WellPATH
Your Path to Better Health
Joint Health Management Board

Monthly WellPATH Spotlight

May 2022: Physical Fitness & Nutrition

Essential Nutrients Your Body Needs and Why

There are so many reasons why regular physical activity boosts your health. We know that staying active is one of the best ways to keep our bodies healthy. However, staying fit is more than just being active, it's also about supplying your body with the right amount of nutrients to recover, build and maintain muscle, and prevent disease.

Essential nutrients are compounds that the body can't make or can't make in sufficient quantities. According to the World Health Organization, these nutrients must come from food, and they're vital for disease prevention, growth, and good health. While there are many essential nutrients, they can be broken into two categories: **macronutrients** and **micronutrients**.

Macronutrients are eaten in large amounts and include the primary building blocks of your diet — protein, carbohydrates, and fat — which provide your body with energy. Vitamins and minerals are **micronutrients**, and small doses go a long way. Review this month's spotlight to learn about the six main groups of essential micronutrients and macronutrients. Don't forget to complete the monthly quiz for a chance to win a $25 gift card!

Protein

Protein is essential for good health. Protein provides the building blocks of the body, and not just for muscle. Every cell, from bone to skin to hair, contains protein. Protein is used primarily for growth, health, and body maintenance. All of your hormones,

Sources:
https://www.healthline.com/health/food-nutrition/six-essential-nutrients#takeaway
https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-eating/eat-smart
https://medlineplus.gov/minerals.html

antibodies, and other important substances are composed of protein. Protein is not used to fuel the body unless necessary.

Generally, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends 10 percent to 35 percent of your daily calories come from protein. So, that's about 46 grams of protein for adult women and 56 grams for adult men.

Proteins are made of up different amino acids. While the body can create some amino acids on its own, there are many essential amino acids that can only come from food. You need a variety of amino acids for your body to function properly. The good news is that you don't need to eat all of the amino acids at once. Your body can create complete proteins from the foods you eat throughout the day.

Healthy Sources

While meat, fish, and eggs are good sources of essential amino acids, you can also get protein from plant sources like beans, soy, nuts, and some grains. Exactly how much protein you need daily depends on a variety of factors including how active you are and your age.

Carbohydrates (Carbs)

Don't let the low-carb craze fool you. Carbohydrates are necessary for a healthy body. Carbs fuel your body, especially your central nervous system and brain, and protect against disease, according to the Mayo Clinic.

Food contains three types of carbohydrates: sugar, starches and fiber. Carbohydrates are either called simple or complex, depending on the food's chemical structure and how quickly the sugar is digested and absorbed. The type of carbohydrates that you eat makes a difference – foods that contain high amounts of simple sugars, especially

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fructose, raise triglyceride levels. Triglycerides (or blood fats) are an important barometer of metabolic health; high levels may be associated with coronary heart disease, diabetes and fatty liver.

Simple carbohydrates are digested quickly and send immediate bursts of glucose (energy) into the bloodstream. That's why you may feel a rush of energy when you eat a dessert, only to be followed by a crash of fatigue when that sudden burst of energy is depleted. Simple sugars are found in refined sugars, like the white sugar you'd find in a sugar bowl. Added sugars (including refined sugars) provide calories, but lack vitamins, minerals and fiber and can lead to weight gain.

Complex carbohydrates are digested more slowly and supply a lower, more steady release of glucose into the bloodstream. As with simple sugars, some complex carbohydrate foods are better choices than others. Refined grains, such as white flour and white rice, have been processed, which removes many nutrients and fiber. Many foods containing refined grains like white flour, sugar and white rice lack B vitamins and other important nutrients unless they're marked "enriched." By contrast, unrefined whole grains retain many of these vital nutrients and are rich in fiber, which helps your digestive system work well. Fiber helps you feel full, so you are less likely to overeat these foods. That explains why you will feel full longer after eating a bowl of oatmeal compared to the same amount of calories of sugary candy.

Healthy Sources

Before you reach for the white bread or pasta, keep in mind that the type of carb you eat matters. Some carbs are healthier than others. Opt for whole grains, beans, and fiber-rich vegetables and fruits, instead of refined grains and products with added sugar.

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Fats

Fats often get a bad rap, but research has shown that healthy fats are an important part of a healthy diet. Dietary fats are essential to give your body energy and to support cell function. They also help protect your organs and help keep your body warm. Fats help your body absorb some nutrients and produce important hormones, too.

Yes, fat is high in calories, but those calories are an important energy source for your body. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends that 20 to 35 percent of your daily calories come from fat, but the World Health Organization suggests keeping it under 30 percent of your calories. Including healthy fats in your diet can help you to balance your blood sugar, decrease your risk of heart disease and type 2 diabetes, and improve your brain function. They're also powerful anti-inflammatories, and they may lower your risk of arthritis, cancer, and Alzheimer's disease.

The American Heart Association recommends replacing bad (saturated) fats with good (unsaturated) fats as a part of a healthy eating pattern.

Love It: Unsaturated (Poly & Mono)

- ✓ Lowers rates of cardiovascular and all-cause mortality
- ✓ Lowers bad cholesterol & triglyceride level
- ✓ Provides essential fats your body needs but can't produce itself

Limit It: Saturated

- ⚠ Increases risk of cardiovascular disease
- ⚠ Raises bad cholesterol levels

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Lose It: Artificial Trans Fat, Hydrogenated Oils & Tropical Oils

- Increases risk of heart disease
- Raises bad cholesterol levels

Healthy Sources

The most famous unsaturated fats are omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids. Unsaturated fats are important for your body as they provide essential fatty acids your body can't make. You can find these healthy fats in nuts, seeds, fish, and vegetable oils (like olive, avocado, and flaxseed). Avoid trans fats and limit your intake of saturated animal-based fats like butter, cheese, red meat, and ice cream.

Vitamins

Vitamins are vital for warding off disease and staying healthy. The body needs these micronutrients to support its functions. There are 13 essential vitamins that the body needs to function properly, including vitamins A, C, B6, and D.

Each vitamin plays an important role in the body, and not getting enough of them can cause health problems and disease. Many Americans do not get enough of many essential vitamins. Vitamins are essential for healthy vision, skin, and bones. Vitamins may lower the risk of lung and prostate cancer, and they're powerful antioxidants. Vitamins like vitamin C boost the immune system and help the body heal.

Before you start buying everything from Vitamin A to Zinc, remember there's only one way to be sure you're getting the vitamins and minerals your body needs: Eat healthy foods.

Supplements can be beneficial, but the key to vitamin and mineral success is eating a balanced diet. Before taking vitamin and mineral supplements, talk to your physician about your personal dietary plan.

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Healthy Sources

If you eat a varied, well-balanced diet full of vegetables and fruits, and have a normal and healthy functioning digestive tract, you likely don't need to take vitamin supplements.

Minerals

Much like vitamins, minerals help support the body. They're essential for many body functions, including building strong bones and teeth, regulating your metabolism, and staying properly hydrated. Some of the most common minerals are calcium, iron, and zinc.

In addition to strengthening bones, calcium helps with nerve signal transmission, maintaining healthy blood pressure, and muscle contraction and relaxation. Iron supports your red blood cells and hormone creation, while zinc boosts your immune system and wound healing. Most people get the amount of minerals they need by eating a wide variety of foods. In some cases, your doctor may recommend a mineral supplement. People who have certain health problems or take some medicines may need to get less of one of the minerals. Always talk to your doctor before taking mineral supplements.

Water

You can go for weeks without food, but you can't last more than a few days without water. Water is absolutely crucial for every system in your body. It's also the main thing you are made of. About 62 percent of your body weight is water.

Water improves your brain function and mood. It acts as a shock absorber and a lubricant in the body. It also helps flush out toxins, carry nutrients to cells, hydrate the

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body, and prevent constipation. Even mild dehydration can make you feel tired and impair your concentration and physical performance.

Healthy Sources

You don't have to chug water to stay hydrated. Fruits and vegetables can also be a great source. Munch on some spinach or watermelon to stay hydrated. The best way to know if you're properly hydrated is the color and volume of your urine. If your urine isn't frequent and pale yellow or nearly clear, you need more water.

Final Tips

Eating a varied diet full of fruits, vegetables, healthy proteins and fats, and whole grains is the best way to get enough of these six essential nutrients plus the important category of phytonutrients — the beneficial chemicals in colorful plants that prevent disease. These micronutrients and macronutrients are vital for your body to function normally and stay healthy.

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