WHEN Ms Sunita came to me with her 20-year-old daughter, she had no idea that her daughter was suffering from celiac disease that had crippled her and compromised her health to such an extent that she could not pursue her career.

After some medical advice and regular follow up and after one year of being on a strict diet, Ms Sunita’s daughter is now healthy. The daughter has now even taken dietetics as her career.

Most of our body cells get replaced within a month’s time, some early and some later. So, it would not be wrong to say “we become what we eat”. With the kind of highly stressful life that we are living, most of us forget about healthy eating practices and make our body suffer too much, sometimes to the extent that the repair becomes irreversible. Therefore, it is imperative that healthy diet practices are incorporated into our daily routine for healthy living.

Balanced Diet
Men and women differ in their daily nutritional requirements. Follow simple rules like taking minimum of five fruit and veg meals a day, including whole-grains, taking more of low-fat, low-sugar dairy foods and taking more of fish, poultry, beans and pulses and less of red meat.

Nutritional requirements vary depending on sex, size, age and activity levels. This table gives only a rough daily estimate recommended for a healthy, balanced diet for maintaining rather than losing or gaining weight by the US FDA.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guideline Daily Amounts (GDAs)</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Energy (kcal)</td>
<td>2500</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protein (g)</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carbohydrates (g)</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar (g)</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fat (g)</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturates (g)</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fibre (g)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt (g)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Typically, men need more nutrients than women with the exception of salt and fibre.

**Breakfast:** Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. It should be rich in proteins as they are slow to digest and slow the stomach emptying keeping us fuller for long and causing less craving for food for the rest of the day. Also, protein requires more calories to digest than carbs therefore we boost up our metabolism by having breakfast rich in proteins. Eggs are ideal for breakfast; other options are lean ham, fish like salmon, and low-fat dairy foods. People who regularly eat breakfast weigh less than those who skip it.

**Mid-morning snack:** Add mid morning snack to boost metabolism.

**Lunch:** Lunch should be a mix of lean protein and starchy carbs. Carb-rich foods supply energy so that we do not suffer from mild drowsiness in the afternoon. Go in for high fibre whole-grains (like rye, whole wheat and barley) and avoid sugary ‘white’ foods that produce a steady rise in blood sugar. Studies show rye bread keeps blood sugar stable for up to 10 hours – perfect to prevent mid-afternoon slumps.

**Mid-afternoon:** Usually people crave for salty food more than sugary in the afternoon. Say no to the crisps and say yes to spiced nuts, seeds, and popcorn.

**Dinner:** There is no need to strictly avoid carbs; they are low in fat, fibre-rich, and easy to digest. We can combine them with healthy fats which the body can use overnight for growth and repair. Healthy fats can be obtained from fish like salmon and trout as well as nuts, seeds and their oils. We can use a wide variety of vegetables or salad, add a dressing made from flaxseed or rapeseed oil and add meat, fish or beans with a serving of brown rice, quinoa or whole wheat chapati.

**Add These to Your Diet**

**Almonds:** They are a good source of healthy unsaturated fats, protein, fibre, and vitamin E and are great for heart, digestive system, and skin.

**Quinoa:** It’s a great source of unsaturated fats, fibre, B vitamins and has higher protein than many other grains.

**Olive oil:** It is rich in monounsaturated fat. There is significant decrease in risk of heart disease if we replace two tablespoons of saturated fat with monounsaturated fat. It also has good anti-inflammatory properties which help in healing.

**Black beans:** Beans keep the stomach full for much longer than many other foods (rich fibre content) and provide constant energy for a long time (rich in highly complex carbohydrates that get converted to energy very slowly providing energy for long duration). They are also rich in proteins like meat but unlike meat they are low in saturated fats. Black variety is preferred by many because weight for weight it has more fibre than any other member of the legume family.

**Eggs:** Eggs have particularly high dose of vitamin called choline to enhance memory and pure muscle-building amino acids. They have all the right nutrients for muscle growth.

**Milk:** Lack of milk causes our body cells to retain calcium and fat. Milk also helps to stimulate the body’s fat-burning system and slows down the storage of fat.

**Beef:** It is a rich source of muscle-building amino acids, especially iron and zinc. It is a very nutrient-dense food providing protein, vitamins B6 and B12, selenium, phosphorus, niacin, and riboflavin which is good for heart and circulation.
**Soy:** Soy is also labelled by some as a “perfect food.” It is rich in proteins, fibres, minerals, vitamins, and antioxidants. It is available in all sorts of varieties like tofu, soy milk, soy nuts, soy protein in protein shakes and bars.

**Yogurt:** Yogurt not only has all the benefits of milk but also is rich in germ-fighting bacteria which increase immunity of the gut and of the body. Studies show that regular yogurt intake protects against catching a cold, possibly due to its effect on improving the body’s immunity. It is also rich in calcium (like milk) and, therefore, helps in fat-burning and also makes us feel satiated, making it an ideal food for weight loss. However, there is one caution in the marketed yogurt: it is usually packed with added sugar and high-fructose corn syrup. To get the maximum benefit from its useful bacteria, we should consume yogurt that is fresh or less than a week old.

**Water:** Water has no calories. Drink eight glasses a day. It flushes toxins, regulates body temperature, is an insulator for joints, prevents kidney stones, and provides important minerals for the body. We can make sugar-free lemonade or add calorie-free flavours to water and sip it throughout the day.

**Spinach:** Spinach is rich in fibre, calcium, and whole day dose of beta carotene, which is important for immunity and good vision.

**Whole wheat bread:** Replace your white bread with whole wheat bread. Be careful when buying something that claims to be whole grain. It may only look brown because it’s coloured with molasses. Rather than buying based on colour, check the ingredient list. The only true whole-grain products are those that contain 100% whole wheat or whole grain listed as the first ingredient on the packaging.

**Broccoli:** It is full of iron, calcium, fibre, and vitamin C. It is a boon for the circulatory system, bones, and fighting colds.

**Oatmeal:** A bowl of oatmeal is the best breakfast to have. It gives energy and long satiety. Its high zinc content is helpful against stress, immunity, weight loss and heart disease. Its richness of fibre protects heart and blood vessels against cholesterol, the levels of which can decrease by up to 30 points or more. Flavoured oatmeal packs usually have added sugar and therefore excess calories. Therefore, try for the original instant oatmeal and add your own choice of fruits and calorie-free sweeteners.
**Sweet potatoes**: Sweet potatoes are particularly rich in iron, vitamin C, vitamin E and beta carotene, which protect against cellular damage of all types, especially in athletes who compete in extreme environments (such as altitude, heat, cold, or pollution). They are also one of the best foods for recovery of muscle after a vigorous workout. Sweet potatoes can be baked, boiled, stirring cooked, or grated into hamburgers.

**Tomatoes**: Tomatoes are a powerful aphrodisiac and are also called “love apples”. They are particularly rich in lycopene which is especially helpful in men to fight against prostate cancer. Tomatoes are more nutritious when cooked than when eaten raw because lycopene becomes more bio-available after it’s heated.

**Flaxseed**: Flaxseed has plant based omega 3 fats, fibre, and disease-fighting compounds called lignans. A Mayo Clinic study showed that crushed flaxseed can cut down on hot flushes in women, and other reports suggest flax can lower “bad” or LDL cholesterol and triglycerides. They even play a role in fighting breast cancer.

**Kale**: Kale is rich in antioxidants like lutein and zeaxanthin that protect the eye. It is also rich in vitamin C and small amounts of calcium. It is especially helpful for women because it is a potent bone builder helping them combat osteoporosis and lowering their risk of hip fracture.

**Walnuts**: Walnuts are beneficial in both breast cancer and osteoporosis. The protective effect is due to its antioxidants called phytosterols. Walnuts are the only nut to harbour plant based omega 3 fats, which is helpful in preventing osteoporosis.

**Tomatoes**: Tomatoes are a powerful aphrodisiac and are also called “love apples”. They are particularly rich in lycopene which is especially helpful in men to fight against prostate cancer. Tomatoes are more nutritious when cooked than when eaten raw because lycopene becomes more bio-available after it’s heated.

**Blueberries**: They have more anti-oxidants, fibre, vitamins, and minerals than any other fruit weight for weight. They are also extremely good for memory due to their high anti-oxidant content keeping the brain and nervous system healthy.

**Salmon**: Salmon are particularly rich in omega-3 fats, which is a boon for our memory, heart and blood vessels. Salmon is also particularly high in protein.

---

Dr. Ravinder Pal Singh Malhotra is Director, Institute of Liver Transplant & Gastro-Sciences at Saroj Super Speciality Hospital, Near Madhuban Chowk, Sector 14, Rohini, New Delhi-110085. E-mail: rpsm_2501@yahoo.co.in