



## **Understanding Functional Nutrition, a “balanced diet”**

In the context of Functional Nutrition, a “balanced diet” is one that suits your lifestyle, addresses your health concerns, and respects your food preferences. In essence, there isn't a one-size-fits-all diet or eating pattern. Instead, dietary and lifestyle plans should be customized for each individual to enhance their overall health and well-being. For instance, the nutritional requirements for someone recovering from a traumatic brain injury differ significantly from those of an active individual looking to increase their intake of fresh, whole foods.

That said, there are some general principles for achieving balance. When macronutrients (protein, fat, and carbohydrates) are consumed in the right proportions, they supply your body with all it needs to function optimally. A distribution of 25% protein, 30% fat, and 45% carbohydrates, or 25P/30F/45C. This means that 25% of your caloric intake should come from protein, 30% from fat, and 45% from carbohydrates. The 25P/30F/45C ratio is suitable for anyone aiming for a healthy, balanced diet.

## **Tips for Balancing Your Diet:**

**Stay hydrated:** Calculate your hydration needs by dividing your body weight in pounds by half. This number represents the ounces of water you should drink daily. For example, a 128-pound person should aim for at least 64 ounces of water daily ( $128 \div 2 = 64$ ), equivalent to eight 8-ounce glasses. Include water, decaffeinated tea, mineral water, broth, and fresh, raw, cold-pressed vegetable juices in your intake. A handy tip is to carry a water bottle with you everywhere.

**Set SMART goals:** Transitioning from disliking vegetables or eating fast food daily to a diet of whole, fresh foods can be challenging. Set yourself up for success with small, achievable goals that allow for a gradual shift. You might begin by substituting sugary sodas with green tea or sparkling mineral water, then progressively add changes. A practical start could be adding a side salad to your dinner five nights a week. Gradual, realistic changes are more sustainable than abrupt, drastic ones. Focus on improving your lifestyle, not just cutting out favorites.

**Don't skip the protein:** Protein is crucial for building and repairing the body. A lack of it can lead to feelings of fatigue and weakness. While meats, eggs, poultry, and seafood are great sources, don't overlook plant-based options like beans, legumes, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, lentils, nuts, seeds, oats, potatoes, spinach, and wild rice.

**Eat plenty of healthy fats:** Incorporating healthy fats is vital for brain and heart health, satiety, and energy. Aim for a higher intake of omega-3s from sources like avocados, fatty fish, nuts, seeds, olives, sea vegetables, and grass-fed meats, while reducing omega-6s found in processed foods, dressings, and certain oils like canola or grapeseed. Be wary of low-fat or

fat-free products, which often contain added sugars and artificial ingredients.

**Opt for carbohydrates from vegetables:** While many think of grains when they hear carbohydrates, vegetables, fruits, and legumes are also significant sources. When balancing your diet, prioritize vegetables for their fiber content, which aids in blood sugar regulation and digestion.

**Eat the rainbow:** Optimal body function requires a variety of nutrients from different colored whole foods. Try to consume at least five different colors of fruits and vegetables daily.

**Experiment in the kitchen:** Explore new foods and cooking techniques to find what you enjoy. Try at least one new recipe each week. Your preference for certain vegetables might change based on preparation methods. If cooking isn't your forte, consider a cooking class with a friend or get a beginner's cookbook. Online resources also offer free cooking tutorials. The more you enjoy cooking, the more likely it'll become a routine.

**Limit sugar and processed foods:** Excessive consumption of refined sugars and grains is linked to chronic health problems. To prevent and reverse these issues, reduce your intake of refined sugars and grains, which are prevalent in processed foods like packaged snacks and sweets. Check food labels for no or minimal added sugars, and try natural sweeteners like maple syrup or honey in your coffee.

**Everything in moderation:** A key aspect of a balanced diet is flexibility. Overly restrictive eating can lead to disordered eating. Pay attention to your body's cravings, and allow yourself some leniency. Indulge occasionally without guilt to maintain a healthy relationship with food.