

5 Main Food Groups

I want to introduce the 5 main food groups from ChooseMyPlate.gov to help you learn what we eat and what nutrients it provides for your bodies. It will also tell you how much of each food group you need in order to have a well-balanced diet. Well balanced diets look different for each person based on their lifestyle, sex, age, activity level, availability and culture. What you eat may be different than someone else even though you are still following the same food guidelines. A healthy diet is important through all stages of life and will help fuel your body daily in order to complete different tasks. The 5 main food groups are Fruits, Vegetables, Grains, Proteins and Dairy.



Fruits

Fruits can come in different shapes, tastes, and colors. A fruit is defined by a part of a flowering plant or tree that originates in the ovary and contains seeds. ([What's the Difference Between a Fruit and a Vegetable?](#)) It is recommended that you consume 1-2 cups of fruit per day, based on the same factors listed above. Only whole fruits and 100% fruit juice is included in this category. Fruits are low calorie food that provide many essential nutrients to your diet, like folate and potassium. All of these nutrients are needed to maintain healthy blood pressure, cholesterol levels, blood cell production and body tissue repair, to name a few. Whole fruits, as opposed to fruit juices also provide natural fiber that can help with proper bowel function and provide the feeling you get after eating that tells you are full. [All About the Fruit Group | ChooseMyPlate](#)

Vegetables

Vegetables are defined as the part of the plant that is not from the ovary, like the root, leaves or stems, they also sometimes contain seeds. ([What's the Difference Between a Fruit and a Vegetable?](#)) Any whole vegetable or even 100% vegetable juice is included in this vegetable category. It is recommended that you eat between 1 and 3 cups each

day based on your physical activity, sex and age, and other factors listed above. There are also 5 subgroups in the vegetable category that give you options in order to “vary your veggies” weekly that include: dark-green, starchy, red and orange, beans and peas, and other vegetables. Vegetables do not have cholesterol, are low in fat and are sources of many nutrients, including vitamins A & C.. These nutrients are similar to the ones found in fruits as they also help with maintaining healthy blood pressures, reduce blood cholesterol and lower heart disease risks, while also providing a lot of fiber. [All about the Vegetable Group | ChooseMyPlate](#)

Grains

Grains are probably the easiest to include into your diet because they taste so good! They include items like bread, cereal, pasta, tortillas, rice and popcorn. There are 2 subgroups in grains including whole grains and refined grains. The rule is to “make ½ your grains whole”. **Whole grains** contain the entire grain kernel that contain more fiber, iron and B vitamins. These nutrients are needed to help reduce heart disease and carry oxygen through the body. Where **refined grains** are processed where the bran and germ are removed for better shelf life (ex: white bread). Since most of the healthy stuff is removed with the refined grains, they are often **enriched** where the vitamins and iron are put back into the food after processing. It is recommended that you eat between 3 and 8 ounces each day. [All about the Grains Group | ChooseMyPlate](#)

Proteins

Proteins are the building blocks of bones, muscles, skin, cartilage, enzymes, hormones, vitamins and blood. They are made up of amino acids and are one of three nutrients that give calories to the diet. They are mostly found in animal products, however some vegetarian/vegan options include nuts, seeds, and beans. It is recommended to eat lean or low fat options when available and to have at least 2- 6 ½ ounce equivalencies each day. If eaten too many, the meat options can easily raise cholesterol and saturated fat levels, as the saturated fats raise “bad” cholesterol in the blood or Low Density Lipoprotein (LDL). It is also recommended to eat 8 ounces of seafood per week. The seafood has its own recommendation because they contain many nutrients that aren't found elsewhere including Omega-3 fatty acids, EPA and DHA which help with joints, skin and reduce heart disease. [All about the Protein Foods Group | ChooseMyPlate](#)

Dairy

The last group is the **dairy** group, which could probably also be called the **calcium** group. This group contains all milk products that contain their calcium content, including milk, yogurt and cheese but not butter and cream cheese. The milk alternatives, (that are unwelcomely called “milk”) like soy milk, almond milk are not included in this list unless they have been fortified with calcium. You can also get calcium from other sources but it will not be as prevalent in the same size portion, for example “it would take 7 cups of raw broccoli (a typical serving is 1 cup) to get as much calcium as you get in just one 8-ounce glass of milk.” ([9 Milk Nutrition Facts You Need to Know](#)). It is recommended that you consume 2-3 cups of dairy each day based on your age and physical activity. Calcium products are needed in order to help build strong bones, teeth and blood pressure (potassium). It is also considered a common practice in the US that milk is fortified with vitamins A and D ([Healthline.com Fortified Milk](#).) Vitamin D is needed to help with calcium absorption and immunity. Vitamin A is needed for cell growth and immunity. Milk is also considered a complete food source for all of the healthy nutrients it provides ([World Milk Day: Why is Milk Considered to be a Complete Meal?](#)). It is recommended that you consume low fat or nonfat options as it contains saturated fats and cholesterol, like the meat sources of protein, but remember that even whole milk is 97% fat free. [All about the Dairy Group | ChooseMyPlate](#)

Conclusion

Hopefully now you know a little more about what foods you are putting into your body. Try to evaluate what you eat on a daily basis and what else you may need to incorporate into your diet. Remember these recommendations are just guidelines that you can follow. Do your own research and find out how much you actually need in your diet based off of your age, health and physical activity level. I challenge you to go through your fridge and pantry and see what foods you may already have in order to fill up your Plate.