GUIDELINE 1

Eat a variety of foods to ensure a balanced diet

RATIONALE

Nutritionally adequate diet or a balanced diet should be consumed through a wise choice of food items from a variety (diverse) of food groups.

What is a 'Healthy Meal' or 'Healthy Food'?

A healthy meal (food) includes generous amounts of vegetables, adequate whole grains and pulses or beans, along with modest portions of nuts or seeds, complemented by a selection of fruits and plain fermented yogurt or curd. It is free of added sugars or contains very minimal amounts, and is seasoned with minimal oil/fats and salt for taste.

What can make a 'Healthy Snack'?

An ideal healthy snack consists of vegetable or fruit salads adorned with seeds or nuts, topped with yogurt. Additionally, roasted or boiled beans, lobia, chickpeas, and peanuts can serve as nutritious snack options.

What is a balanced diet and why do we need it?

A balanced diet provides required calories, proteins, vitamins, minerals and adequate fibre.

- A balanced diet is a wholesome and nutritionally adequate diet. It provides a variety of nutrients that perform a wide range of functions in the body.
- A balanced diet can be achieved by eating diverse foods since there is no single food item with all the essential nutrients.
- A balanced diet is needed for growth and development to sustain life, maintain health, optimum brain function, immune function, etc.
- Nutrients must be obtained through a judicious choice and combination of a variety of foodstuffs from different food groups. Variety from wholesome foods is the key to achieve nutrient adequacy.
- Physical activity is also essential for appropriate utilization of all nutrients from a balanced diet.
- Exposure to sunlight for obtaining vitamin D is also recommended.

What is healthy eating habit?

- Inclusion of non-starchy fresh vegetables and green leafy vegetables in every meal. Take atleast 30 grams of fruits in every meal.
- Consuming at least 50% of cereals and other grains as whole grains (minimally polished) for adequate nutrients and fibre.
- All cereal (or millet) based diets are accompanied with adequate pulses or beans for good quality protein and fibre.
- Consuming adequate quantities of nuts, oilseeds, fatty fish and restricting cooking oils to 25g to 30g per day.

- Restricting meal frequency to two to three times a day.
- Avoiding ultra-processed foods (UPFs) and foods high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS).
- Avoiding sugar or restricting to 20g to 25g per day (adults).
- Not snacking in between and consuming healthy beverages (refer Guideline 9).

Include variety within food groups: For example, different types of cereals, millets and pulses have different nutrient profile; hence a variety of cereals, millets and pulses are recommended to be consumed on a daily basis for adequacy of different nutrients. This applies to other food groups such as vegetables and fruits as well.

Add varieties of oilseeds and nuts in daily diet: Foods such as nuts, oilseeds, fish, etc. are nutrient dense and are rich sources of good quality fats, proteins, vitamins and other nutrients. Different varieties of oilseeds and nuts are advised.

Foods such as fenugreek seeds, amaranth seeds, flax seeds, chia seeds and basil seeds have health promoting effects and can be consumed at least three to four times a week.

Include a variety of fruits and vegetables in daily diet: Vegetables and fruits are sources of protective nutrients such as vitamins, minerals, phytonutrients, antioxidants and fibre. Different varieties of vegetables and fruits should be consumed.

Limit added fat, salt and sugar intake:

- Limit intake of foods with added fat/oil and salt.
- Avoid foods and beverages with added sugars.

Avoid foods and beverages with added sugars.

Nutrients of concern for vegetarians: Achieving adequacy of essential Long chain n-3 poly unsaturated fatty acids (PUFA) and B12 is a challenge. May take foods fortified with these nutrients or must ensure adequate intake of n-3 PUFA rich foods (flax seeds, chia seeds, walnuts, vegetables and greens) as only a small amount of n-3 PUFA will be converted to EPA (Eicosa Pentaenoic Acid) and DHA (Docosa Hexaenoic Acid). For B12; milk has small amount of B12.

Requirements of essential nutrients vary with age, gender, physiological status and physical activity (Fig 1.2). Dietary intakes that provide lower or higher than the body requirements can lead to under-nutrition or overweight/ obesity respectively. Eating too little food during certain significant periods of life such as infancy, childhood, adolescence, pregnancy and lactation and eating too much at any age can have harmful consequences.

Carbohydrates, fats and proteins are 'macronutrients,' which are needed in large amounts. Diets must provide adequate essential amino acids (EAA) and essential fatty acids (EFA) to achieve maximum growth potential among children. Vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients constitute the 'micronutrients' and are required in smaller amounts. Both macro and micronutrients are necessary for physiological and biochemical processes by which the human body acquires, assimilates and utilizes food to maintain health and activity (refer Tables 1.1 to 1.5 for nutritive values of different foods).

Physical activity is also essential for appropriate utilization of all nutrients from a balanced diet.

Figure 1.1. Food pyramid for balanced diet for 2000 Kcal

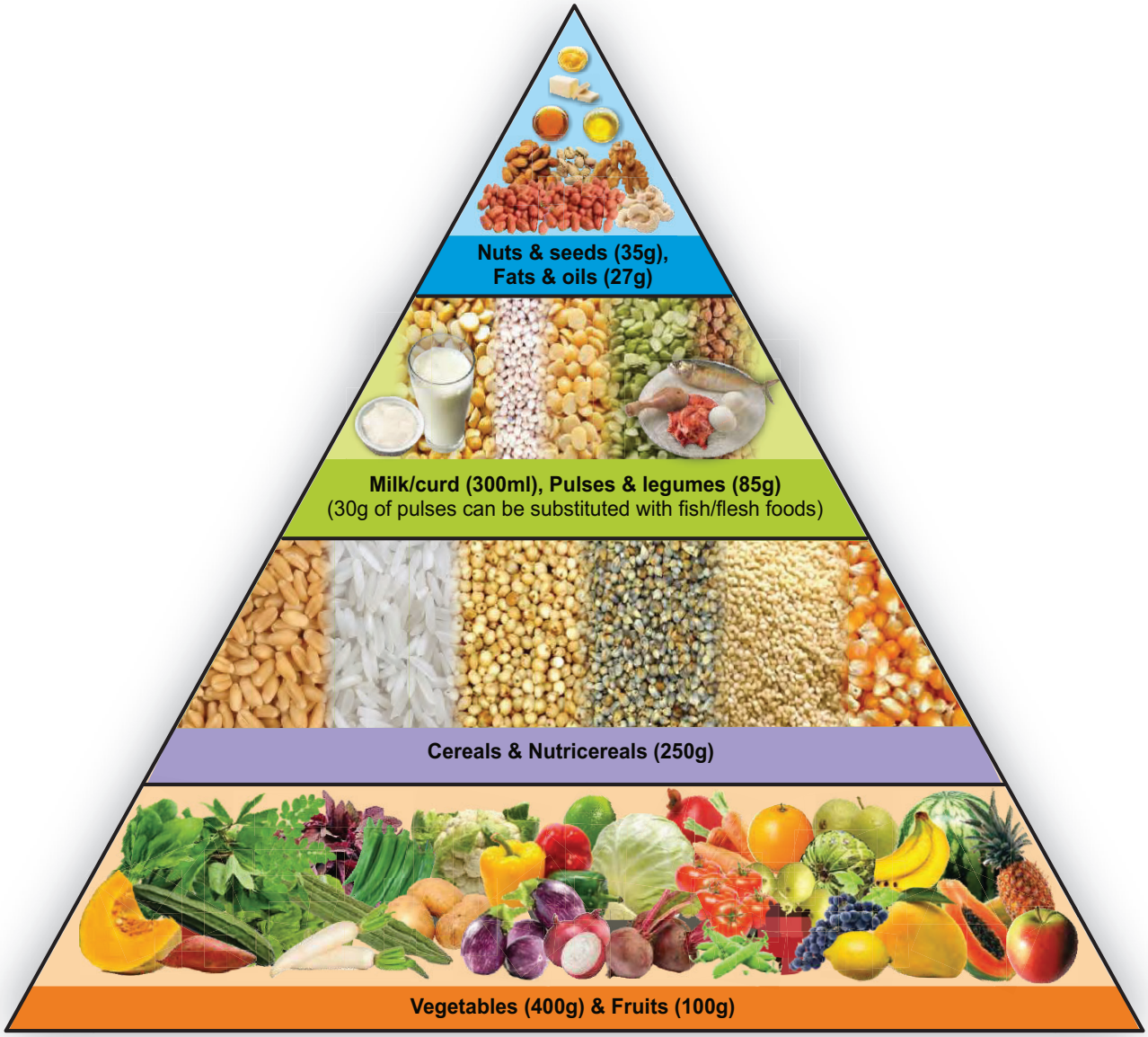
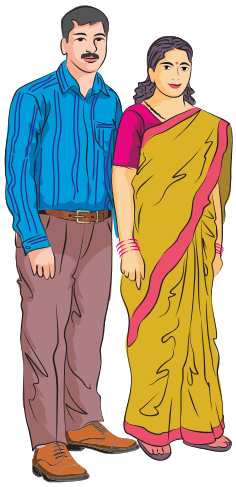


Figure 1.2. Importance of balanced diet during different stages of life



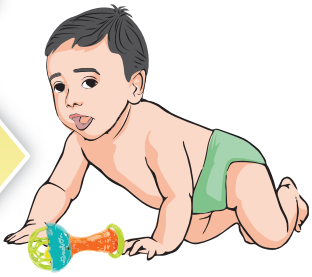
Elders
For being physically active and healthy

Adults
For maintaining health, productivity and prevention of diet-related diseases

Reproductive age
To meet the extra nutritional needs for child bearing/rearing

Adolescents (10 to 19 years)
For growth spurt, maturation and bone development

Children (2 to 6 years)
For growth, development and cognition



Infants & young children (6 months to 2 years)
For growth, development & cognition (Breast milk and nutrient-rich complementary foods)

Infants (0 to 6 months)
For growth and development (Exclusive breastfeeding)