



## Importance of the Meal Plan

A meal plan is an individualized plan developed collaboratively by you and your child's dietitian. The meal plan is an important tool that can help you and your loved one during the recovery process. The meal plan, for your loved one as an individual in eating disorder recovery, is like medication. It provides a guideline or structure to help you with planning meals and snacks for your loved one. It provides nutritional balance and aids in decreasing your loved one's anxiety around meals and food choices.

### Meal plan benefits

- Helps in the planning of well-balanced meals and snacks to provide essential nutrients
  - Meets your loved one's individual nutritional needs
  - Includes all food groups (see benefits below), promoting variety
- Helps restore hunger & satiety cues by mimicking an appetite-based eating schedule
  - Eating disorder behaviors (restricting, bingeing, purging, etc.) can lead to physiological and psychological dysregulation of hunger and fullness cues
  - Eating every 2-4 hours not only helps regulate hunger/fullness cues, but also provides the body with energy throughout the day and blood sugar regulation
  - Stimulates/maintains active metabolism/digestion
- Reduces obsessive thoughts surrounding food
  - Decreases psychological rigidity via incorporating flexibility
  - Normalizes all foods
  - Strays away from calories and numbers
  - Decreases negotiation in terms of nutritional needs
- Minimizes ED behaviors, such as restricting, bingeing, and purging
  - Increasing recognition of behaviors
  - Decreases restrict, binge, purge cycle
- Helps to establish and maintain a healthy body weight
  - Aids the body to return to or remain at its set-point
  - Regulation of metabolism
- Allows for incorporating "fear" or "challenge" foods in a structured way



## **Food Groups Within the Meal Plan and Their Benefits/Functions**

### **Starches**

Starches are also referred to as carbohydrates. Carbohydrates are easily used by the body for energy and are also the body's main source of fuel/energy. In fact, the brain can only use glucose, the product of carbohydrate metabolism for energy. Carbohydrates are needed for the central nervous system, the kidneys, the brain, and the muscles (including the heart) to function properly. They also are important for intestinal health and waste elimination. Starches also contain essential B vitamins and minerals.

### **Protein**

Protein is important for growth, tissue repair, immune function, hormone and enzyme production, preserving lean muscle mass, and energy for our bodies.

### **Vegetables**

Vegetables provide nutrients such as vitamins and minerals vital for health and maintenance of your body. It's important to eat a variety of colors within your vegetable choices to ensure an optimal intake of nutrients. Vegetables are also a good source of fiber.

### **Fruit**

Fruits are important sources of vitamins and minerals that help you feel healthy and energized. They are typically a good source of fiber.

### **Dairy**

Dairy contains many vitamins and minerals such as calcium, phosphorus, and magnesium. Dairy also provides Vitamin D which is important for maintenance of calcium and regulation of phosphorus. These nutrients are important for building healthy bones and teeth, muscle function and energy release.

### **Added Fats**

Fats are important for growth and development. They help the body absorb vitamins A, D, E, K (fat soluble vitamins) and provide taste, consistency and stability to food. Fat is also important for brain function, as 50% of brain tissue is fat. It is also called the satiety nutrient, as fat is essential in regulating hunger and fullness cues. Fat plays a role in temperature regulation, hormone production, protection of the vital organs, and digestive health.

## **Reminders**



EATING  
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Health Centers  
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Remember, the meal plan is a guide/tool to help with planning balanced, nutritionally adequate, normalized meals and snacks. There is always room for flexibility. But remember to check the function of the flexibility. Is it driven by normalized flexibility? Or disordered flexibility?

Also, remember, there will come a time in your loved one's recovery that the meal plan may no longer be needed or helpful, where you support your loved one in transitioning to intuitive eating. But right now in your loved one's recovery, intuitive eating is not helpful or healthy, and therefore, a structured meal plan is necessary and beneficial for your loved one's recovery.