Macronutrients

Most of what makes up your body and a calorie are the same. Food is made up of three components, carbohydrates, protein, and fat. These three components are called macronutrients and contain calories to give your body energy to function.

Carbohydrates—4 calories per gram
Carbohydrates give energy to your body, especially the brain. Carbohydrates are converted to glucose (blood sugar) during digestion. The body then uses the glucose to provide energy to all the parts of your body. Carbohydrates can be separated into two groups, simple and complex. Simple carbohydrates are mostly sugar and are found in fruits, vegetables, dairy products, and refined sugars. Complex carbohydrates consist of whole grain breads, grains, cereal, starchy vegetables and legumes. Complex carbohydrates make you feel full longer, are released more slowly into your blood and are good sources of fiber. Your body stores extra, unused carbohydrates in the form of fat.

Proteins—4 calories per gram
Protein is found in all your body’s cells and is important to help build and maintain muscles, hair, skin, and bones. Protein breaks down into smaller parts called amino acids. Our bodies make some amino acids, but there are many you can only get from eating food. Protein comes from meat, poultry, fish, dairy, nuts, dried beans, legumes, and certain grains. Animal sources contain all the amino acids you need, but vegetable proteins only have some of the amino acids. That is why vegetable proteins are called incomplete proteins. Protein does not store in your body like fat and carbohydrates do. It is important to eat protein every day to ensure you have enough.

Fats—9 calories per gram
Fat plays many important roles in your body in addition to providing energy. It helps absorb vitamins and plays an important role in proper growth and development. Fat adds flavor and texture to food to make it taste good. Fat has more calories per gram so it helps make you feel full. Dietary fat is particularly important for infants and toddlers for the calories and nutrients. The amount and type of fat you eat contributes to your cholesterol level. Fats are not created equally and some are better for you than others. Saturated fats are unhealthy fats which are found in animal products and coconut and palm oils. Trans fats are unhealthy fats that have been changed so the food is more shelf stable. Examples of foods that may contain trans fats are shortening, margarine, crackers, cookies, snack foods and foods fried in partially hydrogenated oils. Limit your consumption of saturated and trans fats by choosing lean cuts of meat and avoiding foods with trans fats. Replace unhealthy fats with healthier ones such as canola, olive, soybean, and sunflower oils.

Source: Food and Drug Administration

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