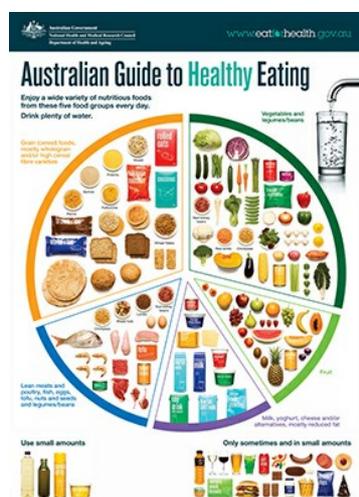

Food variety and a healthy diet

Summary

- Eating a wide variety of healthy foods promotes good health and helps to protect against chronic disease.
 - Eating a varied, 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.
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Food variety means eating a wide variety of foods from each of the five food groups, in the amounts recommended. Eating many different foods helps maintain a healthy and interesting diet which provides a range of different nutrients to the body. Eating a variety of foods promotes good health and can help reduce the risk of disease.



Five major food groups

The five food groups are:

- vegetables and legumes/beans
- fruit
- lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds, legumes/beans
- grain (cereal) foods, mostly wholegrain and/or high cereal fibre varieties
- milk, yoghurt, cheese and/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. These food groups make up the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating.

Choose a variety of foods

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

Occasional foods

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' and they should only be eaten occasionally. They tend to be too high in either energy (kilojoules), saturated fat, added sugars, added salt or alcohol, and have low levels of important nutrients like fibre.

Examples of 'discretionary choices' or occasional foods are:

- sweet biscuits, cakes, desserts and pastries
- processed meats and fattier/salty sausages, savoury pastries and pies, commercial burgers with a high fat and/or salt content
- sweetened condensed milk
- 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 and alcoholic drinks.



Small allowance for healthy fats

Unsaturated fats are an important part of a healthy diet. The two main types of unsaturated fats are monounsaturated fats (found in olive and canola oil, avocados, cashews and almonds) and polyunsaturated fats like omega-3 fats (found in oily fish) and omega-6 fats (found in safflower and soybean oil and Brazil nuts). These fats can help reduce the risk of heart disease and lower cholesterol levels when they replace saturated fats in the diet. The Australian Dietary Guidelines include a small allowance for healthy fats each day (around 1–2 tablespoons for adults and less for children). 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 polyunsaturated margarine or olive oil).

Include the five food groups in your diet

It's not hard to include foods from the five food groups into snacks and meals. Some suggestions include:

- **Vegetables and legumes** – raw or cooked vegetables can be used as a snack food or as a part of lunch and dinner. Salad vegetables can be used as a sandwich filling. Vegetable soup can make a healthy lunch. Stir-fries, vegetable patties and vegetable curries make nutritious evening meals. Try raw vegetables like carrot and celery sticks for a snack 'on the run'.
- **Fruit** – this is easy to carry as a snack and can be included in most meals. For example, try a banana with your breakfast cereal, an apple for morning tea and add some berries in your yoghurt for an afternoon snack. Fresh whole fruit is recommended over fruit juice and dried fruit. Fruit juice contains less fibre than fresh fruit and both fruit juice and dried fruit, and are more concentrated sources of sugar and energy. Dried fruit can also stick to teeth, which can increase the risk of dental caries.
- **Bread, cereals, rice, pasta and noodles** – add rice, pasta or noodles to serves of protein and vegetables for an all-round meal. There are many varieties of these to try. Where possible, try to use wholegrains in breads and cereals.
- **Lean meat, fish, poultry, eggs, nuts, legumes and tofu** – these can all provide protein. It's easy to include a mixture of protein into snacks and meals. Try adding lean meat to your sandwich or have a handful of nuts as a snack. You can also add legumes to soups or stews for an evening meal.
- **Milk, yoghurt and cheese** – try adding yogurt to breakfast cereal with milk, or using cottage cheese as a sandwich filling. Shavings of parmesan or cheddar can be used to top steamed vegetables or a salad. Use mostly reduced fat products.

Serving sizes of vegetables and legumes/beans

One standard serving of vegetables is about 75 g or:

- ½ cup cooked vegetables
- ½ cup cooked dried or canned beans, peas or lentils
- 1 cup salad vegetables
- ½ cup sweet corn
- ½ medium potato or other starchy vegetables (such as sweet potato)
- 1 medium tomato.

Serving sizes of fruit

One standard serving of fruit is about 150 g or:

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

Or only occasionally:

- 125 ml (1/2 cup) fruit juice (no added sugar)
- 30 g dried fruit (such as 4 dried apricot halves, 1½ tablespoons sultanas).

Serving sizes of grain (cereal) foods

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

One serve equals:

- one slice of bread (40 g)
- ½ medium roll or flatbread (40 g)
- ½ cup cooked rice, pasta, noodles, barley, buckwheat, semolina, polenta, bulgur or quinoa (75-120 g)
- ½ cup cooked porridge (120 g)
- ¼ cup muesli (30 g)
- 2/3 cup breakfast cereal flakes (30 g)
- 3 crispbreads (35 g)
- 1 crumpet (60 g) or small English muffin or scone (35 g)
- ¼ cup flour (30 g)

Serving sizes of lean meats and poultry, fish, eggs, tofu, nuts and seeds and legumes/beans

One serve equals:

- 65 g cooked lean red meat (such as beef, lamb, pork, kangaroo), ½ cup lean mince, 2 small chops, 2 slices of roast meat (about 90-100 g raw weight)
- 80 g cooked poultry such as chicken or turkey (about 100 g raw weight)
- 1 cup (150 g) cooked dried or canned beans, lentils, chick peas or split peas
- 100 g cooked fish fillet (about 115 g raw weight) or 1 small can of fish
- two large eggs (120 g)
- 1 cup (150 g) cooked dried or canned legumes or beans, such as lentils, chickpeas or split peas (no added salt)
- 170 g tofu
- 30 g nuts or seeds, or nut/seed pastes (no added salt), such as peanut or almond butter, tahini.

Serving sizes of milk, yoghurt and cheese

When choosing serves of milk, yoghurt and cheese or alternatives, choose mostly reduced fat.

One serve equals:

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

Serves for children and adolescents daily

Children and adolescents	Grains (cereal),rice, pasta and noodles	Vegetables, legumes	Fruit	Milk, yoghurt, cheese	Meat, fish, poultry, eggs, nuts, legumes
Children 2-3 years	4	2 ½	1	1 ½	1
Children 4-8 years	4	4 ½	1 ½	2 for boys 1.5 for girls	1 ½
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	5.5 for boys 5 for girls	5 ½ for boys 5 for girls	2	3 ½	2 ½
Adolescents 14-18 years	7 for boys 7 for girls	5 ½ for boys 5 for girls	2	3 ½	2 ½
Pregnant and breastfeeding girls under 18 years	7	5 ½	2	4	2 ½

Sample serves from the Australian Dietary Guidelines

Serves for women daily

Women	Bread, cereals, rice, pasta, noodles	Vegetables, legumes	Fruit	Milk, yoghurt, cheese	Meat, fish, poultry, eggs, nuts, legumes
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Women 19-50 years	6	5	2	2 ½	2 ½
Women 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

Sample serves from the Australian Dietary Guidelines

Serves for men daily

Men	Bread, cereals, rice, pasta, noodles	Vegetables, legumes	Fruit	Milk, yoghurt, cheese	Meat, fish, poultry, eggs, nuts, legumes
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

Sample serves from the Australian Dietary Guidelines

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Nutritionist
- Dietitians Association of Australia Tel. (02) 6163 5200
- Community healthcentre
- Nutrition Australia Tel. (03) 8341 58

Things to remember

- Eating a wide variety of healthy foods promotes good health and helps to protect against chronic disease.
- Eating a varied, 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.

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

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