

What is “Japanese Diet” ?

Japan’s nutrition policy has been particularly focusing on the concept of “DIETS” which includes what to eat, when to eat, and eating with others.

The core concept is “**staple dish/main dish/side dish**.” That is, properly combining these three types of dishes can help people maintain ideal nutritional balance: **staple dish**, such as rice, is the major source of **energy**, **main dish** (meat, fish, etc.) supplies **protein and fat**, and **side dish** mainly consists of vegetables/mushrooms and is the source of **vitamins/minerals**.

Furthermore, in the concept of “DIETS,” Japan also places special importance on eating style, such as interacting with others through meals and eating at the appropriate time of the day, recommending it in the “Dietary Guidelines for Japanese.”



Japanese Diet* fits the basic principles of “healthy diet”

*In this paper, “Japanese Diet” is defined as meal that follow the “Dietary Guidelines for Japanese” or that consist of a combination of staple dish, main dish, and side dish.

■ Joint statement by FAO and WHO “What are healthy diets?”
<https://iris.who.int/server/api/core/bitstreams/f06e1673-3689-4cb1-8a37-762a3e9c5360/content>

In their joint statement, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) (Oct. 2024) outline four basic principles of “healthy diets”: **Adequate, Balanced, Moderate, Diverse**.

Adequate

Providing enough essential nutrients
to prevent deficiencies and promote health, without excess.

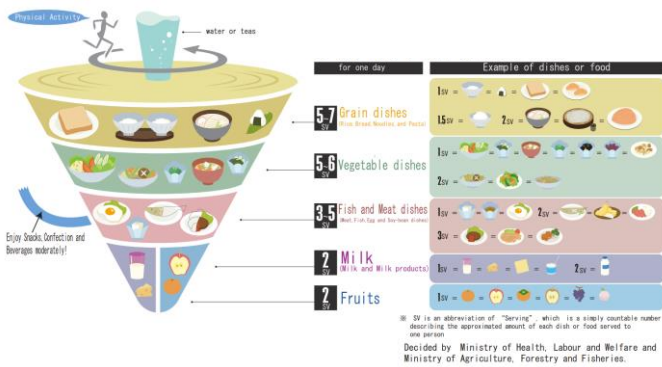
- Across the life course - from the growth period to older adulthood and during pregnancy - consumption of the Japanese diet is associated with higher intakes of a variety of nutrients, including vitamins A, B1, C, and folate, and minerals such as potassium, calcium, magnesium, and iron.

Nutrient			Nutrient		
No. of studies			No. of studies		
Vitamin	Vitamin A (Retinol)	7/0/1	Mineral	Potassium (K)	11/0/0
	Vitamin B1 (Thiamine)	8/0/1		Calcium (Ca)	13/1/1
	Vitamin B2 (Riboflavin)	5/0/1		Magnesium (Mg)	10/0/1
	Vitamin B6	5/0/0		Iron (Fe)	15/0/0
	Folate	9/0/0		Zinc (Zn)	5/0/0
	Vitamin C	14/0/1		Copper (Cu)	3/0/1

※Of the 25 studies on the “Japanese Diet” (including papers published outside Japan), 19 addressing “Adequate” were reviewed to examine which nutrients underwent correlation analysis.

※Red indicates No. of studies reporting a positive correlation; Blue, No. reporting a negative correlation; Black, No. reporting no correlation

Japanese Food Guide Spinning Top



“Dietary Guidelines for Japanese” aims to promote well-balanced meals that include **staple** selected from grain dishes (e.g, rice), **main dish and side dish**, along with moderate amounts of milk and dairy products and fruit.

It provides clear indications of daily intake – “what to eat” and “how much to eat.”

Website of “Dietary Guidelines for Japanese”
https://www.maff.go.jp/j/balance_guide/index.html



*This investigation retrieved articles from PubMed and CiNii published between 1 January 2000 and 31 July 2025. The eligible studies primarily targeted Japanese residents in Japan.

Balanced

In energy intake, and energy sources (i.e., fats, carbohydrates and proteins) to promote healthy weight, growth and disease prevention.

- Findings from research on “Japanese Diets” show that **protein/energy ratio, fat/energy ratio, saturated fatty acids/energy ratio, and carbohydrate/energy ratio** are within recommended ranges across the life course - from the growth period to older adulthood and during pregnancy.

Moderate

In consumption of foods, nutrients or other compounds associated with detrimental health effects.

- Regarding the association between “Japanese Diets” consumption and sodium intake, some studies report a positive correlation, whereas others report no correlation or negative correlation. **The relationship between “Japanese Diets” and sodium intake remains inconclusive**; further study is needed.

Diverse

Including a wide variety of nutritious foods within and across food groups to favour nutrient adequacy and consumption of other health promoting substances.

- It has been shown that individuals consuming “Japanese Diets” have **higher intakes of a variety of food groups** – including grains, tubers, legumes, vegetables, fruits, fish and seafood - and therefore greater dietary diversity across life course from the growth period to older adulthood, as well as during pregnancy.