

Focus on Balance

We have all been told to eat a balanced diet with a variety of foods. Ok, sounds easy, but what exactly does that mean? What is a balanced diet? Eating a balanced diet means that you are eating a meal that provides you with the three main categories of macronutrients: carbohydrates, fats, and proteins. It is important to eat a variety of each of these to obtain your needs of micronutrients: vitamins and minerals.

Protein: Without protein, life would not exist. Protein is found in many tissues of the body such as muscle, skin, and bone and is used for growth, maintenance and repair. It is important to eat enough protein to maintain healthy functioning. Surprisingly, your body only needs as little as 2-4 oz of protein each day to prevent deficiency. Most people consume more than four ounces of protein at each meal. If you eat more protein than your body needs, it can be stored or used as energy. But the energy from protein is less efficient than the energy readily available in carbohydrates.

Sources: Meat, Fish, Poultry, Dairy, Nuts, Beans, Seeds, Soy, Peanut butter

Fat: Ounce for ounce, fats contain more calories than any other nutrient. This is why it is important to limit your fat intake. In addition, the type of fat that is consumed is also a concern. Total fat intake should be limited to 25-30% of energy and saturated fat intake should be limited to 10% of energy. Fats, unlike carbohydrates, are not used instantly for energy. Instead, our bodies readily store dietary fat.

Sources: Fatty meat, skin on poultry, fatty fish, whole dairy products, nuts, seeds, butter, margarine, oil, avocados, sweets

Carbohydrates: Carbohydrates are your main source of energy and are essential for cellular health. Without carbohydrates, our bodies cannot function properly. It is important to include carbohydrates for a balanced diet.

Sources: Bread, cereal, pasta, rice, beans, starchy vegetables--potatoes, corn, peas, lima beans—fruit, milk, yogurt, sugar, sweets.