

The Importance of Healthy Nutrition and Dietary Diversity

Dietary diversity and eating a variety of foods from each food group is crucial for supplying the individual with all the essential nutrients that the body needs, including carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins, minerals and water, so that the body can function properly and generate energy, grow, repair damaged tissue, and regulate the body's biochemical reactions.

It is generally recommended to avoid foods and beverages containing large amounts of calories and are high in fat, sugar, or salt to reduce the risk of developing chronic diseases such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, osteoporosis, and some types of cancer. It is also important to maintain dietary diversity because relying on one type of food will not be enough to sustain the body's nutritional needs.

The role of proteins in nutrition:

- Building and repairing the vital components of the body, such as bones and muscles
- Maintaining proper pH levels in the blood
- Producing enzymes and hormones
- Protecting the body from diseases and infections
- Regulating body processes to maintain fluid balance (inside and outside the cells)
- Proteins are a secondary energy source that the body relies on in case the diet did not include carbohydrates and fats. However, it is important to note that relying on protein for energy exhausts the kidneys.
- Supplying the body with glucose when there is a deficiency in carbohydrates and blood glucose. The liver and kidneys convert some amino acids into glucose through a process called gluconeogenesis.
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The role of carbohydrates in nutrition:

- A primary energy source, and the only source that provides brain cells and red blood cells with energy.
- Preventing constipation. Dietary fibers are carbohydrates that facilitate the movement of the body's digestive waste, and therefore prevent constipation.
- Ridding the body of toxins. Glucuronic acid combines with some drugs and toxins and releases them out of the body.
- Activating some beneficial bacteria. Lactose plays an important role in stimulating the growth of beneficial gut bacteria that is responsible for producing B group vitamins and improving the absorption of iron and calcium.
- Improving the flavor of the food.

The role of fats in nutrition:

- Regulating the movement of fat-soluble compounds through cell membranes in and out of the cell, especially hormones and fat-soluble vitamins (A, D, E and K).
- Producing important compounds. Cholesterol is a key component in membranes of the body's cells. It can also transform into similar compounds such as vitamin D, bile salts and certain hormones (estrogen and testosterone)

The role of vitamins and minerals in nutrition:

- Regulating vital processes in the body
- Building the body's basic compounds
- Maintaining the health of the body's systems

The role of water in nutrition:

- Maintaining normal body temperature
- It lubricates the joints and acts as a pressure reliever.
- Protecting the spinal cord and other sensitive organs.
- Disposing of wastes by urination, sweat and bowel movement.

Tips for healthy nutrition:

- Chew your food slowly and steadily to enjoy its taste
- Eat breakfast every day to control your hunger and curb your appetite for the rest of the day
- Enjoy eating a meal and avoid getting too full
- Eat small portions of food
- Make your daily food intake as colorful as possible
- Make sure that half the dish consists of vegetables and fruits
- Eat more fruits and vegetables and drink plenty of juice.
- Eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables daily. Distributed as follows: 2 servings of fruits and 3 servings of vegetables.
- Make sure to choose lean meats cooked with very little amounts of salt and fat
- Eat at least two servings of fish each week especially salmon, sardines, trout and mackerel
- Eat foods containing heme iron (from meat) alternately with foods containing other types of iron (from meat substitutes, such as beans, lentils, tofu, etc.) along with foods rich in vitamin (C), to improve the absorption of non-heme iron (from meat substitutes).
- Drink skimmed or low-fat milk containing 1% or 2% fat and avoid eating high-fat products because they contain a large amount of fat, particularly saturated fats.
- Drink 500 ml (2 cups) of milk or calcium-fortified soy beverages

- Consuming milk and dairy products is important for maintaining bone health and stimulating their growth during childhood, adolescence, pregnancy and breastfeeding.
- Dairy products are an important source of calcium, proteins, vitamins and minerals
- Make sure to breastfeed your baby.
- It is recommended to read any labels printed on the product including the nutrition facts label before purchasing the product, to determine the portion size, fat (including total fat, saturated fat, trans fat), cholesterol, sodium, as well as total carbs , proteins , calcium , vitamins , iron.
- Drink water regularly, especially in hot weather or during physical activity.
- Avoid sugary drinks and replace them with water whenever possible
- Exercise daily to maintain a healthy weight and improve your health
- Adults should exercise at least half an hour a day at least five times a week, which is equal to around two and a half hours per week (150 minutes). Children and youth should engage in daily physical activities for one hour and avoid sitting in front of TV screens and electronic devices for more than two hours a day.
- Try doing a variety of different physical activities and distribute them throughout the week starting slowly and then increasing the intensity of the physical activity.

References:

- National dietary guidelines for healthy nutrition in accordance with the national strategy for healthy diets and physical activity
- Takhtit Al Wajabat Al Ghidhayiya (Planning meals) Dr. Essam bin Hassan Aweida