

# Free how to build a healthy diet

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## WHAT IS A HEALTHY DIET

Eating healthy is not easy. Although there is a vast amount of information available on the subject, it is difficult to understand what a healthy diet actually consists of. It is often suggested that a healthy diet consists of foods low in saturated fat, high in fibre, and rich in vitamins, nutrients, and minerals. Studies have proven that maintaining a healthy diet not only reduces risks to one's health, it can also prolong one's life. So with all the organic, gluten-free, vegan, vegetarian, etc., information available, the question remains.... what is a healthy diet?

According to the British Heart Foundation, a healthy diet is a balanced diet ([www. bhf. org. uk](http://www.bhf.org.uk)). The Foundation explains that food exists in five different groups: fruits, vegetables, starches, protein, and high fat and sugar foods. The Foundation then suggests that a healthy diet consists of the right mixture of these food groups as can be seen in the diagram below.

Adapted from [http://www. diabetesdiabeticdiet. com/food\\_pyramid. htm](http://www.diabetesdiabeticdiet.com/food_pyramid.htm)

This diagram is referred to as the food pyramid and was developed by the US Department of Agriculture. The pyramid was developed as a guide for healthy eating in that it not only describes the different food groups, but also explains how much a person should have of each in a day. How much one should eat during any given day is referred to as a serving. As stated above by the British Heart Foundation, the right proportion of the different food groups is what constitutes a healthy diet. Given this information, a healthy diet consists of the following: 1/3 of fruits and vegetables, 1/3 of starches,

1/3 of proteins, and a small amount of high fat and sugar foods (Landau, 2003).

Further to this information, the food pyramid gives a guide of how many servings of each food group should be consumed in a given day. Whilst this information is useful, it can still be difficult to know what a healthy diet is due to the fact that one may not know exactly what a serving size is. To this end, the following information has been given in regards to serving size:

The bottom of the pyramid is the starch group and is made up of complex carbohydrates such as bread, pasta, and grains. These foods are a good source of energy. A typical serving of this food group is described as one slice of bread, ½ cup of rice, cooked cereal or pasta, or 1 tortilla. It is important to note that the developers of the food pyramid suggest that items within this group should be made with whole grain rather than flour.

The next level of the pyramid is that of fruits and vegetables. A serving of these food groups can consist of one cup of raw leafy vegetables, ½ cup of other vegetables (raw or cooked), ½ cup of vegetable juice, one medium apple, orange or banana, ½ cup of chopped, cooked or canned fruit, or a ½ cup of fruit juice. This is the information given for one serving of fruits and vegetables and it is suggested that an individual consume 2-5 servings of each a day. These foods are rich in vitamins and essential nutrients.

Above the fruit and vegetable level of the pyramid are the protein and dairy groups. A serving of this group can consist of one egg, two tablespoons of peanut butter, ½ cup cooked dry beans, or 1/3 cup of nuts. It is also

suggested that dairy products should be low-fat or non-fat options. These foods provide protein, iron, zinc, and calcium.

The top of the pyramid contains those foods that are high in fat and sugar. It is suggested that these food be consumed sparingly. Whilst individuals might enjoy these foods, they provide little nutritional value and can be described as empty calories ([www. diabetesdiabeticdiet. com](http://www.diabetesdiabeticdiet.com)).

This information leads into the next topic of a healthy diet, calories. Whilst people have been counting calories for years, and substantial information exists regarding the correct amount of calories one should consume, how does caloric intake relate to a healthy diet As each individual is different, so can be the caloric intake guide from person to person. The amount of calories someone is to consume is dependent on such things as age, gender, body type, and activity level, just to name a few. However, as a general guide it is suggested that a healthy calorie intake for women is 2, 000 calories per day, 2, 800 for men, and 1, 600 for children and older adults ([www. mayoclinic. com](http://www.mayoclinic.com)).

To summarise, a healthy diet is one that consists of foods low in fat, high in fibre, and rich in vitamins, nutrients, and minerals. The food pyramid developed by the US Department of Agriculture serves as a guide to a healthy diet. This diagram provides information regarding each of the five food groups and what types of foods are contained in each of these groups. The pyramid also provides a guide for the recommended daily intake of each of these groups. The British Heart Foundation goes further to describe a healthy diet as a balance between daily caloric intake and the right serving

of different food groups. Whilst caloric intake differs for individuals, the serving size for the various food groups remains the same no matter the adult: 6-11 of starches, 2-5 of both fruits and vegetables, 2-3 of proteins and dairies, and a very small amount of foods high in fat and sugar. This information answers the question: what is a healthy diet?

## MAINTAINING A HEALTHY DIET

Given the information above, one might assume that eating a healthy diet is somewhat straightforward and easy. This may in fact be the case when first embarking on a quest to eat healthy. As with anything new, beginning a healthy diet can be fun and exciting, even easy. However, with the passage of time it can become difficult to maintain healthy eating habits. This difficulty can be further enhanced with the fact that it costs less to buy a burger and fries than it does to prepare a healthy meal. So what is the key to maintaining a healthy diet How can individuals continue to make healthy choices for themselves whilst keeping interest in the subject of healthy eating?

The British Food Standards Agency gives the following eight tips for maintaining a healthy diet:

Base your meals on starchy foods (wholegrain varieties),

Eat lots of fruits and vegetables,

Eat more fish,

Cut down on saturated fat and sugar,

Eat less salt

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Drink plenty of water, and

Don't skip breakfast

([www.eatwell.gov.uk](http://www.eatwell.gov.uk)).

It is often the case that individuals believe that eating healthy means that certain foods cannot be eaten. Whilst limiting the intake of certain foods is suggested, it is also suggested that eating the right balance of foods is more important. Moderation is another key to maintaining a healthy diet. Foods high in fat and sugar do not have to be eliminated from one's diet, they just need to be consumed in moderation and in the right portions.

Another misconception is that maintaining a healthy diet can be more expensive. The Food Standards Agency indicates that whilst some healthy ingredients can be a bit more expensive, not all healthy food options are. In fact, some of these items can even save an individual money. Starchy foods such as pastas, rice, and breads are often cheaper than many other products. Seasonal fruits and vegetables can also be a lot cheaper than sweets. So whilst maintaining a healthy diet can be good for your overall health, it can also be good for your pocket book.

Helpguide.org also suggests some keys to maintaining a healthy diet. This website suggests that individuals plan meals ahead of time. This can be done on a weekly, or even monthly basis. Having healthy options ready and available can help in the planning process. Instead of cooking a healthy meal each night, it is suggested to cook when you can. Perhaps there is more time available at the weekend, so prepare several different meals at this time and freeze them for later in the week.

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## CONCLUSION

Eating and maintaining a healthy diet can be difficult. The health benefits of doing so are evident, but what is a healthy diet and how can one maintain healthy eating habits? The food pyramid serves as a good guide for what a healthy diet consists of: foods low in fat, high in fibre, and rich in vitamins, nutrients, and minerals. A healthy diet also consists of the right portions of the right foods and a healthy caloric intake. Whilst eating a healthy diet is one thing, maintaining healthy eating habits is another. Continuing to eat healthy can be achieved through taking the right steps such as: having healthy food options available and ready to eat, planning meals ahead of time, and maintaining a good balance of foods in the right portions.

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