

Studies show that people who eat a wide variety of food are healthier, live longer and have reduced risk of developing lifestyle illness. Food choices influence our risk of developing these lifestyle illnesses such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes. Foods, in particular vegetables and fruit, contain a large number of naturally occurring substances known as phytochemicals. Currently, scientists have identified over 12,000 of these phytochemicals many of which are thought to interfere with the processes that cause cancer and heart disease.

What is Food Variety?

Food variety means eating a mixture of foods across the whole range of food types, such as vegetables, fruit, cereals, meat, fish and dairy products. Variety also means the range of foods within each of these types, e.g. cereals can be wheat, oat, rye, rice, or barley. We encourage a variety of foods to be eaten because the nutritional benefits can be very different both between each food type and between food types.

How Much Variety is Enough?

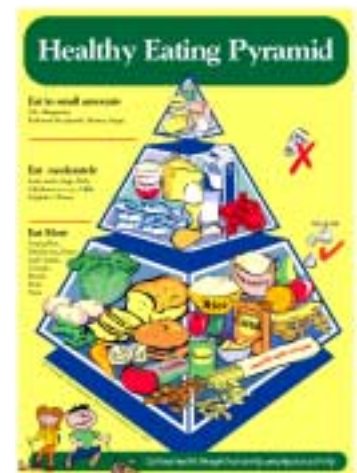
Nutrition Australia encourages Australians to eat around 30 different foods each day. It is important to note that "30" is based on individual foods, not food categories as detailed in the Food Variety Checklist (overleaf). Ideally, 20 - 30 different types of foods should be eaten every day. A good way to start increasing your food variety is to follow the two basic steps Nutrition Australia recommends:

1. Use the Food Variety Checklist and calculate your score to see what you're eating for the **week**. Even if you score 'Fair', aim for the 'Good' level next week, and so on until you score 'Very Good'. Nutrition Australia encourages long term improvements to your diet, not short term ones.
2. Once you have achieved 'Very Good' for the week, then you're on the way to aim for eating around 30 different foods each day. While some days might not be as good as others, we encourage you to just try to eat a variety each day.

Easy Ways To Increase Food Variety	
Typical Diet	Suggestions for increased Variety
Wheat cereals, milk and orange juice	Muesli with added sunflower and pumpkin seeds, served with yoghurt and a mixture of fresh or dried fruits
White bread, toasted cheese and tomato sandwich using margarine for spread	Sandwich made on multigrain bread with cheese, chutney, tomato, lettuce and avocado
Meat and two vegetables	Chopped lamb fillet cooked with salt reduced soy and ginger, served with stir-fry vegetables. Cous Cous with
Total of 11 foods	Total of 34 foods

Tips for Food Variety

- ◆ Choose a variety of foods from the Healthy Eating Pyramid.
- ◆ Eat a range of different breakfast cereals and breads.
- ◆ Jazz up dishes with herbs and spices— they can transform a meal for little cost and no fat or salt.
- ◆ Experiment with the different vegetables, fruits, cereals and meats available. Ask for tips on how to prepare and eat exotic produce.
- ◆ Just because you haven't tried it, doesn't mean you won't like it. Give yourself time to get used to a new food.
- ◆ Experts say that it can take humans up to nine times to adjust to a new food or flavour.





Food Variety Checklist

Score one point for each food category you have eaten throughout one week. Count each food category only once.

Fruit

- Stone fruit (e.g. apricot, avocado, cherries, nectarine, olive, peach, plum, prune)
- Citrus (e.g. orange, lemon)
- Apples
- Bananas
- Berries (e.g. raspberry, strawberry)
- Grapes (including raisins, sultanas)
- Melons (e.g. honeydew, rockmelon, watermelon)
- Pears, nashi
- Tropical fruit (e.g. guava, jackfruit, lychee, mango, papaya, pineapple, starfruit)
- Date, kiwifruit, passionfruit

Vegetables

- Root (e.g. carrots, sweet potatoes, potatoes, bamboo shoots, beetroot, ginger, parsnip, radish, water chestnut)
- Leafy greens (e.g. spinach, cabbage, brussell sprouts, silverbeet)
- Marrow-like (e.g. cucumber, eggplant, marrow, pumpkin, squash, swede, turnip, zucchini)
- Flowers (e.g. broccoli, cauliflower, endive, chicory, lettuce)
- Stalks (e.g. celery)
- Onion (e.g. spring onion, garlic leek)
- Peppers (e.g. capsicum)
- Tomatoes, okra

Legumes/Pulses

- Beans (e.g. green beans, snow peas, snap beans, dried peas)
- Adzuki, baked beans, haricot, black beans, black eyed beans, borlotti beans, cannellini beans, chickpeas, kidney beans, lentils, lima beans, lupins, mung beans, pinto beans, soya beans, soya milk, bean curd

Grains and Cereals

- Wheat (including ready-to-eat cereals such as Weetbix, bran flakes, & wholemeal/white bread)
- Rye (includes ready-to-eat products)
- Barley (includes ready-to-eat products)
- Oats (includes ready-to-eat products)
- Rice (includes ready-to-eat products)
- Corn (includes ready-to-eat products)
- All other grains and cereals (e.g. buckwheat, millet, quinoa, sago, semolina, tapioca, triticale)

Meats

- Pork (including ham and bacon)
- Lamb, beef, veal
- Poultry (e.g. chicken, turkey, duck)
- Game (e.g. quail, wild duck, pigeon)
- Game (e.g. kangaroo, rabbit, venison)
- Liver, brain, all other organ meats

Seafood

- Shellfish and molluscs (e.g. mussels, squid, oysters, scallops)
- Crustaceans (e.g. prawns, lobster, crabs, shrimps)
- Fatty Fish (e.g. anchovies, tuna, salmon, sardines, herring, mackerel, kipper, pilchards)
- Fish (saltwater)
- Fish (freshwater)
- Roe (caviar)

Dairy

- Milk, yoghurt (without live culture), ice cream, cheese
- Live Cultures (yoghurt with live culture e.g. acidophilus, bifidobacteria)

Eggs

- All varieties

Fats

- Oil
- Hard/soft spreads

Herbs and Spices

- Use regularly

Nuts and Seeds

- Almond, brazil, cashew, chestnut, coconut, hazelnut, peanuts, peanut butter, pecan, pine nut, pistachio, pumpkin seed, sesame seed, tahini, hommus, sunflower seed, walnut

Fermented Foods

- Miso, tempeh, soya sauce
- Sauerkraut
- All other varieties including vinegar, beer, sour cream, camembert and other fermented cheeses, yoghurt (non-live culture), sour dough bread

Beverages

- Non-alcoholic (e.g. tea, coffee, cocoa)
- Alcoholic

Other

- Sugar, syrup, honey, confectionary, jam, marmalade, chocolate, soft drinks
- Yeast (e.g. vegemite, marmite, Brewers yeast)
- Water, including mineral and spring water



Total amount of different foods _____

Check your score:

- > 30 Very good
- 25-29 Good
- 20-24 Fair
- < 20/ Poor
- < 10 Very Poor

Reference: Savige, G.S., Hau-Hage, B. & Wahlqvist, M.L.: Current Therapeutics, March 1997 p.62.