



# Exploring the Food Groups

Fifth-grade nutrition education newsletter

Lesson **1**

## It's all about nutrients

There are about 40 different nutrients we need each day to stay healthy and prevent disease. No food contains all the nutrients we need, so it's important to eat a variety of foods. To make it easier to plan meals that give us the nutrients we need, use MyPlate (at right). MyPlate puts foods into groups according to the major nutrients they provide.

Here's a quick tour of each food group and why it helps you stay healthy:

### Fruits

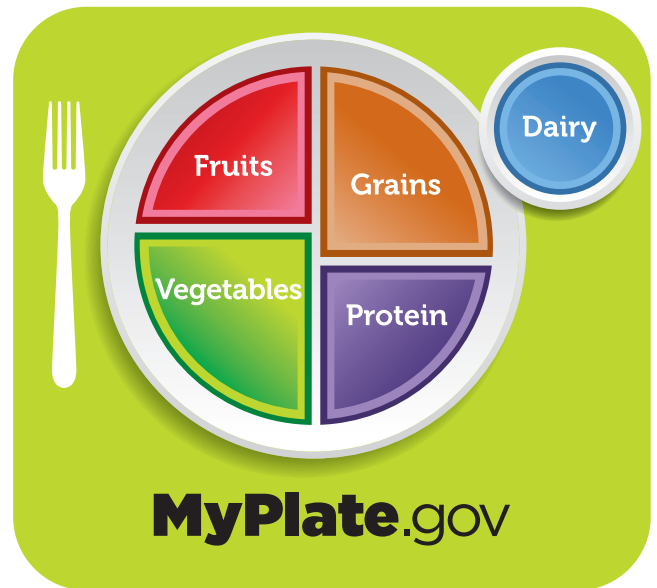
Fruits are naturally sweet, vitamin C "superstars." They also contain folate and fiber. Folate helps tissues grow and red blood cells form. Fiber fills you up and keeps your digestive system healthy. Potassium found in fruits helps maintain healthy blood pressure. Most fruits are naturally low in fat, sodium and calories.

### Vegetables

Looking for vitamins A, E, C and folate? Vegetables are your source! Vegetables, like fruits, also provide fiber and potassium for healthy blood pressure. Most vegetables are low in calories. Be sure to eat a wide variety of colorful vegetables.

### Grains

Whole grains have fiber. Enrichment provides B vitamins like thiamin, riboflavin, niacin and folate. Grains are also good sources of iron and magnesium. Eating whole grains may help you reduce your chances of developing some chronic diseases.



U.S. Department of Agriculture. [www.MyPlate.gov](http://www.MyPlate.gov)

### Protein Foods

The Protein Foods group contains not just meat, poultry and fish; but also eggs, beans, nuts, seeds, and tofu. Protein is good for our bones, muscles, skin and blood. Protein foods also provide the minerals iron, zinc and magnesium.

### Dairy

Minerals like calcium and potassium are found in dairy foods. You can also find vitamin D and protein in dairy foods. Some of these foods can be high in saturated fat, so choose low-fat or fat-free options when possible. If you or your child cannot drink milk, try lactose-free milk or calcium-fortified plant milks such as soy, oat, or almond.

# How can you make choosing healthy foods the easy choice?



- Keep whole, fresh fruit out on the counter in a bowl for easy snacking.
- Keep a snack box with cut-up fruit in the refrigerator.
- Make bags or cups of cut up veggies like broccoli and carrots for on the go snacking.
- Keep frozen veggies on hand for a quick side dish or to add to soups, stews, or casseroles.
- Cook extra barley or bulgur and freeze. Add it to soups, stews and stir-fry dishes.
- Keep whole grains on hand for snacking with dips. Whole-wheat crackers, tortillas, pita bread and bagels are all good choices.
- Keep spices and herbs on hand to flavor popcorn without butter. Try garlic powder, curry, cinnamon and other favorites.
- Keep plain, fat-free or low-fat yogurt on hand as a topping for baked potatoes (instead of sour cream).
- Make kabobs with chunks of fruit, vegetables, and cheese on a skewer or coffee stirrer.

Keep spices on hand.



Need a quick and easy protein treat for snacking on the go? Small salmon or tuna pouches are great options.

- Hummus is delicious as a dip for cut-up veggies or as a spread for whole-wheat bread or crackers.

Have fruit ready for easy snacking.



Keep frozen veggies on hand.



Cut up carrots and broccoli for on the go snacking.



Keep hummus on hand as a dip or spread.



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For more information, call MU Extension's Show Me Nutrition Line at 1-888-515-0016.

Need help stretching your food dollars? Contact your local resource center or go online to [mydss.mo.gov/food-assistance](http://mydss.mo.gov/food-assistance)