

Food Groups Addendum

The following information is provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for MyPlate. MyPlate is part of a larger communication initiative based on the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. MyPlate is designed to remind Americans to eat healthfully; it is not intended to change consumer behavior alone. MyPlate illustrates the five food groups using a place setting. The groups represent the major food group categories that have been used by USDA for consumer guidance for about 30 years. For more information, visit MyPlate.gov.¹

VEGETABLES²

Any vegetable or 100% vegetable juice counts as part of the Vegetable Group. Vegetables may be raw or cooked, fresh frozen, canned, or dried/dehydrated; and may be whole, cut-up, or mashed.

Vegetables are organized into five subgroups based on their nutrient content:

- Dark-green vegetables
- Beans, peas and lentils
- Starchy vegetables
- Red and orange vegetables
- Other vegetables

A number of foods that are considered fruits by botanists are part of the Vegetable Group. For example, tomatoes, avocados, eggplants, cucumbers, green peppers, zucchini, butternut squash, and others are classified as fruits by botanists because they are the fleshy plant part surrounding its seeds. However, for nutritional and culinary purposes, these foods are considered to be vegetables rather than fruits. The nutritional classification of foods considers not just botany, but a food's nutrient content, use in meals, and taste. The Vegetable Group includes those botanical fruits that are not sweet or tart and are usually consumed along with other vegetables or as a vegetable.

Beans, peas, and lentils are a MyPlate vegetable subgroup. Legume is the scientific term that describes a type of plant that includes pods. Foods in this subgroup include **beans** (kidney beans, pinto beans, white beans, black beans, lima beans, fava beans, soy beans), **dried peas** (chickpeas, black-eyed peas, pigeon peas, split peas), and **lentils**. **Edamame**, which is the soybean in the pod, is also counted in this subgroup (even though it is eaten fresh and not dried).

Green peas and green (string) beans are not part of this subgroup because their nutrition is more like foods in other vegetable subgroups. Green peas and green lima beans are in the Starchy Vegetables group. Green (string) beans are in the Other Vegetables group.

The nutrition found in beans, peas, and lentils are similar to foods in both the vegetables food group *and* the protein foods group. Like vegetables – beans, peas, and lentils are excellent sources of fiber, folate, and potassium. And like protein foods – they are excellent sources of plant protein, also providing iron and zinc.

FRUITS³

Any fruit or 100% fruit juice counts as part of the Fruit Group. Fruits may be fresh, canned, frozen, or dried. They may be whole, cut-up, or pureed.

The Fruit Group includes botanical fruits that are sweet and/or tart in taste – those which are usually thought of as fruits by consumers.

GRAINS⁴

Any food made from wheat, rice, oats, cornmeal, barley, or another cereal grain is a grain product. Bread, pasta, oatmeal, breakfast cereals, tortillas, and grits are examples of grain products.

Grains are divided into two subgroups, Whole Grains and Refined Grains. Whole grains contain the entire grain kernel – the bran, germ, and endosperm. 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. Most refined grains are enriched, which means that certain B vitamins (thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, folic acid) and iron are added back after processing. However, fiber is not added back to enriched grains.

Most Americans eat enough total grain foods. However, few eat enough whole grains. At least half of the grains we eat should be whole grains.

PROTEIN⁵

Protein Foods include all foods made from:

- Seafood
- Meat, poultry, eggs
- Beans, peas, and lentils (also part of the vegetable group)
- Nuts, seeds, soy products

It is recommended to eat a variety of protein 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 a vegetarian or vegan, the advice to eat meat, poultry, and seafood does not apply to you. Vegetarian protein options include beans, peas, and lentils, nuts, seeds, and soy products.

DAIRY⁶

The Dairy Group includes milk, yogurt, cheese, lactose-free milk, and fortified soy milk and yogurt. Fortified soy milk and yogurt with added calcium, vitamin A, and vitamin D are a part of the Dairy Group. This is because their nutrition content is like dairy milk and yogurt.

The Dairy Group does not include foods made from milk that have little calcium and high fat content, such as cream cheese, sour cream, cream, and butter. Also, other products sold as “milks” but made from plants like almond, rice, coconut, oat, and hemp “milks” may have calcium, however, they are not a part of the Dairy Group because their nutrition content is not like dairy milk and fortified soy milk.

There are calcium choices for those who do not eat or drink dairy products. However, these are not part of the Dairy Group.

¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2021, August 4). *AskUSDA: What is MyPlate?* Usda.gov. <https://ask.usda.gov/s/article/What-is-MyPlate>

² U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2019, July 17). *AskUSDA: What Foods Are in the Vegetable Group?* Usda.gov. <https://ask.usda.gov/s/article/What-foods-are-in-the-Vegetable-Group>

³ U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2019, July 17). *AskUSDA: What Foods Are in the Fruit Group?* Usda.gov. <https://ask.usda.gov/s/article/What-foods-are-in-the-Fruit-Group>

⁴ U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2023, April 26). *AskUSDA: What Foods Are in the Grains Group?* Usda.gov. <https://ask.usda.gov/s/article/What-foods-are-in-the-Grains-Group>

⁵ U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2023, April 14). *AskUSDA: What Foods Are in the Protein Foods Group?* Usda.gov. <https://ask.usda.gov/s/article/What-foods-are-in-the-Protein-Group>

⁶ U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2023, April 26). *AskUSDA: What Foods Are in the Dairy Group?* Usda.gov. <https://ask.usda.gov/s/article/What-foods-are-in-the-Dairy-Group-formerly-called-the-Milk-Group>