
Healthy eating – what to put on your plate

Summary

- Use the Australian Dietary Guidelines as the foundation for a healthy diet that suits your specific needs.
 - Get professional advice, such as from an Accredited Practising Dietitian, if you have specific nutrition needs or are confused about what to eat.
 - Eat a wide variety of foods from the five food groups, and limit foods containing saturated fat, added salt, added sugars and alcohol.
 - Know how much to put on your plate.
 - Choose water as your main drink.
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Do you know what foods are best to put on your plate? Or how much you should eat and how often?

The **Australian Dietary Guidelines** are there to help you to make healthy choices that will lead to good nutrition and health.

The Guidelines are developed by the National Health and Medical Research Council, working with independent experts in nutrition. They are based on the best available science about the types and amounts of foods and the dietary patterns that are thought to promote health and wellbeing, and reduce your risk of diet-related conditions and chronic disease.

The basis of a healthy diet

The Guidelines will give you the basis of a healthy diet. Use them to build your own food plan, factoring in specific nutritional requirements based on your age and gender. This **summary guide to the Australian Dietary Guidelines**, and these basic tips, will get you started:

- Eat a wide variety of foods from the **five food groups**:
 - plenty of colourful vegetables, legumes/beans
 - fruit
 - grain (cereal) foods – mostly wholegrain and high fibre varieties
 - lean **meats and poultry**, fish, **eggs**, tofu, nuts and seeds
 - **milk, yoghurt, cheese or their alternatives**, mostly reduced fat. (Reduced fat milks are not suitable for children under the age of two years.)
 - Drink plenty of water.
- Limit foods high in **saturated fat**, such as biscuits, cakes, pastries, pies, processed meats, commercial burgers, pizza, fried foods, potato chips, crisps and other savoury snacks.
- Replace high fat foods containing mostly saturated fat with foods containing mostly **polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats**. Swap butter, cream, cooking margarine, coconut and palm oil with unsaturated fats from oils, spreads, nut butters and pastes, and avocado.
- Limit foods and drinks containing added salt, and don't add salt to foods in cooking or at the table.
- Limit foods and drinks containing added sugars, such as confectionery, sugar-sweetened soft drinks and cordials, fruit drinks, vitamin waters, energy and sports drinks.
- Limit alcohol. Drink no more than two standard drinks on any day to reduce your risk of harm from alcohol-related disease or injury over your lifetime, and drink no more than four standard drinks on any occasion. For women who are pregnant or thinking about getting pregnant, or breastfeeding, not drinking alcohol is the safest option.

Together with following the healthy eating guidelines, aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical

activity, such as walking, every day.

Fruit and vegetables (and legumes)

Fruit, vegetables and legumes all provide vitamins, minerals, dietary fibre and nutrients. Most are low in calories and can help you to feel full longer.

Legumes are also made up of **protein**, so they're a useful substitute for meat. Choose from split peas, kidney beans, baked beans (navy beans), soybeans, chickpeas, lupin, and lentils, among others.

Eating lots of colourful choices from this food group will give your body different nutrients. It can also protect against chronic diseases including heart disease, stroke, diabetes and some cancers.

The following guide will help you work out your daily requirements.

Vegetables – how much to put on your plate each day:

- younger children – 2.5 serves for 2–3 year olds and 4.5 serves for 4–8 year olds
- older children – 5 to 5.5 serves for older children and adolescents
- adults and pregnant women – 5–6 serves
- breastfeeding mums – 7+ serves.
- standard serve is about 75 grams (100–350 kilojoules); for example, ½ cup cooked green or orange vegetables (such as broccoli or carrots) or 1 cup green leafy or raw salad vegetables.

Fruit – how much to put on your plate each day:

- younger children – 1 serve for 2–3 year olds and 1.5 serves for 4–8 year olds
- older children, adolescents and adults, including pregnant and breastfeeding women – at least 2 serves.

A standard serve is 150 grams (350 kilojoules); for example, a medium apple or banana, or two kiwifruits or plums. Try to eat whole fruit and not fruit juice.

Legumes/beans (as a source of protein) – how much to put on your plate each day:

- children – 1 to 2.5 serves, **depending on age**
- men – 2.5 to 3 serves, depending on age
- women – 2 to 2.5 serves, depending on age
- pregnant women – 3.5 serves
- breastfeeding women – 2.5 serves

A standard serve is 500–600 kilojoules; for example, 1 cup of cooked or canned lentils, chickpeas or split peas, or 170 grams of tofu.

Grains

Wholemeal or whole grain foods, such as wholemeal and wholegrain bread, brown rice, quinoa and oats, are better for you than refined grain (cereal) foods because they provide more dietary fibre, vitamins and minerals. Whole grains may protect against heart disease, type 2 diabetes, excessive weight gain, and some cancers.

Grain (cereal) foods that are high in saturated fats, added sugars and added salt, like cakes, muffins, pies, pastries and biscuits, are 'extras' or 'sometimes foods' in this food group.

Grain foods – how much to put on your plate each day:

- younger children – 4 serves
- older children and adolescents – 7 serves
- women – 3 serves for those over the age of 70; 6 serves for women less than 50 years of age; 8.5 serves for pregnant and breastfeeding women
- men – 4.5 serves for those over the age of 70 years; 6 serves for younger men.

A standard serve is 500 kilojoules; for example, one slice of bread or ½ cup cooked porridge. At least two-thirds of choices should be wholegrain varieties.

Lean meats, poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds, legumes/beans

Lean meats, poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds, and legumes/beans are all rich sources of protein. Eating a variety of these foods each day will provide the protein you need, as well as a range of other nutrients, including iodine, iron, zinc, vitamins (especially B12), and essential fatty acids.

The Australian Dietary Guidelines recommend that you eat one to three serves of food from this group each day, depending on your age. If you are pregnant, three to four serves a day are recommended.

Lean meats, poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds, legumes/beans – how much to put on your plate each day

- Children – 1 to 2.5 serves, depending on age
- Men – 2.5 to 3 serves, depending on age
- Women – 2 to 2.5 serves, depending on age
- Pregnant women – 3.5 serves
- Breastfeeding women – 2.5 serves

A standard serve is 500–600 kilojoules; for example, 80 g cooked lean poultry (100 g raw), 100 g cooked fish fillet (about 115 g raw), 65 g cooked lean red meat (about 90 – 100 g raw), two large eggs (60 g each), 170 g tofu, 30 g nuts or seeds, or 150 g cooked legumes.

Dairy

Milk, yoghurt and cheese are rich sources of calcium and other minerals, protein, and vitamins. They can protect against heart disease and stroke, and reduce the risk of **high blood pressure**, some cancers, and type 2 diabetes. Dairy is also good for bone health.

Choose varieties low in saturated fat and added sugar.

If you prefer to avoid dairy, go for alternatives with added calcium, such as calcium-enriched soy or rice drinks. Make sure they contain at least 100 milligrams of calcium per 100 millilitres.

Milk, yoghurt and cheese or alternatives – how much to put on your plate each day

- Children – 1.5 to 3.5 serves, depending on age
- Men – 2.5 to 3.5 serves, depending on age
- Women – 2.5 to 4 serves, depending on age
- Pregnant women – 2.5 serves
- Breastfeeding women – 2.5 serves

A standard serve is 500–600 kilojoules; for example, a cup of milk or $\frac{3}{4}$ cup yoghurt.

‘Extras’ or ‘sometimes foods’

Some foods are known as ‘discretionary foods’, ‘extras’ or ‘sometimes foods’ because they should only be consumed sometimes – they’re not a regular part of a healthy diet. Extras are higher in kilojoules, added sugar, saturated fat, and added salt, such as commercial burgers, pizza, alcohol, lollies, cakes and biscuits, fried foods, and fruit juices and cordials. For more information visit **‘Food to have sometimes’**.

More about how much to eat

Information about exact servings and other examples can be found at **Eat for Health**.

Timing your food intake

When you eat also plays a part in a healthy diet. The biggest food timing tip is eat breakfast. Breakfast literally means ‘to break the fast’ from your last meal at night to your first meal of the following day.

Breakfast skippers are more likely to be tempted by unhealthy choices later in the day and to eat bigger servings at their next meal. Children who skip breakfast generally have poorer nutrition and poorer performance at school.

Other food timing tips are:

- **Eat regularly:** Eating regular meals at set times helps you to get all the servings from the five food groups. Aim for breakfast, lunch and dinner, and two snacks.
- **Listen to your body:** Follow your body's hunger and satiety signals (eat when you're hungry and stop when – or before – you're full).
- **Stop to eat:** Take your time when you dine, and turn off the TV or computer. Notice your food, and your body's signals.
- **Avoid eating dinner late at night:** This gives your body time to digest and use the energy from your meal. Try a small glass of milk or a cup of decaffeinated or herbal tea if you need a late-night snack.
- **Eat larger at lunch and smaller at dinner:** The body digests best at peak energy times, which occur from around noon until 3 pm. If you can't handle a bigger lunch, try splitting it into two smaller meals and eating one at noon and the other mid-afternoon. Eating dinner an hour earlier also aids evening digestion.
- **Eat about 45 minutes after exercise:** This will reduce the amount of energy being stored as fat because the body will use it to replenish low glycogen stores.

Carbohydrates and glycaemic index

Carbohydrates are the body's preferred energy source. They are found in many foods, such as breads, breakfast cereal, rice, pasta, noodles, fruit, potato and starchy vegetables, corn, dried beans and lentils, sugar, milk and yoghurt. Eating a carb at every meal fuels the body throughout the day.

Include a variety of good-quality carbs, such as fresh, canned or dried fruit; rice, bread, quinoa and pasta (preferably whole grain or high fibre varieties); and legumes in your healthy diet.

Carbohydrate-containing foods are rated on a scale called the glycaemic index (GI). This rating (between zero and 100) is related to how quickly their carbohydrate content is digested and absorbed into the bloodstream, and the effect it has on blood glucose levels .

Low GI foods (GI less than 55) absorb into the bloodstream slowly and give sustained energy throughout the day. Examples include wholegrain bread, pasta, oats, apples, apricots, oranges, yoghurt, milk, dried beans and lentils.

High GI foods (55 or more on the GI scale) are quickly digested and absorbed into the bloodstream. Examples of high GI foods are white and wholemeal bread, processed cereals, short grain rice, potatoes, crackers, watermelon.

It's ok to include both high and low GI foods in your diet, but tending towards the lower end of the GI scale in your food choices is shown to improve health.

Remember...

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- Eat a wide variety of foods from the five food groups, and limit foods containing saturated fat, added salt, added sugars and alcohol.
- Know how much to put on your plate.
- Choose water as your main drink.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- **Dietitians Association of Australia.** Tel. 1800 812 942
- **Nutrition Australia.** Tel. (03) 8431 5800

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Dietitians Association of Australia

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