

Healthy eating

Diet is very important for health. It should be **comprehensive, balanced and varied and suited to the needs and tastes** of every individual.

Eating is necessary but it is also a pleasurable experience and a time for sharing.

It is very important to **eat in peace**, sitting at the **table with the whole family** whenever possible, without any television or other distractions.

The **Mediterranean diet** is balanced and healthy; it includes fruits, vegetables, legumes, bread, rice, pasta, nuts, olive oil, etc. and small amounts of fish, lean meat, eggs and dairy, and water for drinking.

It is important to drink one or two liters of **water**, eat **raw foods** (fruit, salads and raw nuts) every day, eat **whole foods** (which provide fiber and minerals), use **olive oil** (preferably virgin, for cooking and seasoning), use **little salt**, divide food intake into **three to five meals** throughout the day, drink **as little alcohol as possible** and **exercise** daily.

A Mediterranean diet that is more vegetarian and consumes less meat is good for us. By eating whole grains and vegetables in a single day we get the same proteins that we do when we eat meat or fish.

Amount of food:

This depends on age and level of physical activity as well as constitution and metabolism. Older and less physically active people should eat less than the young and those who do hard work.

Healthy, balanced and varied diet:

It will be healthy and balanced if we eat **seasonal foods that are local, fresh and whole**, have not been refined and processed or pre-cooked and have few preservatives or additives. We should eat a varied diet with a little of everything.

A sample 5 meals a day menu:

1. Breakfast: a drink (animal or vegetable milk, tea, herbal tea), starch (cereal, bread, biscuits, etc.) with cold meats, tuna or jam, honey, olive oil, etc. and/or yogurt and fresh fruit.

2. Mid-morning: a pick-me-up, some dairy or fruit or a small sandwich or a handful of nuts.

3. Lunch: a starch (rice, pasta, beans, potatoes, etc.), and/or vegetables, a small serving of meat, fish or eggs, or else legumes, a side of cooked and/or raw vegetables.

4. Mid-afternoon: similar to mid-morning snack.

5. Supper: Lighter than lunch: cooked and/or raw vegetables or chunky or creamy soup, fish or eggs, and on occasion, cold meats or cheese.

The food pyramid shows how much we should eat from each food group. The large base shows **the foods we should eat every day:** grains and starches, vegetables, fruit, nuts and calcium-rich foods (such as dairy). Next come those we should **eat two to three times a week:** legumes, fish, eggs and poultry. At the top of the pyramid, in the narrowest part, are those we **should eat only occasionally:** red meat, cold meats, sweets, butter and fried foods.

