

what is a

BALANCED DIET

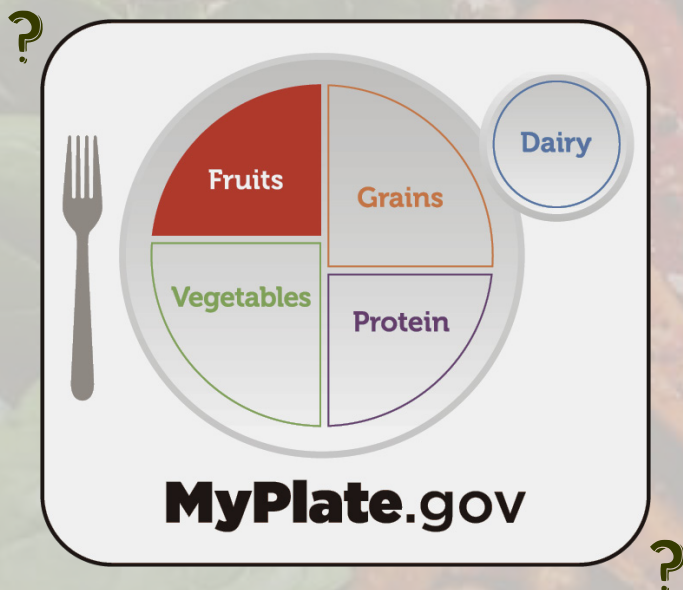
& how do you achieve it?

WHAT IS A BALANCED DIET?

A balanced diet is one that provides all of the essential nutrients that your body needs to sustain health and recover from stress (movement, intentional exercise, growth, injury, etc.).

In the world of nutrition, it is easy to get lost in the complexities of which nutrients are needed to optimize health. But, in reality, a simple breakdown of essential food groups and a basic understanding of when to eat them can suffice to maintain health at any life stage.

You may have heard of and seen the MyPlate¹ method for balanced eating. The idea is that you fill half of your plate with fruits and/or vegetables, a quarter with grains, and a quarter with protein. Then, add a bit of dairy on the side.



This is a useful visual, but it can be a bit overwhelming when you are not always creating a plate with an abundance of food, or when you have limited options.

SO, HERE ARE A FEW TIPS FOR HOW TO THINK ABOUT & BUILD YOUR MEALS:

STEP 1: When you consider what to eat, choose a protein and a vegetable or fruit. These are your “nonnegotiable” for your meal. Sometimes, this will look like a cut of meat with broccoli or a big bowl of lentils and some cabbage. But sometimes this can look like a protein bar or shake with an apple, or a single-serve packet of tuna and a few carrot sticks. Anchoring your meal around protein and a high-fiber vegetable or fruit will give your body its very basic nutritional needs for each meal or snack.²

STEP 2: Add a “fuel” source in the form of healthy fats (dairy products, olive oil, avocado, nuts, coconut, etc.) and/or a complex or whole-food carbohydrate (whole grains like rice or quinoa, sweet potato, potato, a sweet fruit like mango, pineapple, or banana, etc.). These types of food give your body and mind the fuel that they need to function well.² Dairy is another important component, and can be added here as well.

STEP 3: Don't forget to hydrate! It is said a lot, but it's easy to forget. Water is important for your body's fluid balance, for digestion, for your gut's health and lubrication, and many other important processes. Also, remember to add electrolytes, especially if you do a lot of exercise and activity. As your body loses water, it also loses the minerals that keep your muscles (including your heart!) contracting properly. If you drink lots of water while sweating out electrolytes over time, it can be extremely dangerous.³ Hydration includes both water & minerals!



BUT WAIT, WHERE DO THE FUN FOODS GO?

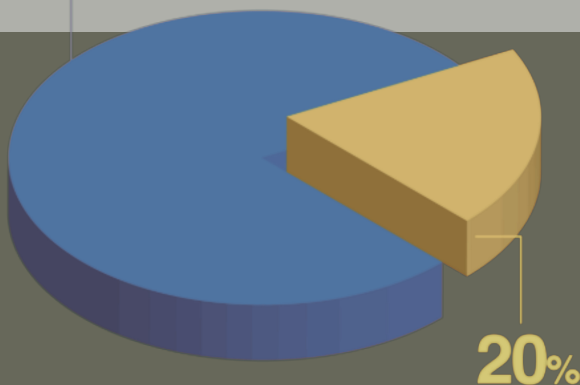


YOU CAN STILL ENJOY SOME FUN, NOT-SO-HEALTHY FOODS while maintaining balance. The 80/20 rule helps a lot of people. The idea is that about 80% of the time, you eat foods that are healthier (like the meal pattern described above). Then, about 20% of the time, you allow yourself to indulge in less healthy food items.

Some like to do this daily, eating healthy meals throughout the day, but enjoying a small dessert or snack with friends in the evenings. You can also break up the week this way, by eating within a healthy meal pattern during weekdays and enjoying some social-eating on the weekends.

You may find that you are not eating exactly at an 80/20, and that is ok. The idea is just to eat well the majority of the time, while giving yourself grace to enjoy the pleasure of food (especially as a community/social activity).

80%



WHEN TO LOOK FOR HELP:

Sometimes, people get into an unhealthy head-space about their healthy eating habits. It is important to remember that stressing over food components is not part of a balanced diet.⁴ If you find yourself becoming stressed about your eating behaviors and food choices, or notice obsessive or compulsive behaviors surrounding your eating habits, seek guidance from the on-campus behavioral health dietitian, Brooke Lister, RDN.

You can call 435-797-3016 to make an appointment. Visit the USU Campus Recreation Nutrition Coaching website for more information at <https://www.usu.edu/campusrec/nutrition/coaching>

TIPS:

Add essential food components to your backpack for the day to encourage yourself to eat regularly (3-4 times a day, or every 3-4 hours, is best!)

Some cost-efficient meal components:

- Tuna or salmon drain-free single-serve packets
- Tinned sardines, mackerel, or chicken
- Apples
- Cheese sticks
- Pork rinds
- Protein bars (not as cost-efficient, but if you can get them, they're great in a pinch)
- Baby carrots
- Cut celery
- Single-serve peanut butter
- Single-serve yogurt cups
- Mandarin oranges



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