

# What Belongs in Each Food Group?

Table 3.1 provides examples of best-choice foods from each food group. For combination foods, students may estimate which food group makes up the majority of the mixed dish. For instance, a student in the protein group who selects chicken stir-fry may decide that chicken is the primary ingredient while also recognizing that this dish contains multiple vegetables (peppers, snow peas) and maybe even grains (buckwheat soba noodles).

**TABLE 3.1 Best-Choice Foods in Each Food Group**

Food group	How to choose	Examples of best-choice* foods
Grains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Whole grains—Choose whole grains or foods made with minimally processed whole grains.</li> <li>Choose foods that list a whole grain as the first ingredient.</li> <li>Watch out for added sugar on the nutrition facts label and ingredients list. Remember that there are many names for added sugar, including corn syrup, sucrose, honey, and molasses.</li> </ul>	Whole grains (barley, brown rice, buckwheat, bulgur, millet, quinoa, wheat), breads (100% whole-wheat or -rye bread, 100% whole-grain rolls, stone-ground corn or 100% whole-wheat tortillas, 100% whole-wheat pitas), cereals (steel-cut oatmeal, seven-grain hot cereal, ready-to-eat cereals made with whole oats, whole wheat, or other whole grains), pasta (100% whole-wheat noodles, soba noodles), crackers (100% whole-wheat crackers, whole-rye crispbread), pancakes (100% whole wheat or buckwheat)
Vegetables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Choose a rainbow of colors, especially dark green and orange.</li> <li>Potatoes don't count as vegetables.</li> </ul>	Collard greens, mustard greens, spinach, kale, chard, bok choy, green cabbage, red cabbage, winter squash, summer squash, zucchini, sweet potatoes, broccoli, carrots, tomatoes, turnips, string beans, lettuce, onions, okra, beets, cauliflower, brussels sprouts, beans and peas (kidney beans, black beans, soybeans, chickpeas, lentils, black-eyed peas)
Fruits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Choose a rainbow of colors.</li> <li>Choose whole fruits or sliced fruits (rather than fruit juices; limit fruit juice to no more than 4-6 oz, or 120-170 ml, per day).</li> </ul>	Peaches, nectarines, cantaloupe, watermelon, grapefruit, raisins, apples, pears, oranges, strawberries, tangerines, grapes, pineapple, mangoes, blueberries, cherries, figs, kiwi fruits, avocados
Protein	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Choose beans and peas,** nuts, seeds, and other plant-based healthy protein options, as well as fish and poultry.</li> <li>Limit red meat (beef, pork, lamb) and avoid processed meats (bacon, deli meats, hot dogs, sausages).</li> </ul>	Beans and peas (kidney beans, black beans, soybeans, chickpeas, lentils, black-eyed peas), nuts (almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts), nut butters (peanut butter, almond butter), seeds (sunflower, pumpkin), tofu and other high-protein vegetarian alternatives (tempeh, falafel, veggie burgers), fish (salmon, trout, cod, shrimp, crab, scallops, light tuna, sardines), eggs, poultry (chicken, turkey)
Dairy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Choose unflavored milk, plain yogurt, small amounts of cheese, and other unsweetened dairy foods.***</li> <li>Dairy foods are needed in lower proportions than foods from the other groups.</li> </ul>	Unflavored milk, plain yogurt, string cheese (mozzarella cheese sticks), cottage cheese, cheddar cheese

\*Best-choice foods contain the most nutrients and contribute to overall health.

\*\*Beans and peas can be considered part of the vegetable group as well as the healthy protein group.

\*\*\*Plain yogurt and other unsweetened dairy foods can also be a good source of protein. Students who cannot consume dairy can choose lactose-free milk or calcium-fortified nondairy alternatives such as unflavored and unsweetened rice milk or soy milk.

From L.W.Y. Cheung, H. Dart, S. Kalin, B. Otis, and S.L. Gortmaker, 2016, *Eat Well & Keep Moving*, 3rd ed. (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics).