

Dietary Diversity

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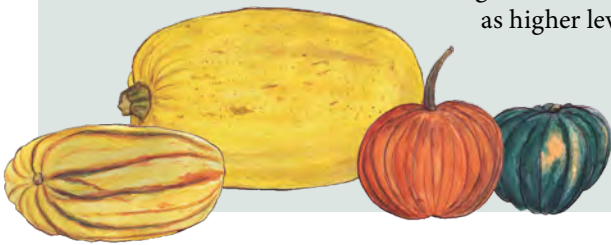
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DIETARY DIVERSITY, is the variety of foods and food groups in a person's or household's diet. Dietary diversity is one way to assess the nutritional quality or adequacy of diets and reflects access to a variety of foods.¹

KEY POINTS

1. **Different foods** contain different vitamins, minerals, nutrients, and phytochemicals.
2. **By eating a variety of foods**, we are more likely to get different vitamins, minerals, nutrients, and phytochemicals that can help prevent nutrient deficiencies and chronic diseases.
3. **Researchers measure** dietary diversity as an indicator of diet quality for supporting nutrition and health.
4. **Higher levels of dietary diversity** are associated with higher socio-economic status as well as higher levels of food security.
5. **Dietary diversity** is linked to biodiversity in agricultural communities.



WHY DIETARY DIVERSITY IS IMPORTANT

Almost two-thirds of all American adults (6 in 10) live with at least one preventable chronic disease, such as cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, and certain types of cancer.² Scientific evidence indicates that poor nutrition, including a lack of dietary diversity, contributes to the development of chronic disease.³ Since different foods contain different vitamins, minerals, nutrients, and phytochemicals, eating a diverse diet helps ensure you get all of the nutrients needed to support nutrition and health.

Dietary diversity is used to measure nutritional quality and adequacy of diets. Globally, 25 percent of young children ages 6–23 months receive the minimum recommended level of dietary diversity (5 or more food groups).⁴ Low dietary diversity in children is linked to nutrient deficiencies that lead to a range of health conditions such as anemia and stunted growth.^{5,6} The World Health Organization recommends preventing chronic malnutrition through the consumption of a diverse range of nutrient-dense and locally available foods.⁴

Additionally, studies show that dietary diversity is linked with biodiversity.⁷ Increased dietary diversity is not only positive for human health, but it is also associated with increased biodiversity, which is a positive for environmental health.

'Eating a diverse diet helps to ensure that you get all of the nutrients needed to support nutrition and health.'



HOW TO MEASURE DIETARY DIVERSITY

The Household Dietary Diversity Score (HDDS) is the most common way to measure dietary diversity. The HDDS is calculated by adding up the number of food groups consumed by an individual or household in a 24-hour period.⁸ Specifically, for each food group shown below, a score of “1” is designated if an item from the food group was consumed, or a “0” if the food group was not consumed with scores ranging between 0–12. See the table, right, for example HDDS calculations.



Example Household Dietary Diversity Score Calculations

Food Group ⁸	Score (1 = Consumed, 0 = Not consumed)		
	Example 1	Example 2	Example 3
Cereals	1	1	1
White tubers and roots	1	0	0
Vegetables ^a	1	0	1
Fruits ^b	1	0	0
Meat ^c	0	1	1
Eggs	0	1	0
Fish and other seafood	1	1	0
Legumes, nuts, and seeds	1	0	0
Milk and other milk products	0	1	0
Oils and fats	1	1	0
Sweets	0	1	0
Spices, condiments, beverages	1	0	1
Total Score	8	7	4

^a Combination of vitamin A rich vegetables and tubers, dark green leafy vegetables, and other vegetables.

^b Combination of vitamin A rich fruits and other fruits

^c Combination of flesh meat and organ meats

CONSUMER PRACTICES TO IMPROVE DIETARY DIVERSITY

1. Eat the rainbow! Foods that are naturally different in color have different nutrients and phytochemicals.^{9,10} Eating healthy foods of all the colors of the rainbow is a great way for both kids and adults to improve their dietary diversity.
2. Keep a food journal to record what you are eating, especially in different seasons. Using your journal, increase your dietary diversity week to week by adding new healthy foods to your diet.
3. Try out a new recipe each week that uses fresh in-season ingredients. Try featuring nutrient-dense ingredients, like salmon, berries, dark leafy greens, or potatoes.
4. Substitute commonly consumed refined grains such as wheat with ancient grains, pseudo grains, and pulses such as amaranth, buckwheat, quinoa, lentils, and chickpeas.
5. If you garden, cultivate different varieties or species such as colorful heirloom tomatoes or peppers.



INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES TO ENHANCE DIETARY DIVERSITY

1. Offer a variety of nutrient-dense foods and prepared foods using a variety of different recipes that are accessible and culturally relevant.
2. Work with local farms to source different varieties and types of nutrient-dense crops.
3. Showcase a variety of seasonally available nutritious foods through cooking demonstrations, tastings, and food fairs. Highlight the food's nutritional importance, seasonality, and contribution to dietary diversity.

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