

Shopping for Good Health

Nutrition Australia's Healthy Eating Pyramid can be used as a guide to drive your food dollar further. Spend around 60% of your food budget on foods from the 'eat most' group, 30% on the 'eat moderately' group, and very little (no more than 10%) on foods in the 'eat in small amounts' group. While some foods in the eat most and eat moderately groups may seem expensive, such as muesli, meat or fruit, they are usually cheaper per kilo than more processed foods such as frozen meals and biscuits. To determine whether a processed food is in the top, 'eat in small amounts', section of the Pyramid, contents in terms of fat, sugar and salt levels, should be examined (see the fact sheet "Reading a Food Label").

Eat Most Foods

Fruit and Vegetables

- Fruits and vegetables provide a range of vitamins, minerals and phytochemicals (substances in plants that help protect against disease).
- All vegetables and fruit have almost no fat (except avocado and olives).
- Eating a wide variety of fruit and vegetables helps you get a range of essential nutrients – no one food contains all the nutrients you need.
- Fresh fruit is a better choice than juices because fresh fruit is a good source of fibre and contains more nutrients.
- Frozen and canned fruits and vegetables are as good a choice as fresh. Choose fruits in natural juices rather than syrup as syrup contains added sugar.

Cereals

- Cereals are an important way to increase the fibre in your diet. Use wholegrain varieties to add interest and diversity.
- Most breakfast cereals are low in fat and are an ideal food to start the day. Some may be a source of hidden fat and sugar, so it is important to read the Nutrition Information Panel. Choose rolled oats, breakfast biscuits (Weet-bix®), wholegrain cereals, natural muesli, bran cereals.
- Rice, pasta and cous cous are all excellent 'eat most' choices.

Breads

- These foods are high in carbohydrates, the B vitamins and fibre.
- Best choices are wholegrain, multigrain, oat-bran, rye, and soy and linseed loaves/rolls; other good choices are wholemeal and white high fibre; for variety include interesting breads such as pita pockets or Turkish breads.

Legumes

- Includes dried and canned beans, peas and lentils; and tofu and tempeh (made from soy beans).
- Legumes could be called one of nature's wonder foods, as they provide carbohydrates, protein, fibre, vitamins and minerals and some very effective phytochemicals.

Eat Moderately Foods

Meat

- Choose lean cuts of beef, pork, veal, lamb and chicken.
- Select red meats with less marbling as they are lower in fat.
- Visible fat should be removed before cooking.
- Remove skin from chicken, as this is fat.
- Watch bulk buys of meat – fatty meat and bony chops may be part of the package.
- Lean mince meat can be more expensive than fatty mince meat, but buy a can of legumes to add to it to make the meat go further.

Fish

- Most fish are low in fat, and all are low in saturated fat.
- Fish have essential and beneficial long chain omega 3 fatty acids, that are necessary for normal growth and development, and beneficial in preventing coronary heart disease, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, renal disease, rheumatoid arthritis, ulcerative colitis, Crohn's disease, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.¹
- Canned fish is as nutritious as fresh. The best choices are those canned in spring water rather than brine (salt) or oil.
- Many frozen fish products are high in fat. Choose those that are not crumbed, and can be prepared by means such as oven baking, microwave and steaming.

Dairy Foods

- There is a wide variety of milk and soy drinks available on the market. These products supply our easiest source of calcium.
- Yoghurt and custard are other excellent sources of calcium. Choose low fat varieties. Many yoghurts also provide healthy bacteria such as acidophilus, bifidus, and/or casei.
- Cheese is also a good source of calcium. Choose lower fat varieties by comparing fat content on the labels. Be careful, as 'reduced fat' varieties can still be high in fat. Jarlsburg, Edam, cottage cheese and ricotta have less fat than some fat reduced cheddars.

Nuts

- Nuts lower LDL (bad) cholesterol and total blood cholesterol, and help prevent heart disease.²
- They contain phytochemicals and many minerals.
- They contain mostly monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, which are beneficial for the heart. An exception is coconuts, which are mostly saturated fat, and should only be eaten occasionally.
- Eat a small handful of nuts each day to help protect against chronic disease.

Eggs

- Eggs provide protein, vitamins A, D, E and K, and other nutrients.
- They are not high in saturated fat.
- Eggs can be enjoyed in moderate amounts, such as one a day.

Eat in small amounts

Oils

- Limit the use of added fats and oils. When choosing these products (e.g. cooking oils, margarines), look for those labelled 'monounsaturated' or 'polyunsaturated'.
- If buying margarine, look for those with low levels of trans fats. Trans fats contribute to heart disease.
- High fat foods such as fried chips should be limited to special occasions only.

Sauces

- Limit use of sauces, dressings and condiments that are high in fat and salt. Choose items such as no oil salad dressings, tomato based instead of cream based pasta sauces, and reduced salt or no added salt sauces.

High Fat Snacks

- Most snack foods are high in fat, so have these on special occasions only. Fruit buns and scones can replace chips and biscuits, though should still be eaten sparingly as they provide energy without many nutrients. For everyday snacks, see the Healthy Snacks section that follows.

Healthy snacks

A snack between meals is fine if it is healthy! Bread and cereal based foods, and fruit and vegetables, form the healthiest snacks. Try these snack ideas:

- Low fat crackers, crispbreads or rice cakes with salsa.
- Carrot and celery sticks with hommous.
- Piece of fruit.
- Low fat yoghurt.



References:

1. Simopoulos, A.P. 2005, 'Fatty acids: Omega-3 polyunsaturated', *Encyclopedia of Human Nutrition*, Oct 2005.
2. Kris-Etherton, P.M., S. Yu-Poth, J. Sabaté, H.E. Ratcliffe, G. Zhao and T. Etherton 1999, 'Nuts and their Bioactive Constituents: Effects on Serum Lipids and Other Factors that Affect Disease Risk', *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, Vol. 70, No. 3, 504S-511S, September 1999.