

## HEALTHY NUTRITION

### HOW OFTEN SHOULD I EAT?

It is important to have 3 meals a day. Breakfast ensures the body has the energy for the day. Lunch keeps us going and dinner replenishes the energy we have spent during the day and ensures the body has sufficient energy to undertake the night time activities of repair and growth. If you eat less than this, you are adding a stress to your body. Some people find it better if they have 3 smaller meals and 2 snacks each day. Each meal or snack should contain a combination of protein and carbohydrate.

If you have exercised it is important to have something to eat within 30 minutes of finishing the exercise as this is the time when the muscles most effectively replenish the energy they have used. The post exercise snack should include both carbohydrate and protein. If exercising first thing in the morning (before breakfast) it is also important to have a pre-exercise snack. (Some people exercising before breakfast make a protein shake and have half before and half after the exercise session.)

### WHAT SHOULD I EAT?

We hear an awful lot about various diets. The Paleo diet, the sugar elimination diet, the “eat nothing but clear soup for two days then eat what you want for the rest of the week” diet, the carb lovers diet, the “I eat nothing until I almost pass out and then I have 3 almonds” diet. It’s all so confusing....but it really doesn’t have to be!

The simplest way ensure you are getting a good range of nutrients is to look at your plate and ensure that just half of it is full of fruit and vegetables. The remaining part of the plate should be grains and protein with grains taking up more room on the plate. A serve of dairy can also be added as a side dish. While the exact amount of food will vary depending on your age, gender and activity level, for an adult this roughly equates to a daily intake of:

2½ to 3 cups of vegetable  
170gm to 200 gm or grains (with at least half this amount being whole grains)  
1½ to 2 cups of fruit  
142gm to 170 gm of protein  
3 cups of dairy

Three of these groups need a little more explanation:

- **Vegetables** can be further divided into dark green, red/yellow, starchy, peas/beans and other vegetables. We need to eat all of these. In a week, we need:
  - at least 1½ cups of dark green vegetables
  - 4 to 6 cups of red/yellow vegetables
  - at least 1½ cups of peas/beans
  - 4 to 6 cups of starchy vegetables
  - 4 to 5 cups of other vegetables.
- **Grains** are any food made from wheat, rice, barley, oats, cornmeal or another cereal grain. Whole grains include whole wheat flour, amaranth, quinoa, bulgur, oatmeal, whole cornmeal and brown or wild rice. Half the grains each day should be whole grains. The other half can be refined grains: white rice, couscous, white flour, white bread, pasta, ready to eat cereal (e.g. cornflakes).
- **Protein** includes meat, poultry, seafood, peas and beans, processed soy products, eggs, nuts and seeds.

Although not listed as a food, oil is an essential part of our diet. The daily allowance for oil is 5 to 6 teaspoons. Generally, we get sufficient oil from the food we eat (e.g. nuts and fish) and the oil we add when cooking. Check the oil you use is low in saturated fat and trans fat.

(It should be noted that any animal based oil or fat such as butter or the fat on meat is a saturated fat. Some plant based oils such as coconut oil are also high in saturated fat.)

Vegetarians, vegans and people with food sensitivity or allergies have the same nutritional requirements but may need to be more selective with the food they chose to ensure they get the daily requirements. For example, people who have sensitivity to grains will need to ensure they are obtaining Vitamins A, C and E as well as sufficient fibre from other sources. Vitamin K is only available in animal products so vegans will needs to ensure they take a supplement with contains it.

A word about sugar.....sugar is a natural and necessary part of our diet. It occurs in fruit and vegetables. Unless you are doing excess exercise (such as an endurance event), it is usually not necessary to add more sugar into the diet. Check the label of the food you buy (particularly dairy) for added sugar. Many foods that are low in fat are high in sugar but this is only shown in the food table. Other words for sugar are: sucrose, fructose, glucose, maltose and lactose. Syrup, molasses and treacle are also basically sugar. Many exercise drinks have a large amount of sugar in them. Unless you are doing strenuous exercise for over an hour, they are unnecessary. Alcoholic drinks are also rich in sugar particularly if they have been prepared with a mixer such as cola.

So what food is best? As a general rule, fresh is best. Fresh fruit and vegetables, meat that hasn't been dosed with artificial colours or preservatives and free range eggs provide the best nutrition. Of course, this isn't always possible, particularly in remote areas. The next best alternative is canned or frozen food. However, it is important to read labels to see what's in it – if you don't know what one of the ingredients is, consider something else. Also, consider where the canned or frozen food comes from; many some overseas exporters to meet the same safety standards as Australian companies. Recently frozen berries and tinned tuna imported into Australia were found to be contaminated due to lower hygiene and safety standards.

The nutrients most commonly depleted by stress or prolonged illness are Vitamins A, E, C and B and the minerals zinc, selenium, calcium, magnesium, iron, potassium, sulphur and molybdenum. In addition, the release of the stress hormones impacts on our digestive system and the blood sugar level.

The best food to eat for these nutrients include:

- ✓ Vegetables especially, green leafy vegetables, broccoli, carrots and sweet potato
- ✓ Whole grains including oats (porridge) and whole grain bread
- ✓ Avocado
- ✓ Chicken
- ✓ Oily fish
- ✓ Fresh fruit especially blackcurrants, strawberries, citrus fruit and apricots
- ✓ Nuts and seeds
- ✓ Low fat dairy
- ✓ Legumes and lentils
- ✓ Eggs
- ✓ Low GI foods

Water is also essential to the body particularly when under stress or suffering from a illness. Not everybody likes water and including a flavour, such as herbal tea, can make it more palatable. Warm water in winter can be easier to drink than cold water. The daily requirement for water will depend on age, activity level and climate (i.e. in hotter climates, it is necessary to drink more). As a general rule, drink between 1 and 3 litres of water a day.

Smoking and certain medications (including the contraceptive pill) can also deplete certain nutrients and interfere with the digestive function. In some cases, medication can cause fluid retention. Specific requirements for food and drink are required in these circumstances to ensure the person meets their nutritional needs.

### **WHAT FOOD SHOULD I AVOID?**

The food to avoid includes those rich in fat, sugar and salt as well as those which increase our stress response. These include:

- × Caffeine – coffee, Red Bull or other caffeine laden drinks
- × Alcohol
- × Fast food
- × Salt
- × Fried food
- × Processed sugar including confectionery, soft drinks, energy drinks and fruit juice
- × Full fat dairy and ice cream
- × White bread, focaccia or Turkish bread
- × Processed food including cakes, biscuits and muesli bars and snack bars

### **WHAT ABOUT SUPPLEMENTS?**

Supplements may help in situations of long term or severe stress. The most quickly depleted ones are: magnesium, Vitamin B and C. If the immune system has become compromised by stress or illness, Vitamin D and zinc can assist in its recovery.

Other supplements may be of benefit in specific situations. It is important to ensure Vitamin D levels remain in the healthy range for people who have little exposure to the sun. People with a high risk of osteoporosis may benefit from a calcium supplement. Women who are having heavy menstrual periods or who have just given birth may benefit from an iron supplement. As selenium is not available in food grown in Australia, a selenium supplement may also be necessary.

Vegetarians and vegans may need a protein supplement if they aren't getting enough from their food. This can be achieved with a good protein powder which can be added to other food (such as cereal or soup) to enrich it or made into a protein drink or smoothie for a snack.

It should be noted that many supplements are available in "high potency" forms. Most of these higher doses far exceed recommended daily intakes and some, such as magnesium or calcium, may be detrimental to health in high doses.