



**Y**ou may have heard someone say, “You are what you eat.” This does not mean that if you only eat french fries, you will become a french fry. It does mean that if you always eat foods of one sort, it can become a problem. When you were little, you probably did not have too many choices of what foods to eat. As you are growing up, you get to choose more often, especially in places like the school cafeteria or when you are out with your family or friends.

If you look at a nutrition label on a package of any of the foods you eat, you will see the words “carbohydrate”, “fat”, and “protein”. A carbohydrate is a sugar. There are two kinds of carbohydrates: simple sugars (glucose, fructose) and complex sugars, known as polysaccharides (starch and fiber). Your body needs carbohydrates for

energy, but many people eat far too much simple sugar. Soft drinks and candy are loaded with simple sugars that we could do without. Eating an apple or a peach is a better choice for our bodies.

Fats also come in two types: saturated and unsaturated. Saturated fats are solid at room temperature (butter, shortening, coconut oil) and you should not eat much of this kind of fat. Unsaturated fats are liquid at room temperature (olive oil, corn oil, vegetable oil) and are considered better for you. Your body needs a little fat each day, but too much can clog your arteries and cause you to gain weight. As a general rule, you should choose foods that are low in saturated fats.

Proteins are made of amino acids and are important for growth. Hair, skin, muscles, and fingernails are all made of protein. There are

many amino acids, but just twenty of them are used to make your body’s proteins. Nine of the amino acids must come from the foods you eat. Your body can make the other eleven amino acids itself. Chicken, eggs, fish, and dairy products are complete proteins—foods that have all nine amino acids the body needs.

In addition to carbohydrates, fats, and proteins, vitamins and minerals are also essential for a healthy lifestyle. One place you can find them: brightly colored fruits and vegetables. Examples of a few sources of vitamins and minerals are shown in the table “Colorful Fruits and Vegetables—Good for You”.

It is a good idea to eat a variety of foods, especially fruits and vegetables. By eating a varied diet, you are more likely to get the nutrients that you need to stay healthy and well.

## Colorful Fruits and Vegetables – Good for You

Vitamin	Found in	What it does	If you don’t get enough
<b>A</b>	Green and yellow vegetables	Helps you see, helps skin cells grow	Problems seeing at night, flaky skin
<b>K</b>	Cabbage, spinach, leafy green vegetables	Protects blood cells, important for muscles	Weak blood cells and muscles
<b>C</b>			
Mineral	Found in	What it does	If you don’t get enough
<b>Calcium</b>	Spinach	Helps grow strong bones and teeth, important for muscles	Poor bones and teeth Muscle and nerve weakness, dry skin
<b>Potassium</b>	Bananas, vegetables	Assists in muscle-building, muscle movement and sending messages through nerves	

