



Do you eat a balanced diet?

A balanced diet means eating a suitable amount of each of the main food groups.

Your body needs a certain amount of nourishment and energy if it is to stay healthy. How much you need depends on how active you are, but the proportions of each type of food you eat should be generally the same.

A normal diet

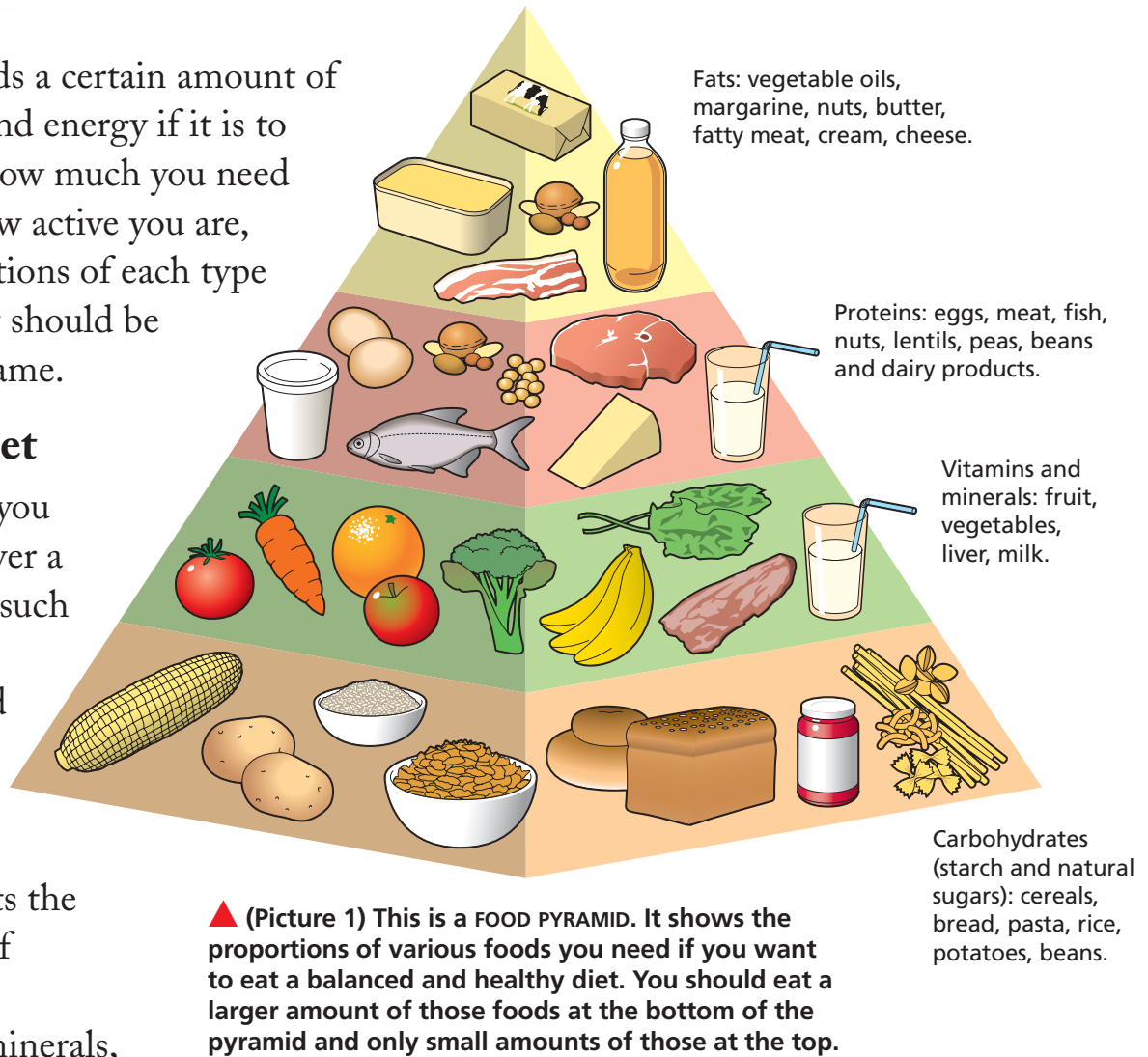
The food that you normally eat over a period of time such as a day, week or year is called your **DIET**.

Your body will only be healthy if it gets the right balance of carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals, proteins and fat

(Picture 1). This is called a **BALANCED DIET**. But how do we know what 'enough' means, and how can we tell if our diet is balanced?

Weight

First, it helps to know that the body is very good at looking after itself. It also helps to know that the body likes to have



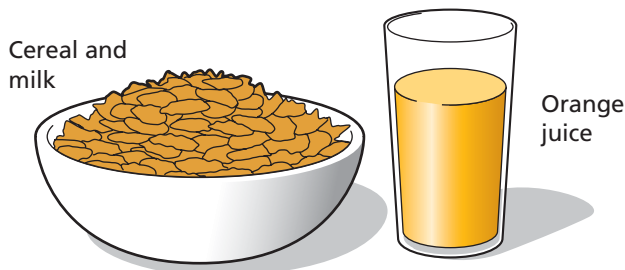
plenty of insurance, so if it can store food in case of emergencies, it will. The difficulty is that the more it stores, the heavier the body becomes and the harder other parts of the body have to work.

A healthy diet for fully grown people is, in part, one where the body does not gain or lose weight. We can find this out by knowing how much energy is in

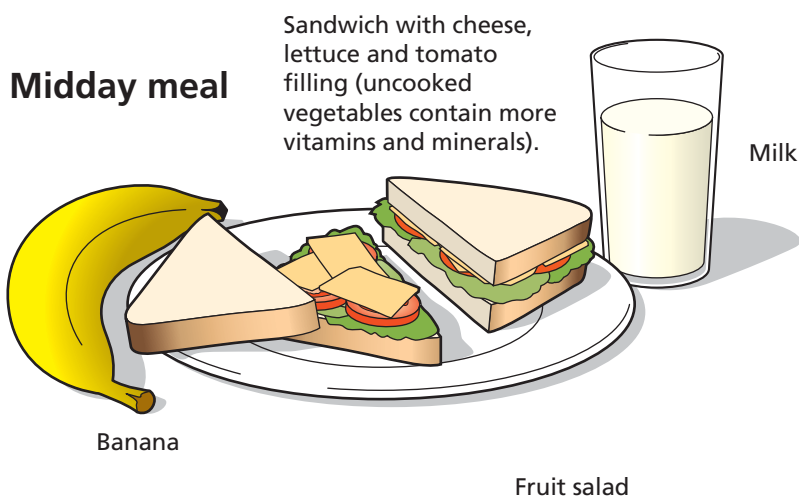
our food (which is measured in a unit called **CALORIES**) and how much energy we burn off by living (which we can also measure in Calories).

Younger people are growing and getting heavier all the time. For them, increasing weight is often normal, but getting lighter is not.

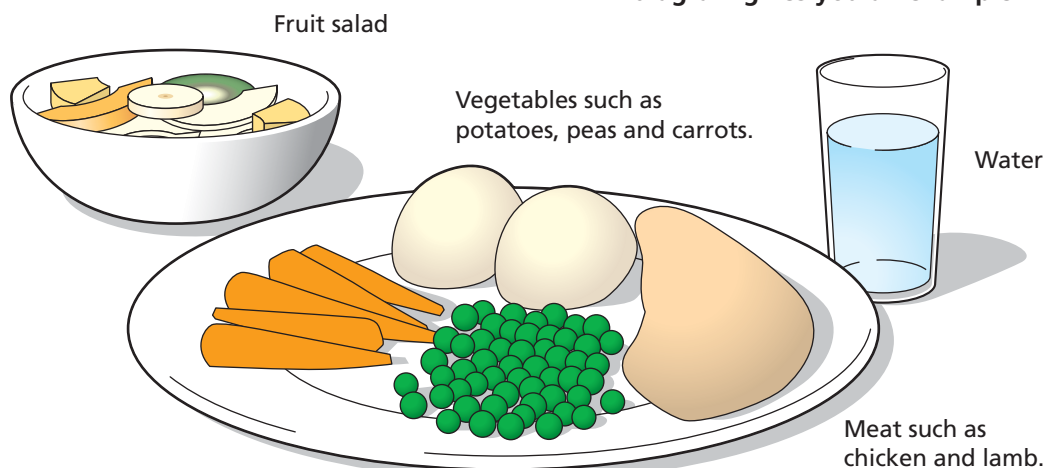
Morning meal



Midday meal



Evening meal



Daily needs

A simple rule for eating a balanced diet is to eat one portion of meat and one portion of dairy products a day, and one or more portions of each of the other groups, such as fruit, as shown in Picture 2. You should aim to eat five portions of fruits and vegetables each day – this is the ideal to aim for.

A rule for how much to eat is not to eat more calories than your body needs.

Summary

- To follow a balanced diet, use the food pyramid.
- Try to avoid sugary and fatty foods.
- Eat lots of foods containing starch, fibre, protein, vitamins and minerals.

◀◀ (Picture 2) There are many different ways to get a balanced diet. Some people choose not to eat meat, or eat only certain types of meat, and others choose food from different cultures. Some people have a larger morning meal and a smaller evening meal. Some people eat several small meals. But whatever way you eat your food, you should have roughly the right proportions of each type of food from the food pyramid, and roughly the same calories to get a balanced diet. This diagram gives you an example.