

# The R.E.A.L. Food Pyramid

This information is designed to provide you with a guideline for healthy eating. If you have a special condition or are under medical supervision, you should discuss your eating plan with your doctor.

## The Recovery from Eating Disorders for Life Food Pyramid

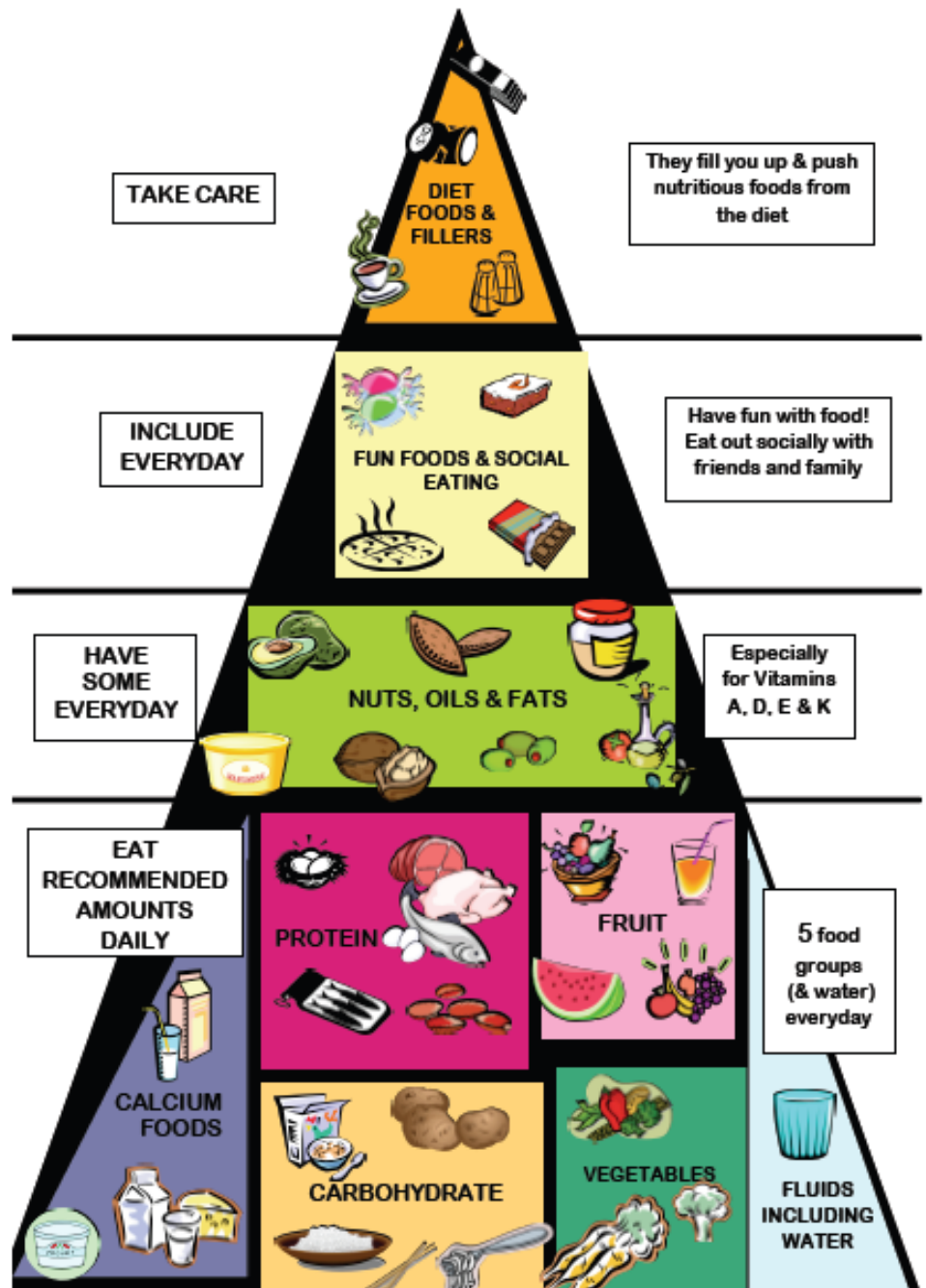
The REAL Food Pyramid has been created as a meal planning guide for individuals with eating disorders. It is ideal if it is used in collaboration with a dietitian, as every person is unique, and there may be foods or amounts that need to be adjusted for you.

### Carbohydrates

Choose a variety of whole grains and carbohydrate foods for dietary fibre, thiamine, folate and iodine. Carbohydrate is needed to stabilise your blood glucose level, and provide fuel for your muscles and your brain. Not eating enough carbohydrate can lead to tiredness, fatigue, dizziness, irritability, and low blood glucose levels. It can also precipitate binge eating, particularly at mid-afternoon (around 3-4 pm) when blood glucose levels naturally drop and cravings commonly kick in. Good sources of carbohydrates include: cereals, rice, oats, bread, noodles, potato, quinoa, pasta, cous cous, tortillas.

### Protein

Protein rich foods provide iron, zinc, vitamin B12 and omega-3. Protein is needed for growth and repair of body tissues and plays an important role in all functions of your body. If you are vegetarian, it is important to replace animal proteins with iron-rich substitutes. Good sources of protein include: meat, chicken, fish, eggs, cheese, tofu, chickpeas, lentil, baked beans, ham, nuts, kidney beans.



Developed in conjunction with dietitians Susan Hart and Caitlin McMaster

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## Vegetables

Choose a variety of vegetables with different colours which provide vitamin C, folate, potassium, beta-carotene and dietary fibre. It is important to not eat excessive quantities of these foods as they can fill you up, and push nutritious carbohydrate and protein foods from the diet.

**Some foods that fit into this food group include:** salad, pumpkin, cabbage, leafy greens, tomato, broccoli, mushrooms, peas, and capsicum.

## Fruit

Choose a variety of different fruits including different colours which provide vitamin C, potassium, and dietary fibre. Try to include fruit in different forms, that is, tinned and dried fruits, which are just as healthy as fresh fruit. It is important to not eat excessive quantities of these foods as they can fill you up, and push out more nutritious foods from the diet.

**Some foods that fit into this food group include:** fresh fruit (e.g., apple, orange, banana, grapes, fruit salad), dried fruit (e.g., sultanas, dried apricots, raisins), and fruit juice.

## Calcium

Choose a variety of calcium containing foods for protein, riboflavin, and calcium. In eating disorder patients, it is common to have a fat intake much lower than ideal, with possible fatty acid deficiency and a low intake of fat soluble vitamins D and E. Therefore it is not recommended you eat light/low fat/skim varieties of calcium rich foods.

It is also common for eating disorder patients to have poor bone health, meaning adequate calcium intake is vital for improving and maintaining strong bones.

**Some foods that fit into this food group include:** milk, yoghurt, calcium fortified soy milk, custard, cheese, and Up & Go.

## Fun Foods

The reason to include 'fun foods' in your day is similar to the reasons why low fat calcium foods are not recommended, and nuts/oils/spreads are included daily. Contrary to this being unhealthy for you, research has shown that there are many benefits, as already listed above. Mostly people with eating disorders have long lists of "bad" foods which they refuse to allow themselves to eat. This can lead to rigid eating patterns, social isolation, and high levels of dietary restraint, all of which are unhelpful when trying to recover from an eating disorder.

**Some foods that fit into this food group include:** chocolate bar, cupcake, lollies, biscuits/cookies, muffins, potato chips, donut, and cake.

## Fluids

Research has shown that fluid or drink choices that individuals with eating disorders make are often related to eating disorder beliefs. Some reasons include using fluid as a weight control method, such as to suppress appetite, or to aid vomiting. Other reasons include to warm up, to rehydrate after vomiting or because of excessive thirst. Research shows that most people drink more fluid than they need while some restrict their fluid intake to far less than the body requires. Neither of these extremes is ideal. As a general rule, aim for 1 glass of fluid (e.g. water, tea, coffee, juice) at each meal and snack. More fluid is required if it is a hot day, you are exercising or you have increased fluid losses.

## Nuts, Oils, and Fats

Many people believe that all fat is bad or "the less fat I have the better". However, diets that are too low in fat may be detrimental to health, as our body needs some fat to function normally. Ideally, aim to eat more foods that contain essential fatty acids found in nuts, seeds, unsaturated fats and oils such as sunflower, olives, and olive oil. Foods that contain fat are more tasty or "satiating" than low fat foods. Adequate amounts of dietary fat signal the brain that you have had enough to eat, and helps to give you the signal to stop eating.

**Some foods that fit into this food group include:** butter, olive oil, avocado, margarine, nuts, mayonnaise, peanut butter, olives, hummus.

## Diet Foods and Fillers

These foods are commonly consumed by individuals with eating disorders. There is nothing really wrong with them from a nutrition standpoint; though when they make up a significant part of your daily intake, your nutrition needs are unlikely to be met. They often push out more nutritious foods from your diet, and some individuals will use them to suppress their appetite. They may also keep you focussed on dietary rules and restricting food.

**Some foods that fit into this food group include:** diet soft drink, artificial sweeteners, very large servings of fruit and vegetables, sugar free sweets, excessive quantities of sauces or condiments, and chewing gum.

Visit our website, [cci.health.wa.gov.au](http://cci.health.wa.gov.au) for more information on specific food groups.

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