



Ask The Expert

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Topic

Nutrition information can be confusing if you don't understand the terminology, get some clarity as we break down the basics.

What is it?

Nutrients

Nutrients are components of food that don't directly provide energy but instead provide vitamins and minerals essential for the body to function. There are two categories of nutrients: Macro-nutrients and micro-nutrients.

Macronutrients

Macronutrients provide your body energy (calories) and come in the form of carbohydrates, proteins, and fats. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend 45-65% of your calories coming from carbohydrates, 20-35% coming from fat and 10-35% coming from protein.¹ As these are general recommendations, always work with a nutrition professional to find the ratios that will be unique to your specific needs.

Micronutrients

Micronutrients (vitamins and minerals) help with digestion, chemical reactions, cell regeneration, immune function, growth, fluid balance, energy production, blood clotting, bone health, hormone production, brain function and so much more.

- › **Vitamins A, D, E and K** are classified as fat soluble vitamins and are important for vision,

bone health, immunity, blood clotting. They are transported and absorbed by fats we eat and can be stored in the fatty tissues of the body and in the liver.⁵

- › All **B vitamins** (B-complex) and vitamin C are considered water soluble vitamins and are important for brain function, immune health, energy production and more. They are transported and absorbed by water and are needed in a steady supply as they aren't stored in the body very long.⁴
- › **Minerals** are involved in body growth and development, bone health, maintaining fluid balance, cell structure, nerve and muscle function, maintain acid-base balance, transport oxygen, aid in wound healing, regulate the thyroid, are involved in hormone production, and help protect against oxidative stress.⁶
- › **Water** is also an essential nutrient in its own category as we need it in large quantities, but it doesn't provide calories. It is used in the body for hydration, chemical reactions, transportation cushioning of organs and temperature regulation.⁷

Why does it matter?

Getting the right balance of calories and nutrients in your diet is a major component to health. Nutrient dense foods typically have more nutrients than calories and are full of protein, fiber, vitamins, and minerals, where calorie dense foods tend to have higher amounts of saturated fats, added sugars and sodium. Consuming large quantities of calorie dense foods can increase your risk of chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, heart disease and diabetes.² Eating a variety of nutrient dense foods help to prevent nutrient deficiencies and reduces your risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and cancer. It can also help you have more energy, a clearer mind, reduce stress and lower the amount of inflammation in your body.³

What can I do?

Work with nutrition and medical professionals to see where you may be imbalanced. After working with you to discover where you need support, they will recommend diet and lifestyle interventions to help you change your habits. Check with your insurance provider to see if nutrition visits are covered and to find an in-network provider or find a list of nutrition professionals at eatright.org.

Include nutrient dense foods in each meal and [snack you eat](#). Set a goal to eat at least 5 portions of fruits and vegetables each day. Look for whole food and whole grain options when possible and eat a variety of colors to ensure you are getting all the different nutrients.

References

1. [Cleveland Clinic: Macronutrients vs. Micronutrients](#)
2. [Science Direct: Nutrient Density](#)
3. [World Health Organization: Keys to Eating Well](#)
4. [Cleveland Clinic: Water Soluble Vitamins](#)
5. [Cleveland Clinic: Fat Soluble Vitamins](#)
6. [Medline Plus: Minerals](#)
7. [National Library of Medicine: Biochemistry, Nutrients](#)

Pro Tip

Try to shop along the edges of the grocery store. This is where you can usually find fresh, whole foods.

Bonus Resources

Book

In Defense of Food

By Michael Pollan

[View on Amazon >](#)

Cookbooks

Just Eat Real Food: 30-Minute Nutrient-Dense Meals for a Healthy, Balanced Life

By Caitlin Greene

[View on Amazon >](#)

The How Not to Die Cookbook

By Michael Greger, M.D.

[View on Amazon >](#)

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