

# How to Build a Healthy, Balanced Meal

Many people have the goal of creating a more balanced meal, but few understand what balance actually means. How can you make a meal more satisfying? How can you ensure you include all nutrients and food groups? What can you add to feel more energized throughout your day? These are all questions that should come to mind as you work toward putting together a healthy, balanced meal.

## What is a Balanced Meal?

A balanced meal contains components from each of the three macronutrients (carbohydrate, protein, and fat). In addition, it will contain a variety of micronutrients from vitamins and minerals, typically from fruits and vegetables. Every person has individual needs on the amount of each macronutrient and micronutrient their body needs to function optimally. A good rule of thumb is to use the palm of your hand as a visual reference when portioning. For a complete meal, it is good to aim for two palm-sized servings of carbohydrate or starch, one palm-sized serving of protein, one palm-sized serving of fruit and/or vegetables, and two thumb-sized portions of fat.

That being said, creating balanced meals also involves flexibility. Not every meal will have the exact same ratio of macro and micronutrients, but that is okay. For some meals, your plate may consist of more carbohydrates, while other meals will consist of more protein. The important thing to keep in mind is that you are incorporating a variety of foods in your diet from each food group.

## What are the Benefits of Eating a Balanced Meal?

As mentioned before, consuming balanced meals can allow you to add a great amount of variety to your diet, which can increase the likelihood of meeting your nutrient requirements. Each nutrient provides different amounts of energy to help fuel you throughout your day. In addition, this variety can be beneficial to your overall health. Consuming a variety of carbohydrates and vegetables can increase the amount of fiber in your diet to improve digestion. In addition, these will provide a multitude of vitamins and minerals that each have different functions in the body. Consuming adequate protein can help the body repair, restore, and build muscle. Adding in a variety of fats can be beneficial for heart health, hormone health, and can increase the absorption of some vitamins.

Balanced meals can also increase the feelings of fullness and satisfaction. Fullness comes from the physical sensations the body feels after a meal, while satisfaction usually pertains to the emotional satiation you may feel after a meal. Satisfaction can be improved by incorporating foods, flavors, and textures you enjoy. Pairing some of your favorite foods with foods from different food groups is all part of creating a balanced meal.

## The Big-Take Aways

Thinking of balanced meals can be stressful, so it is important not to over-complicate things. A balanced meal can consist of whatever foods you enjoy eating. First, think about what sounds good? Ask yourself, does this meal contain each of the macronutrients? What about micronutrients? Think about what you can add from there to ensure you will feel full and satisfied after the meal. Listen to your body, your hunger cues, and add variety wherever you can. Lastly, have fun with creating meals. It can be exciting to try new things, play around with different pairings, and admire the different colors on your plate.

## Balanced Meal Ideas

Stir-fried vegetables and chicken with rice or noodles

Greek yogurt, granola, and fruit

Pizza and a side salad

Oatmeal with peanut butter and banana

Spaghetti, meatballs, and green beans

Tacos with meat, cheese, lettuce, tomatoes, and guacamole

Macaroni and cheese, chicken, peas, and broccoli

Steak, sweet potatoes, asparagus

Bagel with avocado, eggs, and fruit

Sandwich with turkey and cheese, carrots, and chips

Chicken fettuccine alfredo and broccoli

Meatloaf, mashed potatoes and gravy, green beans

Salmon, wild rice, mixed veggies



