojoules (energy), especially the nuts.

**Where to get help**

- Your **GP (doctor)**
- **Dietitians Association of Australia** Tel. **1800 812 942**
- Community health centre
- Maternal and child health nurse

**This page has been produced in consultation with and approved by:**

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