

## NUTRITION 101: THE BASICS



What to eat has been a hot topic of discussion for many years. Although we've made progress, and notwithstanding those that eat for a specific sport, there still remains much confusion as to how to eat in order to take your body from now to wow! First, we need to understand the fundamentals of nutrition and the recommended guidelines for dietary intake. Then, we can use that knowledge and put it all into practice.

### The Macronutrients

Along with vitamins, minerals and water, there are 3 main macronutrients our bodies need in order to function properly (ie. allow our bodies to best process and perform necessary functions): carbohydrates, fats and proteins. Understanding these 3 macronutrients is the foundation for creating the proper diet.

### Carbohydrate

Feared as the arch-enemy of the body, carbohydrate is actually one of the most important nutrients needed for its role in maximizing the efficiency of stored and released energy, nervous & muscular system function and much more. There are two types of carbohydrate: simple (sugar, fruit) and complex (aka starches and found in unrefined whole grain). Refraining from (or eating in moderation) refined simple carbs is the best choice; however naturally-occurring sugar in fruits and some veggies is not a major concern.

Some excellent sources of healthy, unrefined carbs\*:

- Brown rice
- Potatoes (any cooking method but fried)
- Yams
- Vegetables (dark greens and other colorful veggies)
- Fruits
- Oats
- Quinoa (the double power food as it is an excellent source of protein as well)
- Cereal (low sugar)
- Anything whole grain!

\*Please note this list is a guide only and is not a complete list.

### Fats

Another feared macronutrient, fats are an important part of keeping the body healthy and happy. Fats are involved in many processes including: storing excess energy for later use, healthy brain function, cell membrane protection and more. As with carbs, sources of fat can be both good and bad and deciphering which sources are good can sometimes be a challenge. The two types of fat are: saturated (saturated and trans) and unsaturated (monounsaturated and polyunsaturated). While the former is mainly found in animal fat sources, the latter is found primarily in oils and plant-based foods. The point to remember with fats (and with all food in general) is moderation!

Some excellent sources of healthy fats\*:

- Red meat (on occasion)
- Dairy (Greek yogurt also dubs as a great source of protein)
- Seeds
- Nuts
- Nut butters (peanut butter, almond butter)
- Plants (oils such as olive oil)
- Some vegetables such as avocado
- Fish and fish oil (high in Omega 3's and also excellent sources of protein)

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### Protein

The final main nutrient our body needs is protein. Often referred to as the 'building blocks of protein', amino acids combine to form protein that our bodies use. Some proteins are found in the body (non-essential) while others are received through food (essential). Some major functions of protein in the body are: oxygen transportation, muscle support, enzyme and hormone production and energy.

Some excellent sources of healthy protein\*:

- Fish
- Red meat
- Protein powder
- Eggs and egg whites
- Dairy
- Beans and legumes
- Soy

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## Dietary Guidelines for Americans

Now that we've briefly discussed the main nutrients our bodies need (not forgetting the inclusion of vitamins, minerals and lots of water), let's review the recommended guidelines for daily intake. You can see from the Choose MyPlate image that there is a balance between all food groups (grains, vegetables, fruits, protein and dairy) and this is how your plate should look at each meal.



\*For more information on dietary food guidelines, please visit [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov)

## Putting the Knowledge into Practice

In general, you should be eating smaller meals, more often throughout the day to maximize nutrient absorption and efficient utilization of the nutrients. You've heard it before but I'll say it again: skipping breakfast is a huge no-no! If you think about it, your last meal is eaten approximately 2 hours before you sleep. Then, you spend 6-8 hours sleeping. During those 8-10 hours of fasting, the body is using its stored nutrients for energy and sustaining the proper processes the body must undergo involuntarily. Skipping breakfast means you unnecessarily continue the fast and consequently put your body in further danger of depletion. Therefore, eating a complete breakfast of healthy carb, fat and protein is a good idea. Then, every 2-3 hours, try to get in a similar small meal and wherever possible, choose the healthier option of food! Your body will thank you for it in the long run!

## 5 quick food swaps:

- Homemade sweet potato fries (easy oil and salt) instead of chips
- Whole grain bread instead of bagels
- Skim, almond or coconut milk in lieu of full fat milk
- Greek yogurt instead of regular
- Lean white protein (chicken breast, white fish) instead of fatty dark meat (chicken legs, hamburgers)



## Conclusion

It can be overwhelming to sift through the multitude of information available on nutrition. Don't let that prevent you from taking charge of your health. Take your time, do your research and find what works best for you! Every body is different!

## Your Quick Checklist of 5 Tips to Ensure Proper Nutrition:

1. Eat smaller meals, more often
2. Do not skip meals, especially breakfast
3. Choose healthy options of carbs, fats and proteins
4. Utilize the 'MyPlate' as a reference for portion size
5. Everything in moderation

The take home message? Everything in moderation is always recommended! This article is by no means comprehensive but it gives a good starting point for your journey to healthy eating. Support your body throughout the day by fueling it with the proper nutrients and watch your body change for the better ~ right before your eyes!

## Next: Nutrition 201: Fitness Nutrition



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