

The Balance of Good Health

The Balance of Good Health is a pictorial food guide showing the proportion and types of foods that are needed to make up a healthy balanced diet. The Balance of Good Health has been produced by the Food Standards Agency as a guide that aims to help people to understand and enjoy healthy eating.



The Balance of Good Health is based on the Government's Eight Guidelines for a Healthy Diet, which are:

1. Base your meals on starchy foods
2. Eat lots of fruit and veg
3. Eat more fish
4. Cut down on saturated fat and sugar
5. Try to eat less salt – no more than 6g a day
6. Get active and try to be a healthy weight
7. Drink plenty of water
8. Don't skip breakfast

The Balance of Good Health applies to most people. It applies to vegetarians, people of all ethnic origins and people who are a healthy weight for their height, as well as those who are overweight.

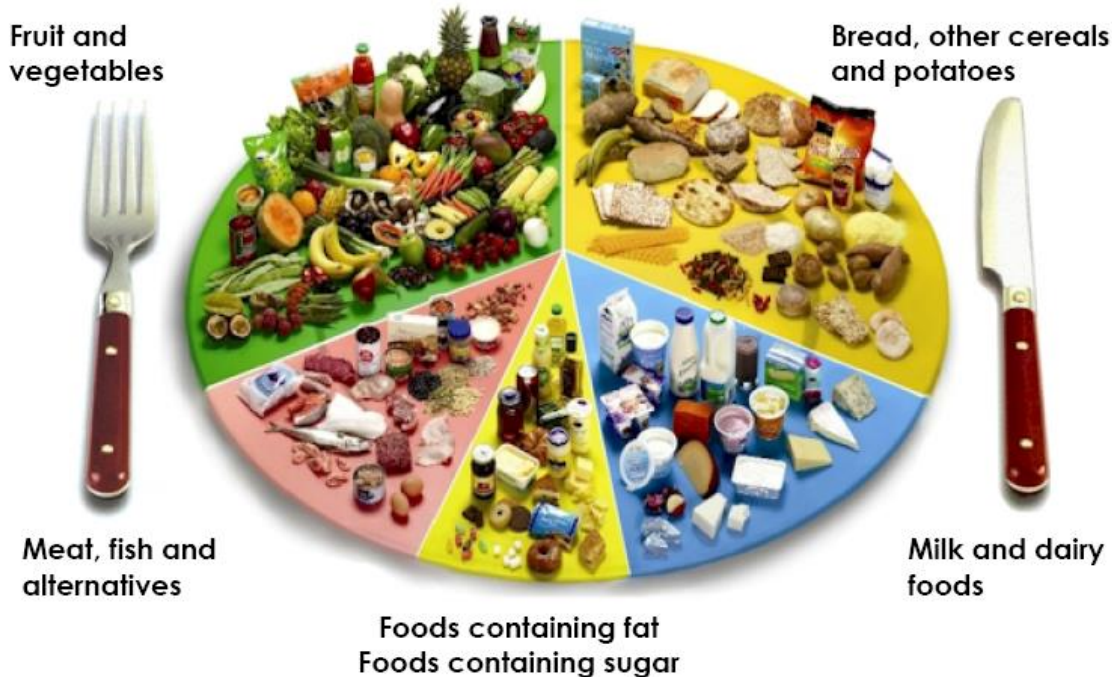
Healthy eating is all about balance, meaning that there are no good or bad foods and all foods can be included in a healthy diet as long as the overall balance of foods is right. All foods provide energy and nutrients and it is achieving the correct intake of those nutrients that is important for health.

No single food contains all the essential nutrients the body needs to be healthy and function efficiently. Different foods contain different vitamins and minerals, therefore a healthy diet should include a variety of foods to ensure all the vitamins and minerals are provided. For example, dairy products such as milk and yogurts are great sources of calcium, but they are a poor source of vitamin C, citrus fruits are good sources of vitamin C, but they do not provide any iron.

We eat food to provide us with energy to live but the balance between how much carbohydrate, fat and protein we eat must be right for us to remain healthy. Too little protein can interfere with growth and other body functions, too much fat can lead to obesity and heart disease.

The guide is divided into five food groups:

The Balance of Good Health



Foods from the largest groups should be eaten most often and foods from the smallest group should be eaten least often. The guide is shaped like a dinner plate which has been designed to make healthy simpler to understand and interpret.

The Balance of Good Health shows the types of foods that fit into the five commonly accepted food groups and the proportions of these foods that should be eaten from each group. People should be encouraged to choose a variety of foods from the four largest groups every day to ensure that they obtain the wide range of nutrients their bodies need to grow, develop and/or function properly and stay healthy.

More foods should be eaten from the *bread, other cereals and potatoes* group and the *fruit and vegetables* group compared with the *milk and dairy foods* group and the *meat, fish and alternatives* group. Foods in the smallest group – *foods containing fat and foods containing sugar* – add choice and palatability but foods from this group should be used sparingly if they are eaten every day (such as butter and spreads) or not eaten too often (such as sweets and crisps).

It is not necessary to achieve this balance at each meal but it should be applied to food eaten over a day or even a week. The amounts that should be consumed will vary depending on energy needs (based on age, sex and physical activity levels) and appetite. Dishes containing more than one food can also fit into the model. For example, a pizza has a dough base with toppings. The dough base counts as a starchy food so having a thick base is a good idea. If the pizza is home-made the topping could be made with a reduced fat cheese or less cheese and more tomato. Including a side salad with the pizza would increase the amount of vegetables eaten, and fruit could be eaten to complete the meal.

Key message

The key message from the Balance of Good Health is that having a balance and variety of foods in the diet is important for health. Aiming to achieve this balance every day is a sensible and practical approach, although it is not necessary to achieve it at every meal. Choosing different foods from within each group is also important as this adds to the range of nutrients consumed, as well as variety to the diet.

Bread, other cereals and potatoes



Foods from this group should be eaten in good amounts and included at each meal. Eating more starchy foods such as bread, potatoes, rice and pasta helps to reduce the amount of fat and increase the amount of fibre in the diet. Wholemeal and wholegrain versions should be included as well as white or refined versions to improve fibre intake, which keeps the gut healthy.

Potatoes, yams, plantains and sweet potato fall into this group, rather than fruit and vegetables, because they contain starchy carbohydrates.

- Base your meals around foods from this group.
- Eat wholegrain or wholemeal breads, pastas and cereals as well as white choices.
- Choose low fat oven chips rather than fried chips (oven chips fall into this food group but fried chips don't).
- Eating more foods from this group will help to reduce the proportion of fat and increase the amount of fibre in the diet.
- Avoid frying or adding too much fat to these foods.

Fruits and vegetables



Eating at least five portions of fruit and vegetables every day is recommended for health. All fruits and vegetables count except for potatoes. Fruits and vegetables do not need to be fresh or raw; canned, dried, frozen, juices or cooked in soups and stews are just as good and all count towards 5-A-DAY.

Fruits and vegetables are low in fat and high in fibre so help to achieve the right balance between the nutrients in the diet. They also contain vitamins, minerals and other substances known as antioxidants which help protect against diseases such as cancer and heart disease.

- Choose fruit or chopped vegetables as a snack.
- Add dried or fresh fruit to breakfast cereals.
- Have a salad with sandwiches or with pizza.
- Add vegetables to casseroles and stews and fruit to desserts.
- Try not to eat the same fruits and vegetables every day.

Milk and dairy products



These foods provide calcium and are very important in the diet for good bone health. These foods should be eaten in moderate amounts every day. Try to eat 2-3 servings a day. A serving of milk is a 200ml glass, a serving of yogurt is a small pot (150g), a serving of cheese is 30g (matchbox size). Choose lower fat versions whenever you can, such as semi-skimmed milk, low fat yogurt and reduced fat cheese.

- Choose low fat milk, i.e. semi-skimmed or skimmed milk.
- Choose low fat yogurts and reduced fat cheeses.

Meat, fish and alternatives



These foods provide protein for growth and development and minerals like iron, zinc and magnesium and also B vitamins. Leaner cuts of meat and lower fat versions of these foods should be included. Visible fat and skin should be trimmed from meat and poultry, and cooking methods should be employed that do not add fat, for example grilling instead of frying. This helps to reduce the amount of saturated fat in the diet.

It is recommended that fish is included in the diet at least twice a week and that at least one of these is an oily fish, e.g. salmon, trout, mackerel or sardines.

Alternatives include nuts, tofu, mycoprotein, textured vegetable protein (TVP), beans such as kidney beans and canned baked beans, and pulses such as lentils.

- Choose lower fat meat products.
- Choose lean cuts of meat.
- Cut visible fat including skin from meat and poultry and drain away fat after cooking.
- Try to grill, roast or microwave meat and fish rather than frying.
- Eat oily fish once a week.

Foods containing fat and foods containing sugar



These foods should be eaten in small amounts. Some of these foods, such as oils and spreads, are typically eaten every day, so they should be used sparingly and lower fat alternatives should be used where possible.

Other foods, such as cakes and biscuits, should be not be eaten too frequently. Food and drinks containing sugar should be eaten as part of meals, rather than between meals.

- Eat small quantities of these foods.
- Choose low fat or reduced sugar foods where possible.
- Use spreads and oils sparingly – opt for vegetable fats and oils.
- Try to limit consumption of sugar-containing foods and drinks between meals.
- Try not to add fat to foods when cooking.

Fluids

It is important to drink enough to remain well hydrated. One of the most common causes of inability to concentrate is dehydration. Even mild dehydration of around 2% affects concentration, yet not enough to stimulate feelings of thirst. Drinking plenty of water can help concentration, sports performance and prevent headaches.

The body needs about 1.5 -2 litres of fluid per day (all drinks count except for alcohol). When the weather is hot, or during and after exercise or strenuous activity, more fluid is needed to compensate for that which is lost from the body.