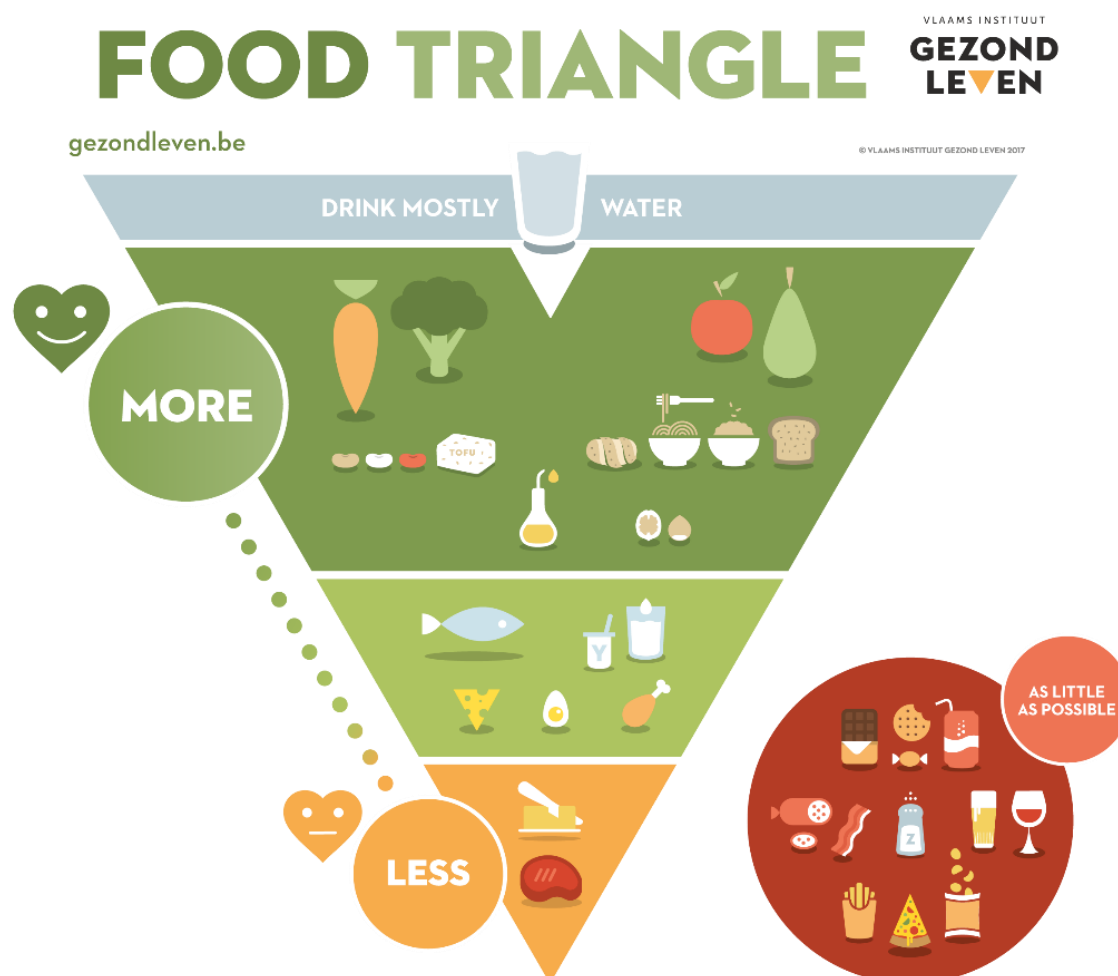


FOOD TRIANGLE: Healthy and sustainable eating with the Food Triangle

Eating healthily: what exactly is that? So many contradictory reports appear in the media that you can't see the forest for the trees. That's why Gezond Leven gathered all the scientific knowledge about healthy eating for you—which foods are preferable and what's best being limited—in the **Food Triangle**. We want to make guidelines that everyone is able to follow in the long term. And ensure there is *enough* healthy food for our children and grandchildren. The result is a **realistic and sustainable model that perfectly fits Flemish eating culture**.



Starting points for the Food Triangle

The **Food Triangle** is based on an extensive literature review and consultation with experts. This was the foundation for formulating the following communal starting points:

- Eat proportionally more foods that are derived from plants than foods that are derived from animals.
- Avoid ultraprocessed foods as much as possible.
- Don't waste food. Moderate your consumption.

Starting point 1: 'Eat proportionately more plant-based foods than foods that are derived from animals.'

A diet predominantly based on foods derived from plants offers the best guarantee for health, and has less impact on the environment. According to the most recent assessment of food consumption habits, the average Flemish person eats too much meat and too little high-fibre food derived from plants such as vegetables, fruit, whole grains, legumes and nuts.

The Food Triangle advises eating less meat, for which we predominantly put the focus on reducing red and processed meats. We strive for a more conscious consumption of meat. Alternative protein sources such as legumes are put in the spotlight.

Starting point 2: 'The preference is for foods that have little or no processing and to eat as little highly or ultraprocessed food as possible.'

In the past decades, there has been a huge change in the way we eat, drink and exercise. The result is well known: a worldwide increase in obesity and other chronic illnesses. We have evolved from a diet consisting mostly of unprocessed foods and freshly prepared meals to massive use of highly processed, ready-to-eat foods.

Ultra or highly processed foods are characterised by the addition of large amounts of sugar, (saturated) fat and salt. These are foods with high energy density (high calories) and low nutritional value (they contain few necessities such as vitamins, minerals and fibres). Long shelf life, attractive packaging and taste, and user-friendliness are characteristic of these products. They have no added value in a healthy diet and are therefore actually superfluous. A few examples: soft drink, candy, cookies and other sweet snacks, potato chips and other salty or fried snacks, and processed meats.

Starting point 3: 'Avoid over-consumption and waste.'

Through the current consumption patterns in Western countries, we exceed our own energy needs: we eat all day long and more than necessary. The over-consumption and waste of food is a joint threat for health and the environment.

With the Food Triangle and the related advice, we want to encourage reduced eating (eating no more than is needed) and emphasise the importance of portion sizes. As a result, we also pay attention to the planning of meals and the purchase of food; preventing food and packaging waste is automatically more sustainable.

Healthy Living tips with the Food Triangle

The three starting points of the Food Triangle form the scientific basis for the ten Healthy Living tips below. We want to use them to make you more aware of healthy eating practices and to motivate you to commit to them.

What is best to eat?

1. Make foods derived from plants the basis of every meal

When they have no processing or little processing, plant-based foods offer the most healthy benefits. Eat plenty of vegetables, fruits, whole grains and legumes. Supplement them with small amounts of nuts, seeds and plant-based oils.

2. Limit your intake of animal products

There's no need to completely eliminate meat, cheese and other animal products from your menu. But small(er) portions are sufficient. Swap between red meat, fish, poultry and plant-based sources of protein such as legumes or tofu.

3. Drink water

Water is the best drink for quenching your thirst. Would you like some variety? Choose tea or coffee without sugar.

4. Choose as few ultraprocessed products as possible

Candy, cookies, chips, soft drinks, wine and beer ... Tasty? Maybe. But are they of any benefit for your body? No. You eat and drink them purely for your pleasure. These products often contain a lot of white flour, sugar, fat, salt or alcohol.

How can you eat healthily and sustainably?

5. Vary your diet and look for alternatives

Eating the same food every day soon becomes boring and monotonous. Play with your healthy eating pattern. For example, eat a different seasonal vegetable every day. And replace the less healthy choices with the healthy version: for example, buy whole-grain bread instead of white bread.

6. Eat at set times and together with others

Set fixed eating times for yourself—to the extent that it's possible. Avoid eating too many snacks in between meals. Also try to eat with others: it helps you to maintain regularity. Especially for families: as a parent, it's an opportunity to set a good example for your children and give them chances to try new things.

7. Eat consciously and with moderation

Learn to read the way your stomach feels: know whether you're hungry or your hunger has been satisfied. Sit at the table, eat slowly and enjoy it. Keep distractions away: turn the TV off, put the smartphone aside. Take small portions of anything that is lacking in nutritional benefits.

8. Adapt your environment

Set up your environment so that the healthy choice is in front of you and the less healthy one is more difficult to access. For example, leave fruit visible in the kitchen and don't keep any candy or biscuits in the car or at the office. Be prepared for 'emergencies': keep a portion of soup or pasta sauce in the freezer for days when you'll be short on time. And keep a bottle of water or a bag of nuts in your bag so that vending-machine candy or petrol-station snacks don't tempt you when you're out and about.

9. Work step by step

Do you need to convert your entire diet overnight? No; every little improvement is a step in the right direction. Keep your goals within reach. For example, start with one piece of fruit a day, if you don't already do that. If you enjoy that and it becomes a habit? Try to build in an extra step. And definitely don't give up if you have a relapse—it happens to the best of us! Do you need help? Following a plan can help. Draw up a weekly menu and a shopping list.

10. Enjoy what you eat!

Make sure your meals are a joy. Spoil yourself every day with delicious, healthy food. And treat yourself every now and then to a less healthy extravagance. Stay aware of the frequency (not too often) and portion size (not too much). Also look for the right balance between caring for your body and enjoyment.

The Food Triangle in colour

At the top of the triangle is the category 'water'.

Drinking water is especially important for keeping your fluid levels in balance and for this reason, water is given its own place at the top. It is the best choice of drink, but for a change, it's okay to choose tea or coffee (preferably without adding sugar).

The Food Triangle itself is divided into three categories. The colours of the different sections reflect the effects on your health.

- **Dark green**

These are foods that originate from plants, and that have a favourable effect on the health: vegetables, fruit, whole grains and potatoes, but also legumes, nuts and seeds, plant oils (and other fats rich in unsaturated fats). Try to eat the little or non-processed version as much as possible.

- **Light green**

These are foods that are derived from animals and have a favourable, neutral or insufficiently proven effect on health: fish, yoghurt, milk, cheese, poultry and eggs. Choose the least processed or non-processed variety here too.

- **Orange**

These are the foods originating from plants or animals that can have an unfavourable effect on health when consumed in high amounts: red meat, butter, coconut and palm oil (fats rich in saturated fatty acids). These products do contain some useful nutrients; for example, iron in red meat, fat-soluble vitamins in butter.

- **Red: the 'others'**

A fourth, red category is set apart from the triangle. These are highly processed products to which high amounts of sugar, fat and/or salt are added and which have clear, unfavourable effects on health. They can originate from animals or plants: prepared meat products, soft drink, alcohol, candy, cakes and pastries, snacks, fast food, etc. They are superfluous to a healthy diet. You are best eating or drinking them rarely and in small portions.

The Food Triangle is based on an expanded literature study, consultation with experts and focus groups with the target group.