Food group facts

Learn about the different food groups and how the nutrients within them nourish our bodies

We divide food into five main groups. We need a variety of food from each of the groups to get all of the nutrients our bodies need. We don’t need to achieve this balance with every meal – it’s more important to get it right over the course of a day or week. Lots of foods (like pizza, casseroles, and sandwiches) are combination of the food groups, and fit into lots of them.

Fruit and vegetables

Fruit and vegetables are good sources of vitamins, minerals, and fibre. We should aim to eat at least five portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables a day. Fresh, frozen, tinned, dried, or juiced fruits and vegetables are all good options – though it’s best to try and limit juice or smoothies to one portion a day. Beans and pulses also count as one of our five a day.

Carbohydrates

Starchy carbohydrates such as potatoes, bread, rice, and pasta are important sources of energy and provide nutrients (including fibre, calcium, iron, and B vitamins). Starchy foods should make up just over a third of the food we eat.

Proteins

Protein rich foods include beans, lentils, and peas – as well as eggs, fish, and meat. A balanced diet can include protein from all of these sources. Our bodies need protein to repair themselves. Protein rich foods also contain lots of vitamins and minerals.

Dairy and alternatives

These foods are sources of protein, calcium, and vitamins. Calcium is important for our bones. As well as milk and milk products like cheese and yoghurt, calcium-fortified dairy alternatives like soya milks, yoghurts, and cheeses are also part of this food group.

Oils and spreads

This group contains foods such as olive, rapeseed, or sunflower oil, avocados, and some nuts (almonds, brazils, and peanuts). We need some fat in our diets – our bodies can’t make essential fatty acids, and we need fat to absorb vitamins A, D, and E. Foods high in other types of fat, salt, and sugar aren’t a food group, because they aren’t essential for our bodies to work. However, it’s still okay to eat them – they’re not ‘bad’ foods, and they can be a part of a balanced diet.