A healthy diet is very important. There are 5 main food groups:
- grains
- vegetables
- fruits
- meat, fish, eggs and alternatives
- milk and alternatives

The main nutrients provided by these foods are carbohydrates, protein, fat, minerals and vitamins. Our body obtains varying amounts of these nutrients from different types of food and then utilizes them to promote growth, help development and maintain health. Therefore, we must have a healthy diet in order to obtain sufficient and appropriate nutrients.

To have a healthy diet, the principles of the healthy eating food pyramid must be followed.

What is vegetarian diet
- it is a kind of diet that includes mainly fruits, vegetables and grains but excludes all meat
- it has become more popular in recent years for the following reasons:
  - some people believe that vegetarian diet is healthier
  - some have religious reasons and refrain from eating meat
  - some have special beliefs such as environmental protection and animal rights protection
  - some people simply want to control their weight and therefore cut down on meat consumption

Examples of vegetarian food
- whole wheat and grains – brown rice, bread, oatmeal, bran, whole wheat cracker
- nuts – peanuts, lotus seed, almond, macadamia nut, hazel-nut, brazil-nut, gingko
- beans and bean products – soya bean, lentil, split pea, green pea, kidney bean, chicken pea
- fruits and vegetables – asparagus, brussel sprout, cucumber, carrot, potato, pumpkin, mushroom, fruits

Main types of vegetarian diet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Diet Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>strict vegan</td>
<td>consumes only fruits, vegetables and grains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>does not take dairy products, eggs and meat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lacto-vegetarian</td>
<td>consumes only dairy products, fruits, vegetables and grains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>does not take eggs and meat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ovo-vegetarian</td>
<td>consumes only eggs, fruits, vegetables and grains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>does not take dairy products and meat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lacto-ovo-vegetarian</td>
<td>consumes only dairy products, eggs, fruits, vegetables and grains</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>does not take meat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fruitarian</td>
<td>consumes only fruits, dried fruits, nuts and honey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Choosing vegetarian diet

Benefits
- vegetarian food is rich in dietary fibre which helps in maintaining normal body weight by giving a sensation of fullness
- decrease the risk of colon cancer, piles and constipation
- because of its low-fat content, the risk of heart disease, hypertension, stroke, cancers, obesity, gallstones may also be reduced

Precautions
- some nutrients are only found in meat, eggs and dairy products. Since vegetarians do not take meat and some even do not take eggs and dairy products, they may become deficient in these nutrients. Nutrient deficiency may result in malnutrition, tiredness, anaemia and other illness
- vegetarians need to be particularly careful in the choice and combinations of food. They may have to take vitamins or other dietary supplements as advised by their doctors
- if one wishes to control weight by switching to a vegetarian diet, he/she must be careful about the quantity of food intake, choice of food, cooking methods and amount of oil used
Important facts for vegetarian children and youth

- Children and youth are at an important stage of development. They need a variety of nutrients to grow healthily. If children are vegetarian for religious or other personal reasons, their diets must include a wide range of foods in appropriate combinations so that they have sufficient nutrients to promote growth.

- Vegetarian food, in general, do not have a strong taste and is not particularly appetizing. Parents need to make extra efforts and be more creative in their cooking and recipes in order to increase their children’s interest in food and stimulate their appetite.

- The protein content of vegetables is, in general, lower than that of animal products. Therefore, in order to obtain the different types of protein, the amount and variety of food intake are of great importance for vegetarians. Beans, nuts and dairy products can be consumed in various combinations e.g. cashew nut, hazel-nut and apricot served in low-fat yoghurt; legumes and chicken peas served in sauce made of cottage cheese.

- Only dairy products, liver, meat and eggs can provide us with vitamin B12. If these foods are not taken, vitamin B12 supplements or vitamin B12 fortified cereals, soya bean milk or other foods must be taken. Read the food labels during shopping to find out whether vitamin B12 has been added.

- Vegetarian food also contains calcium, iron, zinc and other minerals. A variety of food must be taken in order to obtain the different types of minerals.

  - Foods rich in calcium include broccoli, almonds, turnip greens, bean curd (tofu) and dairy products. However, foods with high salt content and drinks that contain caffeine increase the loss of calcium.

  - Food rich in iron include spinach, prunes, dried apricots, iron-added breakfast cereals and water-melon. Intake of foods rich in vitamin C like fresh fruits increase the absorption of iron.

  - Foods rich in zinc include beans, nuts and wheat germs.