

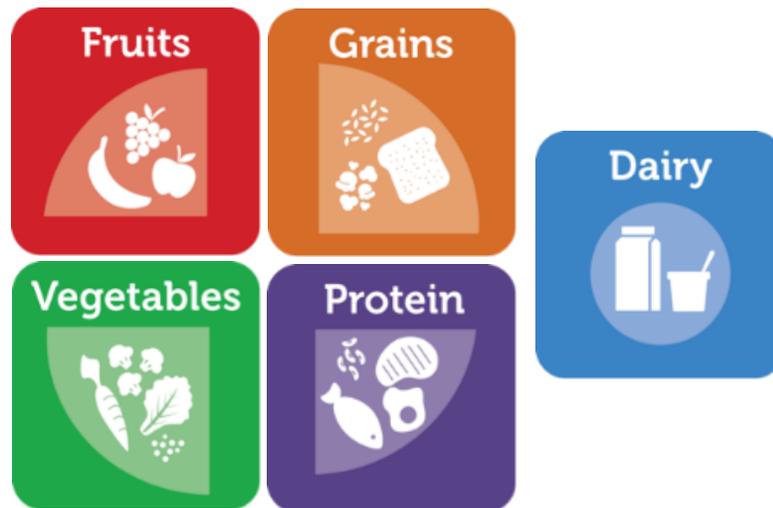
Getting to Know the Food Groups

This fact sheet can help Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) and self-advocates learn about the five main food groups that are key to a healthy diet. These can be used to create a healthy eating plan.

Nutrition Basics

A well-balanced diet or a healthy eating plan includes foods from all the MyPlate food groups: <https://www.choosemyplate.gov/>.

Get to Know the Food Groups



Focus on Fruits

Fruits provide nutrients vital for health, such as potassium, dietary fiber, vitamin C, and folate. Focus on whole fruits—fresh, canned, frozen, or dried—instead of juice. The sugar naturally found in fruit does not count as added sugar.

- **Keep visible reminders:** Keep a bowl of whole fruit on the table, counter, or in the refrigerator.
- **Experiment with flavor:** Buy fresh fruits in season when they may be less expensive and at their peak flavor. Use fruits to sweeten a recipe instead of adding sugar.
- **Think about variety:** Buy fruits that are dried, frozen, and canned (in water or 100% juice) so that you always have a supply on hand.
- **Don't forget the fiber:** Make most of your choices whole or cut-up fruit, rather than juice, for the benefits that dietary fiber provides.
- **Include fruit at breakfast:** At breakfast, top your cereal with strawberries; try peaches and fat-free or low-fat yogurt; add blueberries to pancakes; or take an orange or banana for the road.
- **Try fruit at lunch or dinner:** Pack a fruit to eat or choose fruits from a salad bar. Individual containers of fruits like peaches or applesauce are easy to carry. You can also add small bits of fruit to salad.

Value your Vegetables

Eating vegetables is important because they provide essential nutrients, and most are low in calories. To fit more vegetables in your day, try them as snacks and add them to your meals.

- **Choose vegetables rich in color:** Brighten your plate with vegetables that are red, orange, or dark green. They are full of vitamins and minerals. Try acorn squash, cherry tomatoes, or sweet potatoes. They not only taste great but are good for you, too.
- **Stock up on veggies:** Canned vegetables are a great addition to any meal, so keep on hand canned tomatoes, kidney beans, garbanzo beans, mushrooms, and beets. Select those labeled as “reduced sodium,” “low sodium,” or “no salt added.”
- **Sip on some vegetable soup:** Heat it and eat it. Try tomato, butternut squash, or garden vegetable soup. Look for reduced- or low-sodium soups. Make your own soups with a low-sodium broth and your favorite vegetables.
- **Savor the flavor of seasonal vegetables:** Buy vegetables that are in season for maximum flavor at a lower cost. Check your local supermarket specials or farmers market for the best in-season buys.
- **Vary your veggies:** Choose a new vegetable that you’ve never tried before. Find recipes online at <https://whatscooking.fns.usda.gov/>.

Go for Grains

Grains are divided into two subgroups, whole grains and refined grains. Whole grains contain the entire grain kernel — the bran, germ, and endosperm. People who eat whole grains as part of a healthy eating style have a reduced risk of some chronic diseases.

- **Make half your grains whole grains:** Choose 100% whole-wheat bread, bagels, pasta, or tortillas; brown rice; oatmeal; or grits.
- **Mix it up with whole grains:** Use whole grains in mixed dishes, such as barley in vegetable soups or stews and bulgur wheat in casseroles or stir-fries. Try a quinoa salad or pilaf.
- **Try whole-wheat versions:** Change up your favorite meal with whole grains. Try brown rice stuffing in baked green peppers or tomatoes, and whole-wheat noodles in lasagna.
- **Know what to look for on the ingredients list:** Read the ingredients list and choose products that name a whole-grain ingredient first on the list. Look for “whole wheat,” “brown rice,” “bulgur,” “buckwheat,” “oatmeal,” “whole-grain cornmeal,” “whole oats,” or “whole rye.”
- **Check the label:** Most refined grains are enriched. This means that certain B vitamins and iron are added back after processing. Check the ingredients list to make sure the word “enriched” is in the grain name.

Powerful Proteins

Protein foods include both animal (meat, seafood, and eggs) and plant (beans, peas, soy products, nuts, and seeds) sources. We all need protein—but most Americans eat enough, and some Americans eat more than they need.

- **Vary your protein food choices:** Eat a variety each week. Experiment with main dishes made with beans or peas, nuts, soy, and seafood. Include seafood that are higher in oils and low in mercury, like salmon.
- **Choose lean or low-fat meat:** Choose lean or low-fat cuts of meat like round or sirloin and ground beef that is at least 92% lean. Trim or drain fat from meat and remove poultry skin.
- **Have some egg whites:** Only the egg yolk contains saturated fat.
- **Eat plant protein foods more often:** Try beans (kidney, pinto, or black beans), peas (split peas; chickpeas/hummus), soy products (like tofu), nuts, and seeds. They have low saturated fat and high fiber.
- **Nuts and seeds:** Nuts and seeds are a concentrated source of calories, so eat small portions to keep calories in check. Choose unsalted nuts or seeds as a snack or on salads to replace meat.
- **Keep it tasty and healthy:** Try grilling, broiling, roasting, or baking — they don't add extra fat. Some lean meats need slow, moist cooking to be tender — try a slow cooker for them. Avoid breading meat.
- **Think small when it comes to meat portions.**

Dare to Dairy

Dairy includes milk, yogurt, cheese, and fortified soymilk. They provide calcium, vitamin D, potassium, protein, and other nutrients needed for good health throughout life. Try to choose low-fat or fat-free—to cut calories and saturated fat.

- **Choose fat-free or low-fat milk:** If you currently drink whole milk, gradually switch to lower fat versions. This change cuts saturated fat and calories but doesn't reduce calcium or other essential nutrients.
- **Boost potassium and vitamin D and cut sodium:** Choose fat-free or low-fat milk or yogurt more often than cheese. Milk and yogurt have more potassium and less sodium and often fortified with vitamin D.
- **Top off your meals:** Use fat-free or low-fat milk on cereal and oatmeal. Top your snacks with low-fat yogurt instead of higher fat sour cream.
- **Choose cheeses with less fat:** Cheeses are high in saturated fat. Try different brands or types that have "reduced-fat" or "low-fat" on the label.
- **Switch ingredients:** When recipes such as dips call for sour cream, substitute plain yogurt. Use fat-free evaporated milk instead of cream.
- **If you are lactose intolerant:** Try yogurt, lactose-free milk, or soymilk to get your calcium. Calcium in some leafy greens is well absorbed, but several cups each day to meet calcium needs may be unrealistic.
- **Cream cheese, butter, and ice cream aren't really part of the dairy food group:** They are high in saturated fat and have little or no calcium.