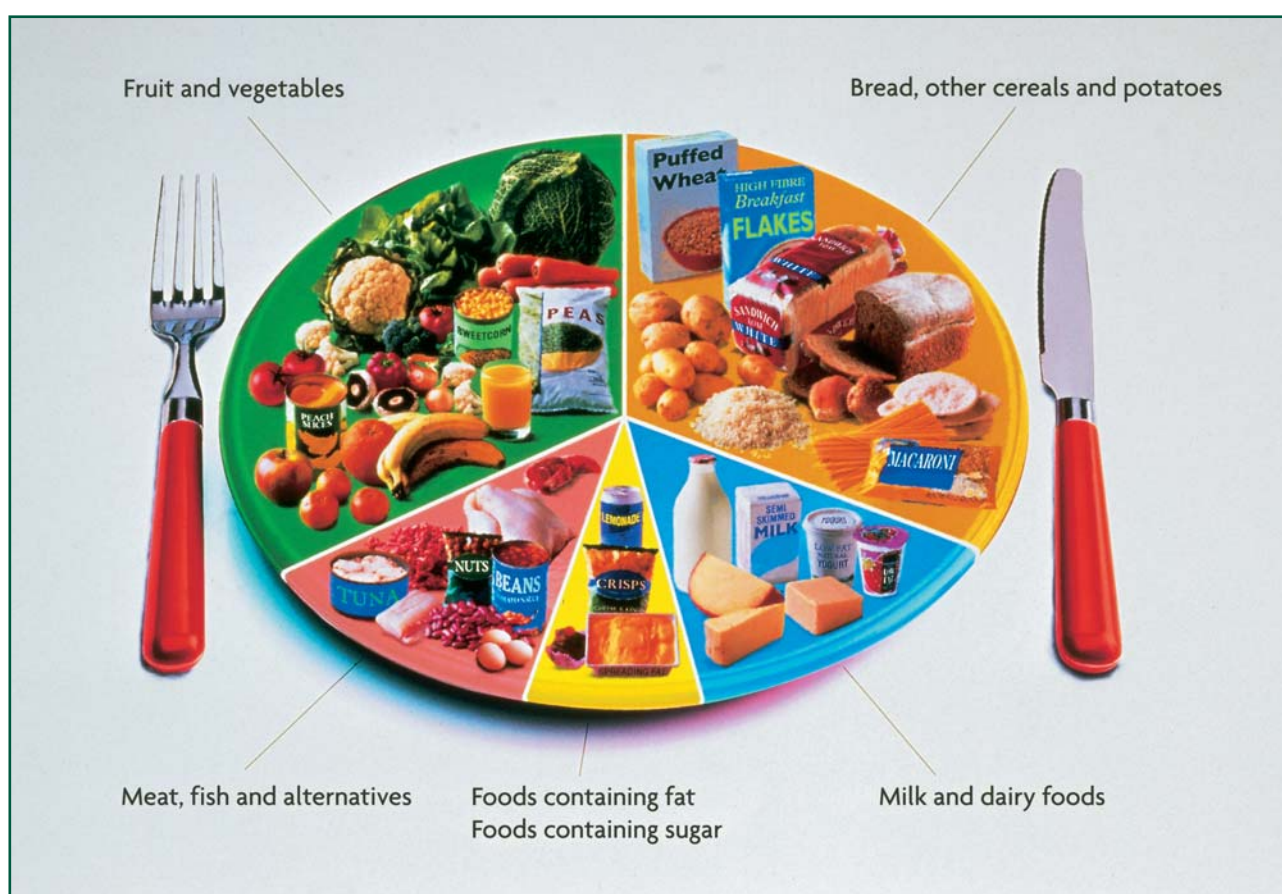


**‘The Balance of Good Health’ visual has been updated and renamed the ‘eatwell plate’.**

**See [food.gov.uk/eatwellplate](http://food.gov.uk/eatwellplate) for more information.**

# The Balance of Good Health

Information for educators and communicators



*The Balance of Good Health*, a pictorial representation of the recommended balance of foods in the diet, aims to help people understand and enjoy healthy eating. It shows that people don't have to give up the foods they most enjoy for the sake of their health – just eat some in smaller quantities or less frequently. Variety and a change towards more vegetables, fruit, bread, breakfast cereals, potatoes, rice and pasta are what matters. Snacks as well as meals count towards a healthy balance.



**FOOD  
STANDARDS  
AGENCY**

## The Balance of Good Health

*The Balance of Good Health* aims to give people a practical message about healthy eating. It is hoped that this will reduce the confusion about what healthy eating really means. The appearance of *The Balance of Good Health* in a number of different settings such as health centres, supermarkets, schools and workplaces will help to maintain a consistent message.

*The Balance of Good Health* is based on the Government's Eight Guidelines for a Healthy Diet:

- Enjoy your food.
- Eat a variety of different foods.
- Eat the right amount to be a healthy weight.
- Eat plenty of foods rich in starch and fibre.
- Eat plenty of fruit and vegetables.
- Don't eat too many foods that contain a lot of fat.
- Don't have sugary foods and drinks too often.
- If you drink alcohol drink sensibly.

## Who is 'The Balance of Good Health' for?

*The Balance of Good Health* applies to most people. It applies to vegetarians, people of all ethnic origins and people who are a healthy weight for their height, as well as those who are overweight. However, it does not apply to children under two years of age because they need full fat milk and dairy products.

Between the ages of two and five, children should make a gradual transition to family foods, and the recommended balance shown in *The Balance of Good Health* can begin to apply.

People under medical supervision or with special dietary requirements may want to check with their doctor to be clear about whether or not it applies to them.

## What is the basis of 'The Balance of Good Health'?

Food provides nutrients to help the body work properly. No single food contains them in the amounts needed, so a mixture of foods has to be eaten.

*The Balance of Good Health* makes healthy eating easier to understand by showing the types and proportion of foods needed to make a well-balanced and healthy diet.

*The Balance of Good Health* is based on the five commonly accepted food groups, which are:

- Bread, cereals and potatoes.
- Fruit and vegetables.
- Milk and dairy.
- Meat, fish and alternatives.
- Foods containing fat; foods and drinks containing sugar.

Encouraging people to choose a variety of foods from the first four groups every day will help ensure that they obtain the wide range of nutrients their bodies need to remain healthy and function properly. Choosing different foods from within each group adds to the range of nutrients consumed. Foods in the fifth group – foods containing fat and foods containing sugar – are not essential to a healthy diet, but add choice and palatability.

The main nutrients provided by each food group are shown in the table on the next page.

The key message of *The Balance of Good Health* is the balance of foods that should be consumed to achieve a good healthy diet. This is shown by the different area occupied by each of the food groups in *The Balance of Good Health*. Although aiming to achieve this balance every day is a sensible and practical approach, it is not necessary to achieve it at every meal. The balance could, however, also be achieved over the period of perhaps a week or two. The table gives guidance on the food groups and on how to choose well from within them.



# The five food groups

	What's included	Main nutrients	Message	Recommendations
<b>Bread, other cereals and potatoes</b>	Other cereals means foods such as breakfast cereals, pasta, rice, oats, noodles, maize, millet and cornmeal. This group also includes yams and plantains. Beans and pulses can be eaten as part of this group.	Carbohydrate (starch) 'Fibre' (NSP*) Some calcium and iron B Vitamins	<b>Eat lots.</b>	Try to eat wholemeal, wholegrain, brown or high fibre versions where possible. Try to avoid: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>having them fried too often (e.g. chips)</li> <li>adding too much fat (e.g. thickly spread butter, margarine or low fat spread on bread)</li> <li>adding rich sauces and dressings (e.g. cream or cheese sauce on pasta)</li> </ul>
<b>Fruit and vegetables</b>	Fresh, frozen and canned fruit and vegetables and dried fruit. A glass of fruit juice also counts. Beans and pulses can be eaten as part of this group.	Vitamin C Carotenes Folates 'Fibre' (NSP*) and some carbohydrate	<b>Eat lots – at least 5 portions a day. Fruit juice counts as only one portion however much you drink in a day. Beans and pulses counts as only one portion however much you eat in a day.</b>	Eat a wide variety of fruit and vegetables. Try to avoid: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>adding fat or rich sauces to vegetables (e.g. carrots glazed with butter or parsnips roasted in a lot of fat)</li> <li>adding sugar or syrupy dressings to fruit (e.g. stewed apple with sugar or chocolate sauce on banana)</li> </ul>
<b>Milk and dairy foods</b>	Milk, cheese, yoghurt and fromage frais. This group does not include butter, eggs and cream.	Calcium Protein Vitamin B12 Vitamins A and D	<b>Eat or drink moderate amounts and choose lower fat versions whenever you can.</b>	Lower fat versions means semi-skimmed or skimmed milk, low fat (0.1% fat) yoghurts or fromage frais, and lower fat cheeses (e.g. Edam, half-fat cheese and Camembert). Check the amount of fat by looking at the nutrient information on the labels. Compare similar products and choose the lowest – for example 8% fat fromage frais may be labelled 'low fat', but is not actually the lowest available.
<b>Meat, fish and alternatives</b>	Meat, poultry, fish, eggs, nuts, beans and pulses. Meat includes bacon and salami and meat products such as sausages, beefburgers and pâté. These are all relatively high-fat choices. Beans, such as canned baked beans and pulses are in this group and they are a good source of protein for vegetarians. Fish includes frozen and canned fish such as sardines and tuna, fish fingers and fish cakes. Aim to eat at least one portion of oily fish such as sardines and salmon each week.	Iron Protein B Vitamins, especially B12 Zinc Magnesium	<b>Eat moderate amounts and choose lower fat versions whenever you can.</b>	Lower fat versions means things like meat with the fat cut off, poultry without the skin and fish without batter. Cook these foods without added fat. Beans and pulses are good alternatives to meat as they are naturally very low in fat.
<b>Foods containing fat; foods and drinks containing sugar</b>	<b>Foods containing fat:</b> Margarine, butter, other spreading fats and low fat spreads, cooking oils, oil-based salad dressings, mayonnaise, cream, chocolate, crisps, biscuits, pastries, cakes, puddings, ice cream, rich sauces and gravies. <b>Foods and drinks containing sugar:</b> Soft drinks, sweets, jam and sugar, as well as foods such as cakes, puddings, biscuits, pastries and ice cream.	Fat, including some essential fatty acids, but also some vitamins. Some products also contain salt or sugar. Sugar, with minerals in some products and fat in some others.	<b>Eat foods containing fat sparingly and look out for the low fat alternatives. Foods and drinks containing sugar should not be eaten too often as they can contribute to tooth decay.</b>	Some foods containing fat will be eaten every day, but should be kept to small amounts, for example, margarine and butter, other spreading fats (including low fat spreads), cooking oils, oil-based salad dressings and mayonnaise.  Foods containing fat such as cakes, biscuits, pastries and ice cream should be limited and low fat alternatives chosen where available. All foods and drinks containing sugar should be eaten mainly at mealtimes to reduce the risk of tooth decay.

\*Fibre is more properly known as non-starch polysaccharides (NSP).

## What about portion sizes?

Rough guide to portion sizes	
Vegetables – raw, cooked, frozen or canned	2–3 tablespoonfuls
Salad	1 dessert bowlful
Grapefruit/avocado pear	½ fruit
Apples, bananas, oranges and other citrus fruit	1 fruit
Plums and similar sized fruit	2 fruits
Grapes, cherries and berries	1 cupful or a handful
Fresh fruit salad, stewed or canned fruit (including a little juice or syrup)	2–3 tablespoonfuls
Dried fruit (raisins, apricots, etc.)	½–1 tablespoonful
Fruit juice	1 glass (150 ml)

*The Balance of Good Health* encourages people to eat more portions of fruit and vegetables than most people currently do (five or more portions a day are recommended). See the box for a rough guide to portion sizes.

*The Balance of Good Health* also suggests that people eat increased amounts of bread, other cereals and potatoes – in practical terms this may result in bigger rather than more portions.

*The Balance of Good Health* does not currently include specific information about portion sizes (apart from fruit and vegetables). This is because this kind of information is potentially misleading, as everyone has different individual needs that are difficult to quantify.

## What about combination or composite foods?

Much of the food people eat is in the form of dishes or meals with more than one kind of food in them.

For example, pizzas, casseroles, pies, lasagne, spaghetti bolognese and sandwiches are all made with foods from more than one of the five food groups. These are often called combination or composite foods. Many manufactured foods are combination foods.

To make healthy choices, people will need to identify the main food items or ingredients in combination foods and think about how these fit with the proportions shown in *The Balance of Good Health*.

For example, a **ham, cheese and mushroom pizza** contains items from the main four food groups:

**dough base** – from the bread, other cereals and potato group  
**mushroom and tomato purée** – from the fruit and vegetables group  
**cheese** – from the milk and dairy group  
**ham** – from the meat, fish and alternatives group.

The proportion of mushrooms and tomato, relative to the other ingredients, is small compared with that shown in *The Balance of Good Health*.

If the pizza is eaten with additional 'fruit and veg' foods such as a mixed salad, peas or broccoli and followed by a piece of fresh fruit, the meal would provide a balance of foods as shown in *The Balance of Good Health*.

## How much food do people need?

People differ in the amount of energy (calories) they require and that is what affects the amount of food, in total, that individuals need. However much people need, the proportion of food from the different groups should remain the same as shown in *The Balance of Good Health*.

So, for example, someone with a low daily energy requirement of, say, 1200 calories would need the same proportions of food from the five food groups as someone with a high daily requirement of, say, 3000 calories.

Things that affect people's overall energy needs are:

- **gender** – women tend to need less energy than men
- **age** – older adults need less energy than adolescents and young adults
- **being overweight** – being heavier than the healthy weight range for an individual's height means less energy is required to achieve a healthy weight
- **being very physically active** – the more active people are, the greater their energy needs

## What about vitamin and mineral supplements?

Vitamin and mineral supplements are not a replacement for good eating habits. Most people can get all the nutrients their body needs by choosing a variety of foods, in the proportions shown, from the five food groups in *The Balance of Good Health*.

Some people need certain supplements. Women who are pregnant, or are planning to become pregnant, need extra folic acid and may need extra iron. Older people may need extra Vitamin D and/or iron. People should consult a doctor, nurse or dietitian if they think they need to take a vitamin or mineral supplement.

### What about drinks?

Everyone should drink plenty of fluid – six to eight cups, mugs or glasses a day. Drinks containing sugar such as fruit juices, some squashes and carbonated drinks should not be drunk too frequently because they can contribute to tooth decay. The regular use of fluoride toothpaste protects the teeth.

Health messages about alcohol are outside the scope of *The Balance of Good Health* model. However, those who are overweight should bear in mind that alcoholic drinks also provide energy.



### How can people use *The Balance of Good Health*?

As more and more organisations use *The Balance of Good Health* in the materials they produce and articles or books they write, it will become widely known.

Everyone can use *The Balance of Good Health* to help them make healthy choices wherever they are:

- **at home** – when deciding what to eat, preparing meals or writing the shopping list;
- **when shopping** – people can aim to fill their shopping basket or trolley with a healthy balance of foods from the five food groups;
- **when eating out** – whether in a café, in the workplace dining room, in a restaurant or just eating 'on the run', people can still choose a healthy balance by following *The Balance of Good Health*.

## **The Food Standards Agency**

is a UK-wide, non-ministerial government department, providing advice and information to the public and government on food safety, nutrition and diet.

The Agency is committed to protecting the interests of consumers through effective enforcement and monitoring in relation to food safety and standards and will:

- put the consumer first
- be open and accessible
- be an independent voice

The Agency's advice is based on the best scientific evidence available, from independent expert advisory committees and all advice will be made public. The FSA supports consumer choice through promoting accurate and meaningful labelling.

**[www.foodstandards.gov.uk](http://www.foodstandards.gov.uk)**

### **Want to know more about healthy eating, nutrition and diet?**

To find out more contact:

- The local community dietician, through the health centre or nearest large hospital
- The local NHS Health Promotion Unit
- Governments Departments: The Food Standards Agency or the Department of Health

Further copies of this leaflet may be obtained by contacting the Food Standards Agency on

Orderline: 0845 6060667  
Minicom: 0845 6060678  
Fax: 020 8867 3225  
Email: [foodstandards@eclogistics.co.uk](mailto:foodstandards@eclogistics.co.uk)

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