

# Gentle Nutrition: Building Balanced Meals & Snacks

All of the following food groups work together to meet our nutritional needs and to help regulate our appetite hormones and blood sugar levels, which, in turn, impact how we experience hunger, fullness, and satisfaction. They are all important and all have a place in a balanced and health supportive eating plan.

## Starchy Vegetables & Grains

Includes potatoes, sweet potatoes, winter squash, corn, green peas, plantains, beans, bread, pasta, rice, cereal, barley, farro, quinoa, couscous, oats, and more. Provides the body with carbohydrate which is a primary and essential fuel source, especially for the brain.

## Fruit & Non-Starchy Vegetables

Provides the body with ample dietary fiber, which helps with digestion and promoting feelings of fullness, essential vitamins and minerals, which are important for keeping all of our body systems operating normally, and other phytonutrients, which may have unique health-promoting properties. Consuming a variety of fruits and vegetables, prepared in a variety of ways will optimize the availability and utilization of these important nutrients.

## Protein Sources

Includes meat, poultry, fish, eggs, cheese, yogurt, milk, nuts, nut butters, seeds, and beans. Protein has very important structural and functional roles in the body from building and maintaining muscle mass, to hormone, enzyme, and antibody production. It also plays an important role in regulating appetite through hormone and blood sugar regulation.

## Fat Sources

Includes condiments like butter, mayonnaise, dressing, sauces, and vinaigrettes. Also found in most protein sources, and in avocados. Has many important roles in the body including facilitating absorption of several nutrients. Also plays an important role in improving the satisfaction value of food through flavor enhancement of meals.

## Other Foods

Sometimes referred to as "fun" foods or "play" foods. Includes foods that may have less nutritional value, but taste really good and provide a lot of pleasure when eaten. Making these foods part of a regular eating plan is crucial to finding satisfaction in meals.

MOST MEALS

MOST DAYS

## Timing

Start by eating within 2 hours of waking

And eating every 3-4 hours thereafter (even if you're not sure you are hungry)

Generally aiming for 5-6 eating occasions/day (approximately 3 meals + 2-3 snacks)

## Meal Composition

Most meals contain at least 1 of each of the following components:

- Starchy vegetable/grain
- Fruit/non-starchy vegetable
- Protein source
- Fat source

And it's OK for meals to contain more than one food from each component group.

**Unsure where to begin for portions?** Try using a standard 10" dinner plate and aiming to make sure that most of the surface area is covered as a starting place.

## Snack Composition

Most snacks contain at least 2 components if aiming to meet a physical nourishment need.

If you are eating a snack simply because you feel like it and not because you are trying to meet a physical nourishment need, generally speaking, just eat what you want and worry less about the composition. But, if you have a meal plan you are following as part of a treatment plan, please follow that!

## Emphasizing Pleasure

Other/play/funs foods can be added as a part of meals or snacks. And, while it's not essential to include these foods at every eating occasion, it is helpful to intentionally represent them most days.

## Be Curious & Embrace Experimentation

Experiment with different proportions, different types, and different quantities of foods within each group. Notice how you feel when one or more groups isn't represented. What combinations help you achieve optimal satisfaction at meals and snacks?

**Disclaimer:** This resources is for informational and educational purposes only. It and is not a substitute for individual medical or nutrition advice or treatment.