



THE VALUE OF FOOD

Nearly everyone enjoys eating. We eat because we feel hungry, because we like eating, and because we feel that food is "good for us". Good food enables children to grow properly and to be healthy, with strong bones and teeth. It enables us to be fit and energetic, and to resist infections and disease. When people don't have enough food they cannot grow and develop properly, and they are likely to suffer from ill health.

Food has this effect on our bodies because of the substances it contains. It contains many different chemical substances which are called nutrients. It is these nutrients which enable the body to grow and to function properly. If there are not enough nutrients in the food we eat, then the body cannot grow and work as it should. We suffer from poor growth, lack of energy and ill health.

Children grow fast and are very active in proportion to their body size. They need more nutrients than adults. Good sources of body-building foods include eggs, fish, meat, milk and cheese. Children should be encouraged to try different foods so that they eat a varied and balanced diet.

Teenagers usually need to eat more food than any other group because they are still growing and remain very active. Their large appetites are a sign that their bodies require extra food for the "growth spurt" which takes place between the ages of twelve and nineteen. Body-building and protective foods are important for growth and fitness. Energy-giving foods are needed too. Girls should eat iron-rich foods such as meat, liver and green vegetables because they lose iron in blood during menstruation.

There are many different nutrients. Each one has a particular function (or job) to perform if the body is to work efficiently. The body is like a car, with many different parts. Each individual part must work properly if the whole car is to run smoothly.

The names of the nutrients are:

- **Protein**
- **Carbohydrate**
- **Fat**
- **Minerals, vitamins**

We also need dietary fibre. This is not exactly a nutrient as it is not absorbed by the body, but it is still necessary for our digestive systems to work properly.

Water is also very important in our diet. We could not live for long without it. About three-quarters of the body is made up of water. It transports materials within the body and removes waste substances. We need to drink about 1 ½ litres (3 pints) of water every day.

What do the different nutrients do?

Protein is necessary for the proper growth of the body. Even when people are fully-grown adults, they need protein to repair and replace cells which have become worn out.

Carbohydrates provide the energy we need to keep fit and active. It is the carbohydrate foods which contain dietary fibre.

Fats are also needed as a source of energy for all our activities.

Minerals and vitamins are only needed in small amounts but they are still essential. There are many different minerals such as iron, calcium and fluoride, and many different vitamins; the most well-known Vitamins A, B, C and D. Each has a different function and none of them can be used to do the work of any of the others. They are all involved with the proteins, carbohydrates and fats in the body's growth, activity and general health.

Most foods contain a mixture of several different nutrients. For example, here are



some of the foods which are good for us, with some of the nutrients they contain:

Bread:

Carbohydrate, protein, iron, calcium, fibre, Vitamin B

Margarine:

Fat, Vitamins A and D

Milk and Cheese:

Protein, carbohydrate, fat, calcium, Vitamin A, some B-Vitamins

Potatoes:

Carbohydrate, protein, Vitamin C

Liver, red meat:

Protein, iron, fat, B-Vitamins

Sardines, other oil fish:

Fat, Vitamins A and D, protein

Oranges:

Vitamin C

Eggs:

Protein, fat, Vitamin A, B-Vitamins

A good diet is one which provides all the nutrients we need. If we eat a wide variety of foods then we are likely to get all the nutrients we need. We should not however eat more than we need. Eating too much of the wrong kinds of food, especially too much fat and sugar, can lead to as much ill health as eating too little!

Protein

Protein is necessary for the growth and repair of all the cells in the body. These cells contain protein which has to be replaced at regular intervals. We get the protein we need from proteins in the plant and animal foods we eat.

In this country, because we all have enough to eat, a shortage of protein in the diet is very unusual. We do not need large quantities of meat, eggs, milk and so on to supply us with enough protein. This is because nearly every food we consume,

except refined sugar, processed fat and alcoholic drinks, contains some protein and therefore contributes a useful amount to the total we need. Generally, even in poorer countries, where people don't have enough to eat, they still get enough protein.

Both animal and plant foods are valuable sources of protein in our diet. As well as meat, fish and dairy produce, it is not always realised what a useful source of protein plant foods are, particularly bread, flour, beans, peas and rice. Proteins from different plant foods, when eaten together (e.g. beans with toast) can provide as good a source of protein as for example, grilled steak or chops which are far more expensive.

It is much more economical to have our protein provided by plant foods rather than animal foods. When so many people in the world are short of food, it is wasteful to use plant food to fatten animals for meat. An acre of land can feed many more people if it is used to produce a food crop than if it is used to rear animals.

Carbohydrates

Carbohydrate foods can be divided into three main types: sugars, starches and cellulose.

Sugars

These are found in all types of sugar, jam, honey, treacle, syrup, sweets and foods made with sugar.

We should reduce the amount of sugar we eat because it will cause our teeth to decay and is very likely to make us overweight. Sugar provides only "empty calories". Most foods provide a variety of different nutrients, but sugar is almost pure carbohydrate and gives us no extra nutrients at all. Although it is a quick source of energy, we do not really need it. It is better to get our supply of energy from foods like bread and potatoes, because they give us protein, minerals, vitamins and dietary fibre as well.



Even though we seem to have a natural liking for sweet, sugary foods, it is in our own interest to avoid them as far as possible and to try not to develop a sweet tooth. There is not much difference between brown and white sugar from a nutritional point of view. As brown sugar costs about twice as much as white, it is not worth paying the extra amount, unless you particularly prefer the flavour. The same applies to honey.

Starches and Cellulose

If we cut down on sugars and fats we can usually eat good amounts of starchy foods without becoming overweight. Starchy foods include bread, flour, potatoes, cereals of all kinds, pasta, pulses and rice.

They are very useful foods as:

1. They provide us with good sources of energy
2. They contain a variety of other useful nutrients
3. They contain good amounts of dietary fibre
4. They are relatively cheap to buy and to produce
5. They fill us up as they are bulky, so we do not feel hungry and tempted to over-eat

One of our aims in choosing our meals should be to eat more unrefined carbohydrate foods. "Unrefined" foods are those which have not undergone too much processing to remove outer skins, bran and so on. We should make an effort to include foods like wholemeal and brown bread, bran, brown rice and pasta and "whole-wheat" breakfast cereals in our diet. We would probably be much fitter and healthier as a result.

Why eat more fibre-rich food?

We should all be eating more foods containing plenty of "dietary fibre" or roughage. This means more unrefined, untreated plant foods, such as wholemeal flour and whole-grain cereals.

What is dietary fibre?

Fibre makes up the cell walls of plant foods, such as cereals, vegetables, beans and fruit. We eat food for the nutrients it contains, and the nutrients are contained within this fibrous wrapping fibre or bran wrapping.

Fats

Fats may come from either animal foods or plant foods. If they are animal fats they are usually hard, like butter, suet or lard. If they are from vegetables or plants they are usually soft and sold in the form of oil, though sometimes these are hardened to make margarine.

In this country it is recommended to cut down on the amount of fat we eat to about 30% of our calorie intake. This is mainly because in our country many people are very overweight and coronary heart disease is a major killer. In less developed countries where they eat much less fat (and usually much less sugar and more cereal foods to), obesity and coronary heart disease are much less common.

Fat in reasonable quantities is nevertheless a good food and adds a lot of flavour to our meals. If we had no butter or margarine for our bread and could never roast or fry any food, then our daily meals would be much less appetizing.

Fat is also a useful food because:

1. It is a very good source of energy
2. Some fats contain Vitamins A, D, F and K
3. We have a layer of fat under our skin which insulates us from too much heat or cold.
4. There is a layer of fat around some of our organs, such as the kidneys, to protect them from damage
5. Fat in a meal helps us to feel full for longer afterwards because it stays in the stomach for quite a long time. We say it has a "high satiety value".



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It is quite easy to cut down on the amount of fat you eat and this will reduce the risk of obesity (being very fat) and coronary heart disease. Do not eat large amounts of fried foods often, do not spread butter or margarine too thickly, do not indulge in lots of cakes, pastry, cream and chocolate.

Foods which contain a lot of fat:

Butter, margarine, lard, dripping, suet, vegetable oils

Cakes, pastry and biscuits made with these
Crisps and chips
Cheese, cream, fat in meat and bacon,
chocolate, salad cream



SUMMARY

Nutrient	Functions in the body	Good sources in the diet
Protein	<p>For growth and repair of tissues.</p> <p>A secondary source of energy.</p>	<p>Animal – meat, fish, cheese, eggs, milk</p> <p>Vegetable – soya beans, nuts, cereals, pulses</p>
Carbohydrate	<p>Source of energy for all the body's activities.</p> <p>Cellulose provides dietary fibre although it is not a food</p>	<p>Sugars – sugar, treacle, syrup, jam, honey, fruit</p> <p>Starches – flour (e.g. in bread, cakes, puddings), other cereals, potatoes</p> <p>Cellulose – fruit, vegetables, bran, wholemeal bread, whole cereals</p>
Fat	<p>A very good source of energy.</p> <p>A layer of fat insulates the body, preventing the loss of heat. Some organs of the body, e.g. the kidneys are protected by fat.</p> <p>Animal fats contain Vitamins A and D.</p> <p>Keeps you feeling “full” after a meal – it has a “high satiety value”</p>	<p>Animal – milk, butter, cream, cheese, suet, fatty meat oily fish</p> <p>Vegetable – margarines, salad or cooking oils</p>