

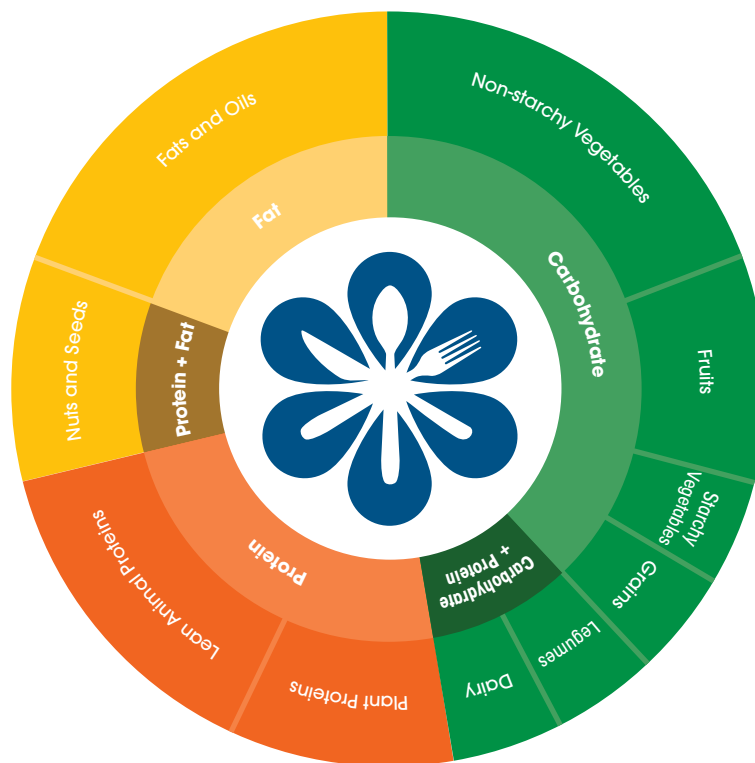


Eating a Balanced Diet

When your healthcare provider tells you to “eat a balanced diet”, it seems straightforward and easy at first. But there are many conflicting opinions about what it means to eat a healthy, balanced diet.

In the context of Functional Nutrition, a “balanced diet” is one that is appropriate for your lifestyle, health concerns, and food preferences. In other words, there isn’t one specific diet or way of eating that works for everyone. Instead, food and lifestyle plans should be tailored to the individual in order to improve overall health and well-being. For example, a person recovering from a traumatic brain injury has a specific set of nutritional needs, which are very different from the needs of someone who is active and wants to incorporate more fresh, whole foods into their diet.

That being said, there are some general guidelines to follow for balance. When macronutrients (protein, fat, and carbohydrates) are eaten in appropriate proportions, they provide your body with everything it needs to function properly. The following graphic shows these macronutrients—and the corresponding IFM food categories—in a distribution of 25% protein, 30% fat, and 45% carbohydrates (or, 25P/30F/45C). This means that 25% of your calories from food should be protein, 30% of calories from food should be fat, and 45% of calories from food should be carbohydrates. The 25P/30F/45C is IFM’s standard distribution for the Core Food Plan, which is appropriate for anyone looking to eat a healthy, balanced diet.



Talk to your healthcare provider about the right food plan and macronutrient distribution for you. Different combinations of macronutrients (protein, fat, and carbohydrates) can help you achieve different health results.

Tips for Balancing Your Diet

- **Stay hydrated.** To determine your daily needs for water and other liquids, take your body weight in pounds and divide by half. The resulting figure is the number of ounces of water to consume each day. Example: a person who weighs 128 pounds should drink at least 64 ounces of water each day ($128 \div 2 = 64$). This is equal to eight 8-ounce glasses of water, decaffeinated tea, mineral water (or seltzer water), broth, and fresh, raw, cold-pressed vegetable juices. To help you stay hydrated, carry a water bottle with you everywhere you go.
- **Set SMART goals.** If you don't like vegetables, or have been eating fast food every day for years, shifting to a diet of whole, fresh foods can be a challenge. Set yourself up for success by setting small, attainable goals that help you incorporate healthy changes slowly and allow you to ease into the transition. You might start by replacing sugary sodas with green tea or sparkling mineral water until you're comfortable adding another change or tackling another goal. When you're ready, try adding a side salad to your dinner five nights a week. Small, realistic changes over time are easier to implement, and are more likely to stick than a huge, dramatic change made suddenly. Work towards improving your lifestyle, not eliminating everything you love to eat.
- **Don't skip the protein.** Protein helps build and repair every part of the body. Without enough of it, you can feel run down, lethargic, and weak. Meats, eggs, poultry, and seafood are excellent sources of protein, but so are certain vegetables. High-protein plant foods include beans and legumes, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, lentils, nuts and seeds, oats, potatoes, spinach, and wild rice.
- **Eat plenty of healthy fats.** Healthy fats will help support brain and heart health while keeping you feeling full and providing your body with energy. Shoot for more omega-3s (from avocados, fatty fish, nuts and seeds, olives, sea vegetables, grass-fed meats, etc.), and fewer omega-6s (from processed foods, salad dressings, and sauces; as well as processed vegetable oils like canola, grapeseed, safflower, etc.). Keep in mind that low-fat and fat-free products contain a lot of added sugar and artificial fillers, which you may want to limit or avoid when trying to eat a balanced diet.
- **Opt for carbohydrates from vegetables.** Most people only associate carbohydrates with grains. But bread, pasta, cake, cookies, etc., are not the only sources of carbohydrates. Many whole foods like fruits, vegetables, and legumes fall into this category, too. When balancing your diet, try to get the bulk of your carbohydrates from vegetable sources. The fiber found in vegetables helps balance blood sugar and improve digestion.
- **Eat the rainbow.** Our bodies function best when they take in nutrients from all different types and colors of whole foods. Aim to eat at least five different colors of fruits and vegetables each day. IFM's Phytonutrient Spectrum documents can help you plan your intake of colorful foods.
- **Experiment in the kitchen.** Play around with different foods and cooking methods to discover what you like. Try at least one new recipe per week. You might find that you like certain vegetables more or less, depending on how they are prepared. If you're not confident in your cooking skills, try taking a cooking class with a friend or picking up a cookbook for beginners. You can also browse websites dedicated to food and cooking for free tutorials. The goal is to become more comfortable with cooking. The more comfortable and enjoyable cooking is for you, the easier it will be to incorporate into a regular routine.
- **Limit sugar and processed foods.** We know that the excessive intake of refined sugars and grains contributes to many chronic health issues. In order to stave off illness and reverse symptoms, limit your intake of refined sugars and grains. Both of these are found in highly-processed foods like shelf-stable cakes and cookies, candy bars, and other snacks. Read food labels carefully, and select foods with no added sugar (or very little added sugar). Try switching the sweetener in your morning coffee from table sugar to a natural sweetener like maple syrup or honey.
- **Everything in moderation.** Part of eating a healthy, balanced diet includes being flexible and limiting your rules and restrictions around food. Being too restrictive can lead to the development of disordered eating patterns. Listen to your body's cravings, and allow yourself some wiggle room. Make a point to indulge occasionally without any guilt or stress about your food choices.