
Guideline 1:

Eat a Variety of Foods to Ensure a Balanced Diet

◇ Why Variety Matters

No single food contains all the nutrients the body needs. A balanced diet must include a wide range of food groups to supply carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins, minerals, and water in appropriate amounts. Diversity in the diet not only supports growth and immunity but also reduces the risk of chronic diseases like diabetes, hypertension, and obesity.

◇ Components of a Balanced Diet

To build a wholesome daily meal plan, ICMR recommends choosing foods from **at least eight different food groups**:

Food Group	Examples	Nutritional Benefit
Cereals & Millets	Rice, wheat, ragi, bajra	Energy, B vitamins, fiber
Pulses & Legumes	Lentils, chickpeas, green gram	Protein, iron, folate
Vegetables	Leafy greens, carrots, sweet potato	Vitamins A, C, minerals, antioxidants
Fruits	Banana, mango, papaya, citrus fruits	Vitamin C, potassium, fiber
Milk & Dairy	Milk, curd, paneer	Calcium, protein, vitamin D
Nuts & Oilseeds	Almonds, peanuts, sesame seeds	Healthy fats, vitamin E, minerals
Flesh Foods & Eggs	Fish, chicken, eggs	Complete protein, iron, B12
Oils	Groundnut, mustard, sunflower oils	Essential fatty acids

A balanced combination of these foods ensures optimal health, especially when portion sizes are tailored to one's **age, gender, physiological needs, and activity level**.

◇ Nutritional Highlights

- **Cereals and pulses:** Combining these improves protein quality, especially important for vegetarians.
- **Vegetables and fruits:** Should make up **half the plate** in every meal. Emphasis on green leafy vegetables, root vegetables, and tubers offers vitamins, fiber, and antioxidants.
- **Calcium and iron-rich foods:** Crucial for children, women, and elderly populations.
- **Seasonal and local produce:** Supports sustainability and ensures freshness.
- **Water and hydration:** While not a food group, adequate fluid intake is essential and complements nutrient absorption.



The energy cut-off level is 250 Kcal for every 100g of cooked food.

◇ What to Limit and Why

- **Refined sugar:** Excess leads to obesity, dental issues, and insulin resistance.
- **Salt:** High intake is linked to hypertension and heart problems.
- **Saturated fats & trans fats:** Found in processed and fried foods; increase risk of cardiovascular diseases.

Use minimal oil in cooking—prefer steaming, grilling, boiling over deep frying. Choose natural sweeteners like jaggery in moderation.

◇ Lifestyle Integration

Balanced eating must go hand-in-hand with regular **physical activity**, adequate **sunlight exposure** for vitamin D synthesis, and mindful eating practices. Growing children, adolescents, pregnant women, and elderly individuals all have unique nutritional needs that should be addressed with careful planning and variety.

ICMR's “My Plate for the Day” encourages visualizing your meals as a well-portioned plate—half vegetables and fruits, one-quarter cereals/millets, and one-quarter protein-rich foods.