

APPENDIX18 Be nourished Italy

What is a balanced diet?

A balanced diet is one that gives your body the nutrients it needs to function correctly. To get the proper nutrition from your diet, you should consume the majority of your daily calories in:

- fresh fruits
- fresh vegetables
- whole grains
- legumes
- nuts
- lean proteins

Why a balanced diet is important?

A balanced diet is important because your organs and tissues need proper nutrition to work effectively. Without good nutrition, your body is more prone to disease, infection, fatigue, and poor performance. Children with a poor diet run the risk of growth and developmental problems and poor academic performance, and bad eating habits can persist for the rest of their lives.

How to achieve a balanced diet

At the core of a balanced diet are foods that are low in unnecessary fats and sugars and high in vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients. The following food groups are essential parts of a balanced diet.

Fruits

Choose fruits that are in season in your area. They're fresher and provide the most nutrients. Fruits are high in sugar. This sugar is natural, though, so fruit can still be a better choice for you than other foods with added sugar.

Vegetables

Vegetables are primary sources of essential vitamins and minerals. Dark, leafy greens generally contain the most nutrition and can be eaten at every meal. Eating a variety of vegetables will help you obtain a lot of nutrients that all vegetables provide.

Grains

Grains such as bread, pasta, breakfast cereals are important sources of many nutrients, including fiber, B vitamins

Proteins

Meats and beans are primary sources of protein, a nutrient that is essential for proper muscle and brain development. Lean, low-fat meats such as chicken, fish, and certain cuts of pork and beef are the best options. Nuts and beans are good sources of protein and contain many other health benefits, as well as fiber and other nutrients. Try to eat:

- lentils
- beans
- peas
- almonds
- sunflower seeds
- walnuts

Dairy

Dairy products provide calcium, vitamin D, and other essential nutrients.

Oils

Oils should be used sparingly. Avoid deep-fried foods because they contain many empty calories.

Besides adding certain foods to your diet, you should also reduce your consumption of certain substances (alcohol, salt, sugars) to maintain a balanced diet and healthy weight.