

# Balancing Act

An important part of eating nutritiously is making sure you have balanced meals

**E**ating nutritious foods is crucial to looking and feeling your best. Your doctor or your parents likely tell you to eat balanced meals. But what does that actually mean?

According to nutritionist Rebecca Wood, author of *The New Whole Foods Encyclopedia*, a balanced meal “provides an equal selection of quality fats, protein, and complex carbohydrates.” To put it more simply, try to have something on your plate from each of the following food groups: whole grains, fruits/vegetables, and protein.

## SAT/ACT WORDS

**Immune:** exempt, as from disease

**Taut:** not loose or flabby

**Visualize:** to see or form a mental image of

## GO ONLINE

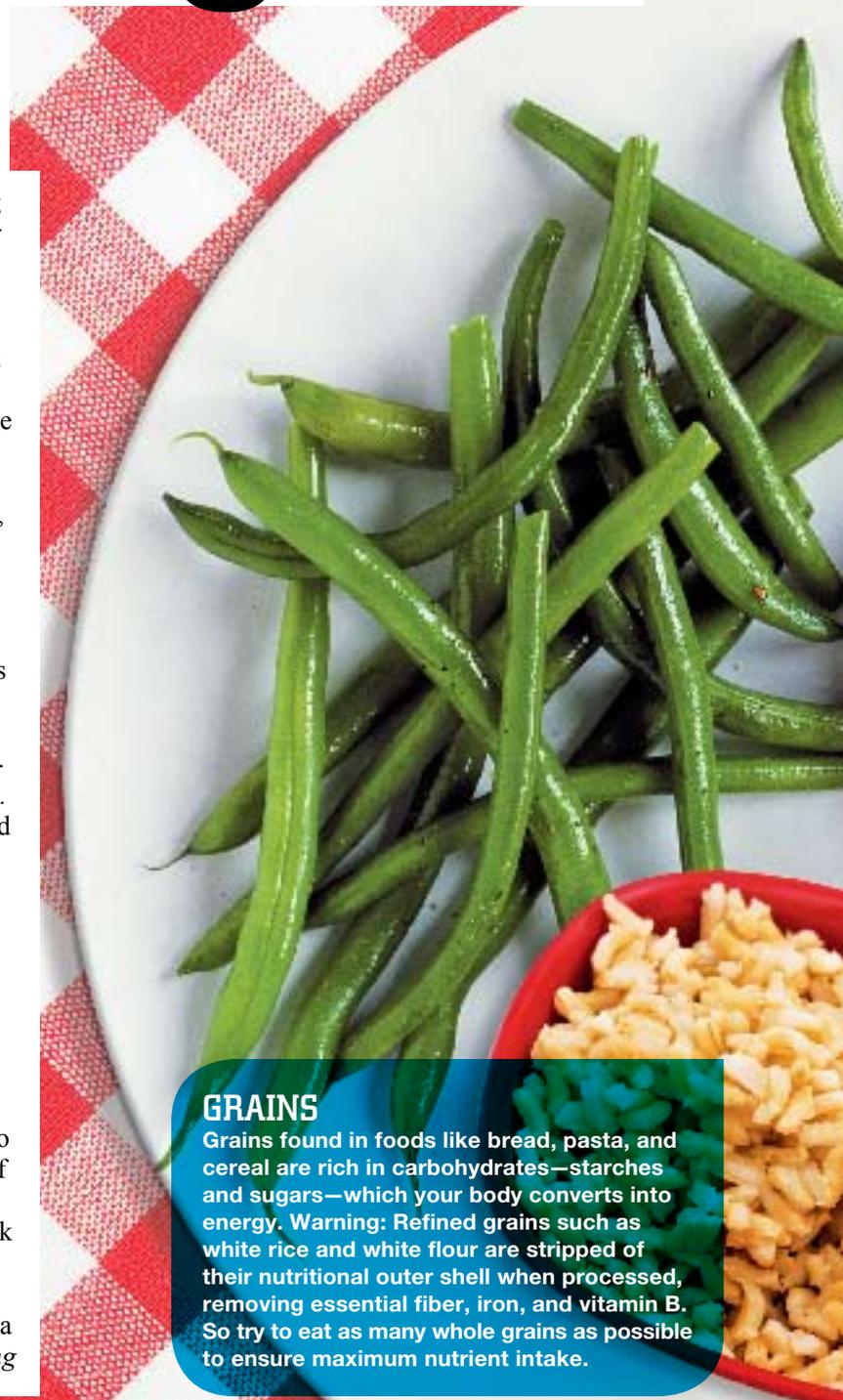
To see examples of a balanced breakfast and a balanced lunch, go to [www.scholastic.com/choices](http://www.scholastic.com/choices).

Hillary Wright, director of nutrition counseling at the Domar Center for Mind/Body Health in Waltham, Massachusetts, suggests **visualizing** a plate divided into three sections: one third whole grains, one third fruits and/or vegetables, and one third lean protein. “If you focus on having a balanced plate, you can assume you’re eating nutritiously,” Wright says.

The truth is, though, that teens are so busy running around between school, part-time jobs, and after-school activities that it’s hard for them to always eat balanced meals.

“Balanced eating is what to aim for,” Wright says. “What also matters is that the day after an off day, in which you don’t eat that nutritiously, you get back on track with healthier food choices.”

Check out the dinner plate on the right and read about why it’s a balanced meal. —Alexis Burling



## GRAINS

Grains found in foods like bread, pasta, and cereal are rich in carbohydrates—starches and sugars—which your body converts into energy. **Warning:** Refined grains such as white rice and white flour are stripped of their nutritional outer shell when processed, removing essential fiber, iron, and vitamin B. So try to eat as many whole grains as possible to ensure maximum nutrient intake.

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## VEGETABLES

Vegetables are high in vitamins, minerals, and carotenoids. They are also low in calories, fat, and salt. There are many health benefits to eating vegetables, including strengthened eyesight, smooth skin, and healthy gums. Plus, consuming veggies strengthens your body's immune system. They are packed with antioxidants that decrease your risk of heart disease, lower your blood pressure, and help prevent many forms of cancer. Note: Potatoes are vegetables.

## DAIRY

There's a reason that ages 13 through 19 are called the formative years—the teenage years are the time to build a sturdy body that will last you through old age. Consuming dairy products, which are full of calcium and vitamin D, helps build strong teeth and bones. Besides milk, examples of dairy products are cheese and ice cream. But beware of the fat content of dairy products and try to consume the low-fat or fat-free options if they are available.

## PROTEIN

Meat, poultry, fish, eggs, beans, and nuts are rich in protein. Protein in foods helps keep skin looking fresh, hair shiny, and muscles taut. Some protein sources, mainly red meat, are high in fat and cholesterol, so try leaner options such as fish, chicken, or turkey. Some fish, like salmon, are also full of omega 3s, nutrients that enhance heart and brain function. Other important minerals in these foods are zinc, magnesium, and iron. All strengthen the body.

## TEST YOURSELF

Are these statements true or false? Answers are in the Teacher's Edition.

- 1 To eat a balanced meal, you should consume a similar amount of vegetables, grains, and proteins.  
 True  False
- 2 Eating cheese will help strengthen your teeth.  
 True  False
- 3 According to nutritional guidelines, a potato is considered a grain.  
 True  False
- 4 Consuming vegetables can help keep your body from getting ill.  
 True  False

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1 Do you eat balanced meals? Why or why not?
- 2 What is your idea of a perfectly balanced meal? What type of foods would you choose to eat? Why?