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NOTES ON SELECTING A BALANCED DIET

The general well-being of the body at all ages depends upon the use of a diet containing adequate amounts of all of the various food essentials. For want of a better expression we sometimes refer to this as a balanced diet. By this we mean that the diet includes foods that will supply sufficient protein, minerals, vitamins, and energy to meet the needs of the body. This is best accomplished by using a variety of foods.

Milk and milk products, eggs, meat, poultry, and fish are the chief sources of protein. Fruits and vegetables are important for minerals and vitamins. Cereals and cereal products, starchy vegetables, sugars, and fats are classed as energy foods, and provide fuel or calories.

The protein requirement for the day will be met by one or two average servings of a protein food. Most foods contain some protein which supplements this main source. The diet should include one green vegetable and one other vegetable besides potato each day. Macaroni, spaghetti, etc., are cereal products and should not be considered as vegetables.

Vitamin C is easily destroyed by heat, and cooked and dried fruits and vegetables cannot therefore be depended upon to supply it in adequate amounts. For this reason, some fruit or vegetable should be eaten raw each day. Milk and eggs should be used liberally at all times because they are excellent sources of vitamins and protein, and milk is our chief source of calcium.

The requirement for energy foods, that is, fats and carbohydrates, depends largely upon the activity of the person concerned. The safest way for an adult to judge whether this requirement is being met is to take note of the weight at regular intervals. If there is a steady increase in weight, it is an indication that the amount of energy foods or the caloric intake is more than is required, and conversely, if there is a decrease in weight the caloric intake should be increased.

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