

FAQs: Balanced Diets

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Why your fish need *both* quality foods and supplements on a regular basis

No single food can provide all of the nutrients your fish need - protein, lipids, carbohydrates, vitamins, and minerals - in the forms each species prefer. Thus, the key to good feeding is variety. Use of a [staple diet](#), a supplemental diet, and [vitamin and nutritional supplements](#) as needed will ensure your fish receives all the nutrients necessary for good health. Also, because fish enjoy a spectrum of tastes and textures, variety enhances the quality of their lives.

The following Q&A addresses many of the most frequently asked questions we receive from customers, and provides information on how to feed your fish a balanced diet. For specific recommendations on balanced staple and supplementary diets, we suggest you also read the article [Feed Your Fish a Variety of Foods for Total Nutrition](#).



Q. Why do I need to use supplemental diet?

A. Two reasons:

- Nutrition - Good commercial staple fish diets are the most complete foods available, and the easiest to use, but they are not perfect. They may not offer the nutrients found in live or frozen foods. A balanced diet should include staple processed food, as well as [freeze-dried](#), [live](#), and/or [frozen foods](#). For herbivores, it should include a [vegetable-based food](#); for carnivores, a [meat-based food](#).
- Variety - An aquarium is seldom comprised of a single species, but even if it is, these fish would not be satisfied with eating the same food day-in and day-out for a lifetime. In the wild, fish eat a variety of foods to get all of the nutrients they require. In your aquarium, your goal should be to replicate this experience. Providing a range of staple, fresh, and supplemental foods improves fish nutrition, and the quality of their lives

Q. How often do I need to feed supplemental diets?

A. We believe that feeding supplemental foods one to three times per week can be very beneficial.

Q. What could happen if I feed the wrong type of food to my fish?

A. Some fish only eat plants (herbivores) and others only eat animals (carnivores), but the majority of aquarium fish eat both plants and animals (omnivores). Plant-eating fish that are fed animal-based foods will not be able to digest the food properly, which may cause internal problems such as constipation. The same is true of strictly carnivorous fish that are fed only plant-based materials. In fact, they may become ill because they cannot obtain the proper nutrients. Thus, it is critical that you match the food to the feeding habits of the fish in your aquarium. Nutrition problems usually result from feeding the wrong type of food (plant-based or animal-based; sinking or floating) and feeding improper amounts, be it too much or too little. Some of the more commonly observed problems with poorly fed fish include lateral line and fin erosion, hole-in-the-head, weight loss, diminished color, stunted growth, listlessness, and disease outbreaks.

Q. If I have many types of fish in my aquarium, how do I get them to be selective about the foods they eat?

A. Tactics. Most aquariums contain a variety of fish including fish that feed on the surface, others that feed mid-water, and still others that only feed on the bottom. Hatchet fish, for example, have upturned mouths that are suited for taking food off of the surface. Tetras are mid-level feeders and have forward-facing mouths best suited for grabbing food suspended throughout the water column. Catfish have sharply down-turned mouths, ideal for bottom feeding. It is essential that you provide foods that are appropriate for each feeding level and that they are nutritionally complete. Because most fish will poach on the foods of others, you may need to use a distraction or timing strategy. For example, distract your bottom feeders by feeding them sinking pellets first, then waiting a moment or two before adding floating foods for your surface feeders.

Q. How much food do I need to feed?

A. As a basic rule, fish should be fed once or twice a day with a quantity that they can fully consume in 3-5 minutes. To start, feed each fish an amount equal to the size of their eye. Overfeeding is much more common and detrimental than underfeeding. The quantity of food you feed your fish is very important for their overall health and the health of your aquarium. Overfeeding can result in uneaten food that will decompose, causing an increase in

Benefits of Quality Foods and Vitamins

- Healthier fish
- Reduced need for medications
- Enhanced colors
- More active fish

Benefits of Supplements/Trace Elements

- Hardier fish
- Better resistance to varying water conditions
- Enhanced color in corals
- More growth in corals
- More active corals

nitrogen products such as ammonia, or harmful bacteria or fungus.

Q. When are vitamin and mineral supplements needed?

- A. One of the key benefits of vitamins and minerals is that they are stress fighters. Whenever you suspect your fish might be stressed, it is a good idea to use them. For example, if you are about to add new fish, do an aquarium renovation, or move, the use of supplements will help your fish better weather the stress. For a profile of supplements and their benefits for marine aquariums, read [Supplements for Aquariums: Who needs What, & Why?](#) For freshwater aquariums, check out [vitamins and nutritional supplements](#).