

### **BALANCED DIET: A SIGHT**

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#### **Abstract**

A balanced diet is one that gives your body the nutrition it needs to function properly. In order to get truly balanced nutrition, you should obtain the majority of your daily calories from fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins.

**Keywords:** - Diet, Nutrition, Calories, Health, Food.

#### **Introduction:-**

A healthy diet is one that helps maintain or improve overall health. A healthy diet provides the body with essential nutrition: fluid, adequate essential amino acids from protein, essential fatty acids, vitamins, minerals, and adequate calories. The requirements for a healthy diet can be met from a variety of plant-based and animal-based foods. A healthy diet supports energy needs and provides for human nutrition without exposure to toxicity or excessive weight gain from consuming excessive amounts. Where lack of calories is not an issue, a properly balanced diet (in addition to exercise) is also thought to be important for lowering health risks, such as obesity, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, hypertension and cancer.

Various nutrition guides are published by medical and governmental institutions to educate the public on what they should be eating to promote health. Nutrition facts labels are also mandatory in some countries to allow consumers to choose between foods based on the components relevant to health.<sup>1</sup>

#### ***Meaning of Balanced Diet?***

A balanced diet needs to contain foods from all the main food groups in the correct proportions to provide the body with optimum nutrition. It should also be made up of the correct number of calories to maintain a healthy weight, and be low in processed foods. Every person is different

and hence the correct diet for health may vary from person to person, however by following a diet that is varied, covers all foods groups and is low in undesirable nutrients such as sodium, saturated fats and sugar, you are well on your way to a healthy body.<sup>2</sup>

**A Balanced Diet means:**

- Eating a variety of foods
- Eating a balance of protein, fat and carbohydrate
- Eating foods that provide the optimum level of the many vitamins and minerals that your body requires. All of these factors are essential for maintaining health and wellbeing.<sup>3</sup>

**What are Calories?**

The number of calories in a meal is a measure of the amount of energy stored in that food. Your body uses calories from food for walking, thinking, breathing, and everything else it does. The average person needs to eat about 2,000 calories every day to maintain his or her weight.

A person's daily calorie intake should be based on age, gender, and physical activity level. Men generally need more calories than women, and active people need more calories than sedentary (inactive) people.

- The following examples of calorie intake are based on U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) guidelines: children ages 2 to 8: 1,000 to 1,400
- active women ages 14 to 30: 2,400
- sedentary women ages 14 to 30: 1,800 to 2,000
- active men ages 14 to 30: 2,800 to 3,000
- sedentary men ages 14 to 30: 2,000 to 2,600
- active men and women over 30: 2,200 to 3,000
- sedentary men and women over 30: 1,800 to 2,200
- The source of your daily calories is just as important as the number of calories you consume. You should limit your consumption of “empty calories,” or those that provide

little or no nutritional value. The USDA defines empty calories as calories that come from sugars and solid fats, such as butter and shortening.

- According to the USDA, Americans consume empty calories most often in:
- Bacon and sausages
- Cakes
- Cheese
- Cookies
- Doughnuts
- Energy drinks
- Fruit drinks
- Ice cream
- Pizza
- Sports drinks and sodas.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Components of a Healthy Balanced Diet:-***

#### **1) Dairy:-**

This includes cheese, milk and yogurt. Dairy foods are usually high in saturated fat so to reduce fat and calories it is best to choose low fat or fat free varieties. Dairy is essential in the diet to provide calcium for strong bones as well as protein and vitamin D. For those who do not consume dairy products it is essential to use a replacement such as soy or nut based milks or supplement calcium in the diet.

#### **2) Protein:-**

This is the main protein containing food group and includes lean meat and poultry with visible fat and skin removed, as well as fish, beans, lentils, peas, nuts and seeds, eggs and soy proteins such as tofu and tempeh. Meat and poultry are high in iron, whilst legumes are a rich source of fibre and eggs provide a multitude of vitamins and minerals. Fish should be included regularly, particularly oily fish high in omega three fatty acids such as salmon and sardines. Cooking

methods should be low fat such as grilling, poaching, dry frying or steaming to minimize extra fat added during the cooking process. It is also important to avoid processed meats such as sausages and sandwich meats where possible as these are high in fat and sodium.

Protein requirements can vary greatly with age, gender and activity level. To find out your personal requirement for protein, use the My Plate tool.

### **Fruit:-**

Fruit is virtually fat free, low in calories, high in fibre and very nutritious. Aim to include a variety of fruits to get a wide range of vitamins and minerals. This could also include dried fruits 100% and fruit juices, however, it is important to choose unsweetened varieties. Both dried fruit and juices are concentrated sources of calories, so make sure portion sizes are controlled. (See also.

### **3) Vegetables:-**

These generally contain the least calories and the most vitamins and minerals, hence they are an excellent option for filling up on. Make sure to include a wide variety in your meals as different vegetables are rich in different vitamins. Try to use low fat cooking methods such as steaming or grilling. 100% vegetables juices can also be included, and are a great way to get a few serves of vegetables into your diet. If you struggle to include enough vegetables in your day to day meals, try adding grated or finely chopped vegetables to mixed dishes such as pasta sauces, burger mince or lasagnes, chances are you won't even notice the difference.

### **4) Grains:-**

This group is the major carbohydrate source in a balanced diet and includes bread, cereals, pasta and rice. Try to choose whole-grain varieties as these are higher in fibre and contain more B vitamins than white versions. Enriched cereals and breads, for example with iron, calcium or omega 3 can also be a good way to add some extra nutrition to your diet. Avoid sugary or

toasted breakfast cereals and sweetened breads made with refined flour as these contain little fiber and are higher in calories and fat.

### **5) Fats and Oils:-**

Whilst some fat is necessary in our diets for the body to function correctly, it is important that these are the right types of fats. Saturated and trans fats should be minimized as these are unhealthy for the heart. These should be replaced with vegetable fats such as canola, olive, or sunflower oil or spreads. All fats do contain a high amount of calories however, so it is important to keep added fats to a minimum in order to maintain a healthy body weight. Opt for light or low-fat salad dressings and mayonnaise, and use vegetable oils for cooking and baking. Other good sources of unsaturated fats include nuts, avocado and fish.<sup>5</sup>

### ***How to Achieve a Balanced Diet***

At the core of a balanced diet are foods that are high in vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients and low in unnecessary fats and sugars. The following are essential parts of a balanced diet.

### **6) Fruits**

Besides being a great source of nutrition, fruits make quick and tasty snacks. Choose fruits that are in season in your area—they are fresher and provide the most nutrients.

### **7) Vegetables**

Vegetables are primary sources of essential vitamins and minerals. Dark, leafy greens generally contain the most nutrition and can be eaten at every meal. Examples include spinach, kale, green beans, broccoli, and collard greens.

### **8) Grains**

In the United States, we consume refined white flour more than any other grain. During the refining process, the hull of the grain—the outer shell—is removed. Unfortunately, the hulls

where the majority of the grain's nutrition lies. Whole grains, which are prepared using the entire grain, including the hull, provide much more nutrition. Try switching from white to whole-grain breads and pastas.

### **9) Proteins**

Meats and beans are primary sources of protein, which is essential for proper muscle and brain development. Lean, low-fat meats such as chicken, fish, and certain cuts of beef and pork are the best option. Removing the skin and trimming off any visible fat are easy ways to reduce the amount of fat and cholesterol in meats.

Nuts and beans, such as lentils, peas, almonds, sunflower seeds, and walnuts, are also good sources of protein. Tofu, tempeh, and other soy-based products are excellent sources of protein and are healthy alternatives to meat.

### **10) Dairy**

Dairy products provide calcium, vitamin D, and other essential nutrients. However, they are also major sources of fat, so it is best to choose reduced-fat or fat-free cheeses, milk, and yogurt.

### **11) Oils**

Oils should be used sparingly. Opt for low-fat versions of products that contain oil, such as salad dressing and mayonnaise. Good oils, such as olive oil, can replace fattier vegetable oil in your diet. Avoid foods that have been deep-fried in oil because they contain a large number of empty calories.

The USDA has an online calculator to help you figure out how much of each type of food you should consume daily. Try it here.

The USDA highlights these key substances that Americans should consume less of in order to maintain a balanced diet and a healthy weight:

- alcohol

- cholesterol
- refined grains
- solid and saturated fats
- salt
- sugars

If you have questions about your diet or feel that you need to lose weight or eat better, schedule an appointment with your doctor or a nutritionist. They can suggest dietary changes that will help you get the nutrition you need and, if necessary, lose weight.<sup>6</sup>

### **Importance of Balanced Diet:-**

A balanced diet is important because your body's organs and tissues need proper nutrition to work effectively. Without good nutrition, your body is more prone to disease, infection, fatigue, and poor performance. Children with a poor diet run the risk of growth and developmental problems. Bad eating habits can continue for the rest of their lives.

Rising levels of obesity and diabetes in America are prime examples of the effects of poor diet and lack of exercise. The USDA reports that four of the top 10 leading causes of death in the United States are directly influenced by diet. These are:

- heart disease
- cancer
- stroke
- diabetes.<sup>7</sup>

In conclusion, it must be noted that allopathic medicine treats the symptoms rather than the root cause of the disease, which is usually caused by wrong eating habits leading to an accumulation of toxins within the system. Whereas a nutritious healthy diet can rectify underlying causes of diseases and restore one to wholeness of mind and body. Once we realize the connection between a wholesome balanced diet and good health, our food will be our medicine and maintaining good health will be a matter of making the right food choices and leading a healthy lifestyle.

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