

Food Groups and the Kid's Healthy Eating Plate at a Glance

Kid's Healthy Eating Plate



Eating a variety of foods keeps our meals interesting and flavorful. It's also the key to a healthy and balanced diet because each food has a different mix of nutrients—both macronutrients (carbohydrate, protein, and fat) and micronutrients (vitamins and minerals).

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). Copyright © 2015, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. For more information about The Kid's Healthy Eating Plate, please see The Nutrition Source, Department of Nutrition, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/kids-healthy-eating-plate.

Vegetables, fruits, grains, protein, and dairy make up the five basic food groups, but not all options within these groups are equally beneficial or healthful, and some foods—especially those from plants—are needed in greater proportions than others. The Kid's Healthy Eating Plate provides a blueprint to help us build a balanced meal with the **best choices from each group**:

Along with filling half of our plate with colorful **vegetables** and **fruits**, split the other half between **whole grains** and **healthy protein**. Minimally processed whole grains make better choices than refined grains, especially when we look out for added sugars. Healthy protein includes mostly plant-based options such as nuts, seeds, and beans, but poultry and fish are also excellent choices. Foods from the **dairy** group are needed in lower proportions than foods from the other groups, but milk and other dairy foods are common sources of calcium and vitamin D, so choose unflavored milk, plain yogurt, or other unsweetened dairy foods.

Dairy Research

Milk and dairy foods are a convenient source of calcium, vitamin D, and other nutrients for many people, but the optimal intake of dairy products has yet to be determined and the research is still developing. To review the most up-to-date evidence on dairy consumption, visit the Kid's Healthy Eating Plate web page on The Nutrition Source: www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/kids-healthy-eating-plate.

The Kid's Healthy Eating Plate also includes elements that are not part of the five food groups, but are additional important reminders for maintaining a healthy diet and lifestyle.

- ▶ *Healthy oils* (plant-based oils such as olive and canola oil) are a great source of healthy fat and should be used when cooking or as dressing on a salad.
- ▶ *Water* should be the drink of choice at every meal and snack, as well as when we are staying active.
- ▶ Note that the Kid's Healthy Eating Plate does not contain sugary drinks, sweets, and other junk foods. These are not everyday foods and should only be eaten rarely, if ever.
- ▶ Finally, just like choosing the right foods, incorporating physical activity into our day by *staying active* is part of the recipe for keeping healthy.

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