



Cultivating Your Balanced Nutrition



Choosing whole foods will best meet your nutrition needs and maximize your body's absorption of vital nutrients. With a focus on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins, you will meet your energy, vitamin, and mineral needs to support your overall wellness. By eating a variety of foods, we ensure that our bodies receive the balanced macronutrients it needs. Macronutrients are the group of nutrients that provide us with energy throughout our day. The three macronutrients in our diet include carbohydrates, protein, and fat. These nutrients are essential in our diet. Depending on lifestyle factors, genetics, and medical conditions, we all require varying amounts of macronutrients. Foods from each macronutrient group also provide different vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants.

Carbohydrates are our cells' fuel for energy, but are also the building blocks of our muscle storage, glycogen. Carbohydrates provide us with high energy substrate and are the preferred fuel for the body, including the brain. Carbohydrates are found in all 5 food groups. Many people think of grains as rich carbohydrate sources, but **fruit, starchy vegetables, beans, legumes, yogurt, and milk** are all great sources of carbohydrates. In addition, **fruits and vegetables** provide natural fiber and phytonutrients which help to reduce inflammation and repair DNA. Choose complex carbohydrates, which contain starch and fiber and help slow down our digestion, keep us feeling full longer, help to reduce our cholesterol, and maintain blood sugar control. Complex carbohydrates such as **oatmeal** and **beans** offer added benefits including folate and iron, which help to prevent anemia.

Protein is made of single amino acids. We use protein for everything, from growth to creating DNA to healing and recovery after exercise or injury. The body can make some amino acids on its own, but 9 of the 20 amino acids must be consumed in the diet. Both animal- and plant-based protein foods are excellent sources of a variety of amino acids. Animal-based protein foods including **chicken, pork, and eggs** provide excellent sources of vitamin B12 and iron, which are important for nerve function and blood cell health. Animal-based protein foods also provide choline and zinc, which help prevent neural tube defects and aid in cell division and growth, respectively. An example of a plant-based protein source is **tempeh**, which is not only rich in protein, but also contains prebiotics to support a healthy gut flora. **Beans** are another excellent plant-based protein food, which are also packed with fiber and help to reduce cholesterol and regulate blood sugar levels.

Fat is a necessary part of our diet because it provides essential fatty acids and helps us absorb many vitamins. It is also a source of energy storage in the body. Our body requires adequate fat in our diet for normal development, to maintain skin integrity, optimize brain health, and to use as an excellent energy source. There are certain types of fats that are essential in the body, because just like some amino acids, the body cannot make these specific fats. There are many types of fats in the diet, including saturated, trans, monounsaturated, and polyunsaturated. These different types of fats can have both healthful and unhealthy nutritional impacts on the body. The least healthful types of fat are saturated and trans, therefore it is recommended we reduce intakes of these types of fats and focus on mono- and polyunsaturated fats to optimize heart health. Nutritious, fat-rich foods include **avocados**, a fruit that is high in potassium, which reduces the risk of high blood pressure. **Nuts and seeds** are another rich source of healthy fats, which also contain good amounts of magnesium, an important mineral to maintain bone health.

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