A healthy diet

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FACT

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A healthy diet is important because it:
° keeps the body and mind healthy
° gives the body energy to be active and function well
° helps the body to grow and repair itself
° helps the body to fight infections and illness
° makes children grow well
° makes pregnant women produce healthy babies.

A healthy diet has a variety of foods from different food groups

Staple foods
Cereals: e.g. maize/cornmeal, millet, sorghum, wheat flour, rice
Starchy roots: e.g. potato, sweet potato, yam, fresh cassava, cassava flour, plantain

Legumes, oilseeds and nuts
Legumes: e.g. cowpea, pigeon pea, kidney bean, lentil, chickpea, groundnut
Oilseeds: e.g. soybean, pumpkin, sunflower seed, sesame, melon seed
Nuts: e.g. chestnut, walnut, hazelnut, macadamia, almonds

Vegetables and fruits
Vegetables: e.g. tomato, pumpkin, carrot, spinach and other leaves, orange sweet potato, sweet pepper, eggplant
Fruits: e.g. mango, pawpaw, passion fruit, orange, pineapple, banana, dates

Animal foods
Meat, offal, poultry and fish: e.g. beef, goat, sheep, pork, liver and other offal, chicken, fresh or dried or canned fish
Milk, eggs and dairy products: e.g. fresh cow milk, fresh goat milk, eggs, curds, yoghurt, cheese

Fats and oils
Fats: e.g. butter, margarine, fat from meat, ghee
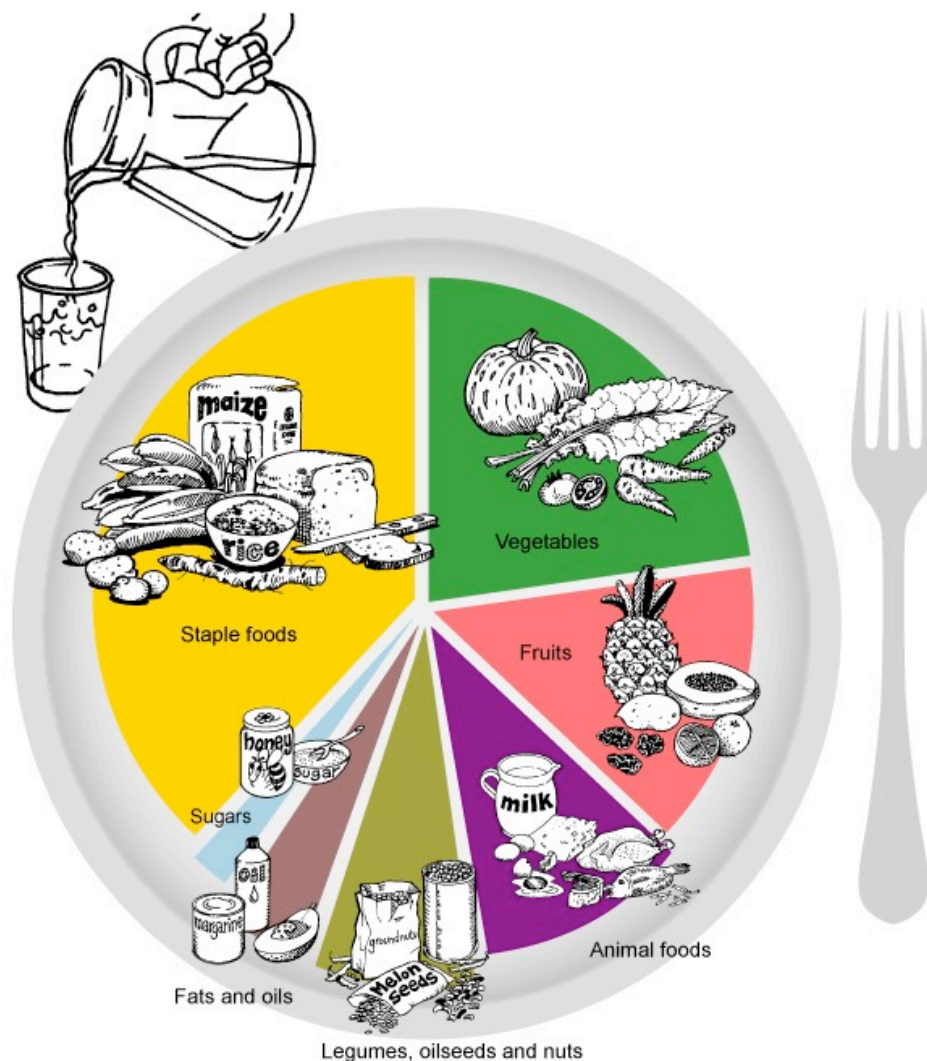Oils: e.g. coconut oil, sunflower oil, groundnut oil, red palm oil, maize oil, oilseeds

Sugars
e.g. sugar cane, honey, jam

Sugar can improve the energy content and taste of foods, but eating sugary foods (like sweets, candies, sodas, jam, sweet cakes, biscuits) regularly and in large amount is not healthy.

ACT
Eat a variety of foods in the right proportions

Too much as well as too little food is bad for your body. A healthy, balanced diet has the right proportions of good quality foods.

The plate shows the proportions of the different food groups you should eat during the day. Make sure you have a total of at least 2-3 meals per day.

- ❖ **Staples** are the biggest portion of the plate. They should be the main component of your diet.

- ❖ **Vegetables and fruits** are about one third of the plate. Have plenty of them, at least 5 a day, ideally different ones. Have them with your meals and as snacks in between meals.

- ❖ **Meat, eggs, fish, dairy products, legumes and oilseeds** make up a smaller part of the plate. Every day you should eat at least ONE of these:

  an animal product (e.g. meat, poultry, offal, milk, dairy products)

  or fish

  or legumes.

- ❖ **Fats and oils** are a small part of the plate. Add them to vegetables and meals in small amounts (e.g. 3-4 tablespoons per day per person).

❖ **Sugars** and sugary foods are the smallest part of the plate. Eat them only in moderation.

❖ Drink plenty of **water** (e.g. 8 cups a day).

❖ **Breast milk is the best food for babies under 6 months.**

Get the best from your food

❖ Eat fruits with every meal to improve the iron absorption (see Fact Sheet 5).

❖ Add a little fat (oil or butter) to increase absorption of vitamins (e.g. vitamin A).

❖ Use iodised salt to get enough iodine. Do not use more than 1 teaspoon per person per day (see Fact Sheet 7).

❖ Do not drink tea or coffee until 1-2 hours after a meal because it will reduce the iron absorption (see Fact Sheet 5).

Eat a colourful diet

A healthy diet has a lot of colours. Especially colourful are vegetables and fruits.

red: e.g. tomato, red pepper, red plums, red watermelon, beets
orange: e.g. carrots, mangoes, oranges, papaya, pumpkin, sweet potato
yellow: e.g. corn, grapefruit, lemon, pineapple, yellow bell pepper
green: e.g. avocadoes, green beans, kale, kiwi, leeks, peas, spinach
white: e.g. bananas, garlic, potatoes

Have two or three meals a day and snacks in between

Healthy snacks are e.g. fruits, vegetables, boiled eggs, sour milk, bread, sweet potatoes, boiled or roasted maize cobs, fried fish, chapatis, bean cakes, nuts and oilseeds.

OTHER IMPORTANT TIPS

WARNING!   Do not drink alcohol regularly and/or in large amounts. It is not part of a healthy diet.