

Home Grown Guidelines to Healthy Eating

The South African Guidelines for healthy eating are messages that will help South Africans to follow a healthy eating plan. The food guide, a visual presentation of what healthy eating entails and will help you to plan how much food an adult should include in their daily eating plan. These messages were developed using recent scientific information.

The Food Guide, illustrated by the picture below, provides information about the amount and kinds of foods that people need to eat most days of the week in order to consume the nutrients needed for good health. Using the information in the Food Guide also helps people not to consume too much of certain nutrients, such as energy, saturated (mostly animal) fat and salt (sodium).

A healthy eating plan refers to a diet that includes foods that supply the correct amount of nutrients needed for health. It contains enough food and a variety of food. Some people call this a balanced diet. A healthy eating plan can include some foods that have low nutritional value (such as sweets or chips) when most of the meals, most of the time, are made from foods from the food guide.

A daily eating plan is likely to be healthy when it consists of three or more mixed meals every day. Most mixed meals will include a starchy food, and foods from different food groups. The daily eating plan should therefore include food from most of the food groups, most days of the week.



The food groups illustrated in the food give above includes the following:

- Starchy foods
- Vegetables and fruit
- Dry beans, split peas and lentils
- Fish, chicken, meat and eggs
- Milk, maas and yoghurt
- Fat/oil

- Sugar

The size of each food group in the food guide is supposed to help South Africans get an idea of how much should be eaten from each group. For example, starchy foods appear in the centre of the picture to bring the message across that starchy foods should form the basis all meals while fats and oils should form the smallest part of our daily food intake.

The South African Guidelines for Healthy Eating are the messages that are meant to complement the food guide. These messages are as follows:

- **Enjoy a variety of foods**

It is important to eat different types of food, because one type of food does not contain all the nutrients the body needs. To eat wisely means to eat different types of food that contain all the nutrients the body needs. The best way to ensure that all the nutrients are obtained, is to eat variety of foods at all meals. When planning good mixed meals, these are the guidelines that should be used:

- **Make starchy foods the basis of most meals**

Starchy foods are the foods most commonly consumed by South Africans, with wheat and maize based foods topping the list. Choose starchy food such as maize meal, bread, rice, potatoes or any other starchy foods that are available and affordable, Starchy foods are rich sources of carbohydrates which supply the body with energy. Such foods should make up the main part of the meal and other food should be served with them to provide extra nutrients. We should also ensure that we make fortified maize meal and/or fortified bread part of the family's daily meals. Add other foods to the starchy food. Examples of these are found in the following three guidelines:

- **Chicken, fish , meat, milk or eggs could be eaten daily**

These foods are good sources of many nutrients, including protein and minerals such as iron, zinc and calcium to build muscles, bones, teeth and blood. Small portions of these foods can be eaten daily.

- **Eat plenty of vegetables and fruits every day**

Many South Africans do not eat enough vegetables and fruit. Vegetables and fruit supply lots of vitamins (vitamins A, C and E) and minerals along with other substances that are good for your health. At least five portions of vegetables and/or fruits should be eaten daily. Add vegetables to the starchy food.

- **Eat dry beans, peas, lentils and soya regularly**

These foods are rich sources of protein that are needed to build, repair and maintain our body's muscles and tissues and contain fibre, energy and minerals. Eat these foods at least three times a week with starchy foods.

- **Use salt sparingly**

Add very little or no salt to foods at table and during cooking. A high intake of salt has been linked to high blood pressure in salt sensitive individuals which damages the blood vessels and increase the risk of heart disease and stroke.

- **Use fats sparingly**

An eating pattern which is high in fat has been linked to overweight, high cholesterol levels, heart disease, diabetes and certain cancers. We should therefore eat fats sparingly. However, fat is important for the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins such as vitamin A.

- **Drink lots of clean, safe water**

Water helps with digestion and absorption of food and with the removal of waste products. Drinking too little water can lead to concentrated urine, reduced sweating, constipation and oedema or water retention.

- **If you drink alcohol, drink sensibly**

Alcohol is not an essential drink for good health. A sensible limit is no more than two standard drinks per day for a woman and no more than three standard drinks per day for men.

- **Use food and drinks containing sugar sparingly and not between meals**

Food and drinks containing sugar should not be taken instead of mixed meals, but can be enjoyed in a small amounts on special occasions or as a treat after a mixed meal.

- **Be active**

Being active and eating healthily are the best ways to prevent us from gaining weight or developing osteoporosis, high cholesterol, high blood pressure or diabetes.