

The South African Guidelines for Healthy Eating and Food Guide

For more information contact: Department of Health. Directorate: Nutrition
Private Bag X828; Pretoria 0001.

This information pamphlet provides advice to South Africans 5 years and older about healthy food choices for healthy living. Following this advice can help you and your family to have healthy eating plans. Eating in this way helps your body to stay healthy; helps you to do everyday tasks, helps you to think and learn, and makes you feel better overall. A healthy eating plan provides your body with energy to function and helps prevent short and long-term illnesses.



The food groups in the *Food Guide*

The *Food Guide* gives information about the amount and kinds of foods that you need to eat to get the nutrients needed for good health. Using the information in the *Food Guide* also helps you not to get too much of some nutrients; such as energy, saturated fat and salt (sodium).

Most choices of foods should be ones that are the most nutritious choices from the food group. Most of these choices will be low in saturated fats, low in added sugar and added sodium; and will provide essential nutrients.

The amount of energy that you need from your daily food intake depends on your age, your gender and how active you are.

Energy needs for different groups of people

	Energy intake kilojoules (kJ) per day	
	BOYS /MEN	GIRLS / WOMEN
5 – 9 years old	6 500	6 500
10 – 13 years old	8 500	8 500
14 – 18 years old	10 500	8 500 to 10 500
Adults	10 500	8 500
Sedentary and older adults	8 500	6 500

Food intake pattern A

Energy level	Starchy foods	Vegetables	Fruit	Dry beans, split peas, lentils, soya	Fish, chicken, lean meat, eggs	Milk, maas, yoghurt	Fat, oil	Sugar
6 500 kJ	8	3	1	1	1	1	4	2
8 500 kJ	11	3	1	1	1	1	6	6
10 500 kJ	15	3	1	1	1	1	8	6

Food intake pattern B

Energy level (kJ)	Starchy foods	Vegetables	Fruit	Dry beans, split peas, lentils, soya	Fish, chicken, lean meat, eggs	Milk, maas, yoghurt	Fat, oil	Sugar
6 500	5	3	2	1	2	1	4	2
8 500	7	3	2	1	2	2	6	6
10 500	10	5	2	1	2	2	8	6

The tables above show how many food guide units you need from each food group every day, based on your energy requirement level and your preferred eating pattern.

Healthy eating plan patterns

To have a healthy eating plan:

- Eat the right amount for your needs, plans for three different energy levels are given.
- Choose a food intake pattern that suits the food you have available to you and that you can afford.
- Enjoy a variety of foods from each food group within a day, from week to week and during the year when different foods are available.
- Use foods from most of the food groups, most days of the week.
- Most of the eating plan will consist of foods from plants; some foods from animals may be included.
- Water is an important part of healthy eating; make plans to have water available during the day.

GET THE MOST FROM YOUR FOODS

Enjoy a variety of foods

The enjoyment of food is one of life's pleasures. Eating is about more than satisfying hunger, it is also a part of family life, social events and celebrations. Having a variety makes meals more interesting and helps to ensure that an eating plan supplies all nutrients.

- Mixed meals are usually eaten three times a day (breakfast, lunch and supper). Eating regular mixed meals, of a similar size, is part of a healthy lifestyle.
- Healthy eating plans include a variety of foods from each food group, over time.
- Variety also means including foods from two or more food groups at each meal; these are called mixed meals.
- Variety also means preparing foods in different ways.

Drink lots of clean, safe water

Water is essential for life. Water is lost through the kidneys, the bowels, the skin and the lungs. Most of these losses occur without us knowing about it. Water that is lost must be replaced by liquids from food and drinks.

Children and adults need about 6 - 8 glasses of liquid a day; most of that should be from water and drinks made with tap water. There are no health benefits to 'binge drinking' water; when excess water is consumed it will be excreted as urine.

- Drink clean, safe water every day as recommended.
- Some water may be taken as tea or coffee; if sugar is added, use it sparingly.
- Keep a water bottle close by during the day; you will drink more water when it is easily available.
- Drink extra water in hot weather and when you are very active.
- Limit the number of drinks you have that are high in sugars, this includes fruit juice, sports drinks, energy drinks and cold drinks.

Make starchy food part of most meals

Starchy foods are the main source of dietary energy, they also contribute micronutrients and dietary fibre when eaten in minimally processed forms (unrefined products). These foods cost less than many other foods, when used as part of most meals they help to satisfy the appetite, without costing too much.

- Fortified maize and bread are good choices of starchy foods, especially for people whose diet has a minimal variety; these people will benefit from the extra vitamins and minerals added to fortified foods.
- Add foods from other food groups to the starchy food to make good mixed meals.
- Use minimally processed starchy foods.
- Include whole grains as part of your starchy foods.
- Choose starchy foods that do not have added fat, sugar or salt.
- Replace a large serving of starch with a smaller serving and include vegetables in the meal.

FOODS	UNIT
Bread, brown / white	1 slice
Porridge, soft	½ cup
Maize meal, dry powder	3 heaped tablespoons
Potato	1 medium
Rice/ pasta/ samp/ whole grains, cooked	½ cup
Breakfast cereal	Varies
Cut corn, mealie	½ cup
Popcorn, popped, no salt or fat	2 cups

Eat plenty of vegetables and fruit everyday

Vegetables and fruit are rich sources of vitamins and minerals, fibre and they contain water. Including these foods in meals helps to fill you up without adding too much extra food energy. There are many health benefits of an eating plan that contains recommended amounts of these foods.

- Eat vegetables in at least one or two mixed meals a day. Fruit can be eaten with meals, or as a snack between meals.
- Vegetables should be eaten every day, and not only on weekends.
- Everyone should have one unit of vegetable or fruit a day that provides beta carotene (which becomes vitamin A in the body). Examples are carrots, pumpkin, butternut, spinach, *imifino*, mango, pawpaw, yellow peaches and nectarines. (Note: oranges and cabbage do not contain beta carotene).
- Prepare vegetables and fruit with little (if any) added fat, sugar and salt. Vegetables with beta carotene should be lightly boiled and served in a meal that has fat, or else have a little oil added.
- Make soup from fresh vegetables instead of using packet soup; this will be nutritious and low in salt.
- Vegetable and fruit juice are not recommended as a regular replacement for fresh vegetables and fruit. They do not have much fibre, are high in sugar and vegetable juice may have added salt.

FOODS	UNIT
Fresh / frozen vegetables	½ cup cooked
Raw leafy vegetables	1 cup raw
All fresh fruit	1 piece medium sized fruit e.g. apple, banana. 2 pieces of small fruit e.g. apricots, plums ½ piece large fruit e.g. grapefruit. ½ cup chopped fruit ½ cup fruit juice 2 tablespoons raisins

Eat dry beans, split peas, lentils and soya regularly

Adding dry beans, split peas, lentils and soya to a meal increases the nutrient content of the meal. Eating foods from this group decrease the risk of a wide variety of degenerative diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and different types of cancer. Eating these foods even helps to combat overweight and they help to maintain healthy blood sugar levels.

- Every week plan to include meals that use dry beans or soya instead of meat or chicken.
- Use dry beans, lentils, split peas and soya as an ingredient in mixed dishes, such as samp and beans, rice and lentils, beans in vegetable sauce with pasta.
- Dry beans or soya can be included with meat or chicken dishes; this will improve the overall nutritional value of the dish (less fat, more fibre) and reduce the cost of each serving.
- Cook dry beans in a wonder box to save electricity.

FOODS	UNIT
Dry beans, cooked	½ cup
Lentils, split peas, cooked	½ cup
Soya mince, dry	30g

Fish, chicken, lean meat, or eggs could be eaten daily

These foods are popular food choices for many people in South Africa, however these foods do cost more than foods in the other food groups, and should not be used often when the family has a limited budget for food. The guideline explains that foods from this group could be eaten daily – not that they should be eaten daily. The food guide unit serves show that only one option from the list could be included each day.

Cheese is included in this group, but should not be the food type chosen most often. This is because it is high in fat and salt. Organ products from animals, such as liver and kidneys are also part of this food group.

Fish with fatty flesh (pilchards, sardines, mackerel, and salmon) provide omega 3 fatty acids, a nutrient this is found in very few food sources.

Many of these foods also have a high content of fat, most of which is saturated fat. Saturated fat has a negative influence on health, so people are advised to use lean types of meat and to remove fat and skin from chicken.

- If included, eat these foods in the recommended quantities, not very large portions.
- Use lean meat, remove skin and fat from the chicken, and limit use of processed meat.

FOODS	UNIT
Fish, white	1 large piece
Fish, high fat flesh	1 small piece
Chicken, no skin	1 medium breast
Meat, lean	Size palm, sliced 10mm
Eggs, hens	2
Liver, chicken	3
Cheese, yellow	cube 30mm ³ / 40g (match box size)

Drink milk, maas or yoghurt every day

Milk, maas and yoghurt are the three types of milk products that are important in this food group. The best choices are those types that are low in fat or fat free (skim), and if sweetened have sugar added sparingly.

- Use low fat or skim milk and milk products; this is to lower the amount of saturated fat in the eating plan.
- Use milk and milk products with little or no added sugar.
- Some dairy products are high in fat, and low in the essential nutrients supplied by low fat milk and are not listed in the food guide (e.g. ice cream, milk based frozen dessert).
- Use low fat milk in tea and coffee instead of tea / coffee whitener

FOODS	UNIT
Milk, low fat or skim	1 cup
Maas, low fat	1 cup
Yoghurt, low fat or fat free	1 tub, 100ml

Use fat sparingly; choose vegetable oils rather than hard fats

The body needs some oils and fats from foods. Oils and fats can be found naturally in plant foods (like peanut butter and avocado) or animal-derived foods (like meat and chicken). They can also be added to foods and meals by spreading tub margarine on bread or using sunflower oil to brown onions for a stew.

The total amount of fat and oil in the diet should be limited, because too much fat increases the risk for weight gain and the development of high blood fat levels.

Fat is an essential nutrient in the eating plan; the type of fat, and the amount eaten are important.

- Use plant oils and foods made from plant oils examples are sunflower, canola, avocado, olive or tub margarine, as shown on the food guide.
- Limit fat from animal foods (full cream milk, cheese, fatty meat, skin of the chicken, high fat processed foods).
- Cook meals using fresh ingredients instead of buying readymade meals; these are likely to be cheaper, more nutritious and have a lower fat and salt content.
- Choose cooking methods that require little or no added oil or fat.

FOODS	UNIT
Oil; sunflower, canola, olive or other plant oil	1 teaspoon
Tub margarine	1 teaspoon
Peanut butter	1 heaped teaspoon

Use salt and foods high in salt sparingly

It is believed that a high salt intake leads to an increase in blood pressure in genetically susceptible persons; if the high salt intake is maintained over the long-term it will lead to hypertension.

Some of the salt in the eating plan comes from salt added during cooking and at table, but most comes from salt added when processed foods are produced and when salt based seasonings and sauces are used in home food preparation.

- A high salt intake is a risk factor for the development of high blood pressure.

Use sugar and food and drinks high in sugar sparingly

A small amount of sugar can be added to foods and drinks like soft porridge or tea to improve the taste. Foods made with sugar, like jam, may be used to make a mixed meal or a snack. Sweets and cold drinks may be eaten occasionally but should not be eaten instead of mixed meals, or when a person does not have money for groceries.

- Frequent consumption of sugar, especially between meals, is a risk factor for dental decay.
- Frequent consumption of sweetened cold drinks and fruit juice can lead to obesity, when the total energy value of the eating plan is higher than needed.

FOODS	UNIT
Sugar, brown or white	1 teaspoon
Jam	1 heaped teaspoon

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Menu planning

You can use these steps to plan good, mixed meals.

- Identify the meals and snacks that will be eaten during the day and remember to include times to have something to drink.
- Start with a starchy food, as a starchy food should be part of most meals. Starchy foods may also be part of some of the snacks. Other foods should be eaten together with the starchy food.
- Include plenty of vegetables and fruit during the day. Use one vegetable or fruit that contains beta-carotene each day. When available, use a variety of vegetables and fruit.
- Plan for other foods to be eaten with the starchy food and vegetables, including some or all of the following:
 - dry beans, split peas, lentils and soya
 - oil or plant foods with plant oil (avocado, peanut butter)
 - milk, maas or yoghurt
 - fish, chicken, lean meat, or eggs.
- These can be added for additional flavour:
 - sugar or sugar-containing foods, if used sparingly.
 - iodated salt (used sparingly) or other non salt based seasoning used during food preparation.
- Remember that other steps for a healthy lifestyle are:
 - Be active!
 - Drink lots of clean, safe water.