

Balanced Eating

CONVERSATION STARTER

A balanced diet gives your body the nutrients it needs to function at its best. Learn how to build healthier food habits into your everyday routine to prioritize your health and wellness! Use this conversation starter to lead a discussion with members on balanced eating and educate your chapter on ways to maximize their well-being and energy as college students. Use this conversation starter to lead a discussion with members on balanced eating and educate your chapter on ways to maximize their well-being and energy as college students.

The discussion questions and nutritional facts featured in the conversation starter are adapted from the resources at [MyPlate.Gov](https://www.myplate.gov) and based on the 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans developed by the United States Department of Agriculture and the United States Department of Health and Human Services. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans was first published in 1980 and has been updated every five years since. It is intended to provide science-based advice on what to eat and drink to promote health, reduce the risk of chronic disease and meet nutrient needs.

In this document, questions to ask and points to make verbatim are in **bold**. Notes and instructions for facilitators are in *italics*.

INTRODUCTION

The facilitator should create a welcoming and judgment-free environment when engaging in a conversation about health and wellness. Remember that each member has a unique background, history and background, history and lived experience, which include her relationship with health and wellness.

The facilitator may share a trigger warning on the topic of food and eating habits. Sample trigger warning may be: “Today we are going to have a conversation about balanced eating. This is a topic that affects each of us and may be sensitive for members. Being honest, open and non-judgmental of each other during our conversation will help us learn more about balanced eating and each other.”

Show participants the Balanced Eating poster.

What stands out to you in the Balanced Eating poster?

Allow members time to respond. Share key takeaways from the poster.

The primary poster message is that small changes matter in terms of balanced eating. In each corner of the poster, we see a snack or food that might be commonly eaten by college students (tacos, cereal, ramen and Doritos) alongside potential alternative foods that could help achieve balanced eating (banana and broccoli, eggs and bacon, cheese and almonds, and low-sodium popcorn, which is a whole grain snack).

What is meant by “Small Changes Matter” in terms of balanced eating?

Allow members time to respond. Share the following if not mentioned by members:

- The benefits of balanced eating add up over time, bite by bite.
- Learning and committing to a simple, balanced eating approach is likely a more effective long-term approach than attempting a restrictive, short-term diet program.
- Most likely, achieving balanced eating will only require making small adjustments to what you currently eat. The key is don't overthink it! Achieving balanced eating is not as complicated as you might perceive.

FOCUS ON WHOLE FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

As we have discussed, the poster highlights small changes that can be made to help bring us closer to a balanced eating approach. One such change is composing about half of your plate at each meal with whole fruits and vegetables.

What are the benefits of eating whole fruits and vegetables?

Allow members time to respond. Share the following if not mentioned by members:

- Eating fruits and vegetables as part of an overall balanced diet is likely to reduce the risk of some diseases.
- Fruits and vegetables provide nutrients vital to the health and maintenance of the body.
- Most fruits and vegetables are low in fat, sodium, cholesterol and calories.

MOVE TO LOW-FAT OR FAT-FREE DAIRY MILK OR YOGURT

Most adults are recommended to consume 3 cups of fat-free or low-fat dairy per day. This can come from milk, yogurt or cheese. It can also come from lactose-free milk and fortified soy milk or yogurt.

Why is it important to eat or drink dairy?

Allow members time to respond. Share the following if not mentioned by members:

- Eating or drinking dairy products offers health benefits, like building and maintaining strong bones.
- Important nutrients from dairy include calcium, potassium, vitamin D and protein.
- Most people do not consume enough potassium. Diets rich in potassium can help maintain healthy blood pressure.
- Vitamin D helps the body maintain proper levels of calcium and phosphorous, which helps to build and maintain bones. Try milk, Try milk, soy milk or other foods that are fortified with vitamin D as well as some fish, such as salmon.

VARY YOUR PROTEIN ROUTINE

Eat a variety of protein-rich foods to get more of the nutrients your body needs. Meat and poultry choices should be lean or low-fat, like 93% lean ground beef, pork loin and skinless chicken breasts. Choose seafood options that are higher in healthy fatty acids (called omega-3s) and lower in methylmercury, such as salmon, anchovies and trout. If you are vegetarian or vegan, consider protein options such as beans, peas, lentils, nuts, seeds and soy products.

Why is it important to select a variety of choices from the protein food group protein food group?

Allow members time to respond. Share the following if not mentioned by members:

- Many people get the right amount of protein from meat, poultry and eggs but do not meet the recommendations for seafood or nuts, seeds, and soy products.
- Meeting the recommendations can help increase the amount of important nutrients your body needs, like unsaturated fats, dietary fiber and vitamin D.
- It also helps limit the amount of sodium and saturated fats you get from processed meat and poultry.

Foods in the protein food group can often be the most expensive. Eating a balanced diet can be done within a tight budget. Consider downloading the MyPlate app on your phone and using the Shop Simple tool within the app to find savings in your area and discover new ways to prepare budget-friendly meals.

CHOOSE WHOLE GRAINS WHEN POSSIBLE

Grains have two subgroups: whole grains and refined grains. To achieve balanced eating, you want to target making half of your grains whole grains.

Whole grains have the entire grain kernel. Some whole grain examples are whole-wheat flour, bulgur (cracked wheat), oatmeal and brown rice.

Refined grains have been milled, a process that removes the bran and germ. This is done to give grains a finer texture and improve their shelf life. But it also removes dietary fiber, iron and many B vitamins. Some examples of refined grain products are white flour, corn grits, white bread and white rice.

Refined grains should ideally be enriched. This means adding back certain B vitamins (thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, folic acid) and iron. However, fiber is not added back to enriched grains. Check the ingredient list on refined grain products. The word “enriched” should appear in the grain name.

Why is it important to eat grains, especially whole grains?

Allow members time to respond. Share the following if not mentioned by members:

- Grains provide many nutrients that are vital for the health and maintenance of our bodies, including complex carbohydrates, dietary fiber, several B vitamins and minerals (iron, magnesium and selenium).
- Fiber from whole grains can help reduce blood cholesterol levels and can lower the risk of heart disease.
- The B vitamins thiamin, riboflavin and niacin play a key role in metabolism – they help the body release energy from protein, fat and carbohydrates. B vitamins are also essential for a healthy nervous system.
- Whole grains are sources of magnesium and selenium. Magnesium is a mineral used in building bones and releasing energy from muscles. Selenium protects cells from oxidation and is important for a healthy immune system.

CONCLUSION

Remember, small changes matter in achieving balanced eating. It likely does not require wholesale changes to your lifestyle or current eating habits. Making small, incremental adjustments to what we place on our plate will result in longstanding changes to what we eat and, as a result, improve our overall health.

Consider downloading the [MyPlate app](#) for more information and tools to put into practice what we discussed today.



Focus on whole fruits and vegetables.

Choose whole grains when possible.

Move to low-fat or fat-free dairy milk or yogurt.

Small Changes Matter

The benefits of balanced eating add up over time, bite by bite.

Vary your protein routine.

Alpha Chi Omega PI KAPPA PHI Sigma Nu Fraternity ZETA TAU ALPHA