

Integrating Gender and Nutrition within Agricultural Extension Services

Info Sheet
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How Different Foods Help

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Eat a variety of foods for Protection, Energy and Body Building to be healthy and well. (Zimbabwe, FAO 2015)

Variety relates to selecting foods from and within the different food groups.

Balance relates to eating enough foods from each food group.

Moderation relates to eating foods in portion sizes that satisfy you. There is no good or bad food! The key is eating in moderate portions.



Three food groups represented in a meal.

References:

1 FAO Zimbabwe. *Healthy Harvest*, 2nd ed. FAO, 2015

Introduction

A variety of foods from the different food groups need to be consumed on a daily basis to provide the body with energy, protect the body, and to help build the body. The purpose of the “How Different Foods Help” tip sheet is to encourage you to promote eating different foods, also called balanced meals or dietary diversity, on a daily basis to the people you meet and work with.

Foods to Consume

The following table describes the food groups and examples of foods within these groups.

Table 1. Variety of foods to consume on a daily basis.

Food Group	Foods within that Group
Staples	Rice, Wheat, Sweet Potatoes, Cassava
Fats & Oils	Vegetable oil, butter, nuts & seeds
Legumes	Cowpeas, lentils, peanut butter
Animal Products	Beef, goat, chicken, eggs, and milk
Vegetables & Fruits	Mango, banana, dark green leafy vegetables

Meal Planning

Consuming balanced meals throughout the day will help people consume a variety of foods.¹ An example of a balance meal could be:

1/3 to 1/2 of the dish should be staples

1/4 of the dish should be legumes or animal products

1/4 to 1/3 of the dish should be cooked vegetables

Small amount of oil should be used to prepare the foods

Very small amounts of salt should be used to enhance flavor

Size Matters

Even though it is necessary for people to consume a variety of food on a daily basis, the amount of food matters.¹ The following are examples of approximate portion size of foods.

Fist = Amount of staple foods, legumes or cooked vegetables per meal

Palm = Amount of animal products (meat, chicken, or fish) per meal

Tip of finger = Fat or oil per meal

1 Cup (8 ounces) = Measure of water to drink