

# Why Nutrition Is Important to Overall Fitness?

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## The Importance of Nutrition and Fitness

As complex as the human body is, physicians, [exercise](#) physiologists and dietitians all agree on one thing--the secret to living a full and healthy life is getting plenty of sleep, staying physically active and watching what you eat. While there have been literally thousands of diets to choose from during the last 100 years, wise consumers always return to sound eating principles made popular by the American Dietetic Association, the American Heart Association and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

## The Food Pyramid

The first food pyramid was published in 1894 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture as the "Food Guide for Young Children" and has been revised a number of times to reflect modern dietary concepts. The current food pyramid published by the USDA recommends a balanced diet of grains, vegetables, fruits, milk and milk products and meat and beans for optimal [health](#) and [fitness](#).

## The Importance of Grains

Grains include wheat, oats, cornmeal, rice and oats. They can also be found in bread, pasta and other baked goods. Grains are high in fiber and have been proven to reduce cholesterol and the risk for coronary disease. Grains also contain B vitamins, folate, iron and magnesium.

B vitamins help with energy production from protein, fat and carbohydrate. Folate is important in producing red blood cells and is particularly important for pregnant women in their first trimester.

Iron contributes to the red blood cells' ability to transport oxygen to the cells, particularly during exercise.

## The Health Benefits of Vegetables

Vegetables are an abundant source of fiber and nutrients that are divided into five groups: starchy vegetables, orange vegetables, dark green vegetables and other vegetables. Eating a diet that is rich in a variety of vegetables can reduce your risk for stroke, Type 2 diabetes, coronary artery disease, bone loss and many types of cancers.

## How Fruits Promote Health

Fruits are available in many different forms including fresh, canned, frozen, dried and as juice. Fruits help to lower the risk for stroke, diabetes, cancer of the colon, mouth, stomach and rectum and also help to reduce the risk of

kidney stones.

## The Health Value of Milk Products

Milk products include milk, yogurt and cheese. Foods containing milk or milk products help to maintain bone density and healthy teeth.

## Meat and Beans as Building Blocks

The meat and beans group includes red meat, fish, eggs, nuts, seeds and poultry. They are important in building and maintaining muscles, blood, cartilage, skin and enzymes that produce hormones. They contain a number of important vitamins, including vitamin E that is an "anti-oxidant" and prevents cell destruction from "free radicals." Iron is important in young girls and women at risk for anemia.

Eating sufficient quantities of meat and beans is another easy way to get your daily allotment of "monounsaturated fatty acids" and "polyunsaturated fatty acids." Some varieties of fish supply "omega-3 fatty acids" that may reduce your risk for heart disease.

## Resources

- [Food Pyramid](#)