Guide to Good Food
Chapter 2: Nutritional Needs—Terms and Definitions

absorption. The process of taking nutrients into the body and making them part of the body.

amino acid. A chemical compound that serves as a building block of proteins.

anemia. A condition resulting from deficiencies of various nutrients, which is characterized by a reduced number of red blood cells in the bloodstream.

beriberi. A disease of the nervous system resulting from a thiamin deficiency, which is characterized by numbness in the ankles and legs followed by severe cramping and paralysis.

carbohydrate. One of the six basic types of nutrients that is the body’s chief source of energy.

cholesterol. A fatlike substance that occurs naturally in the body and is found in every cell but occurs only in foods of animal origin.

deficiency disease. An illness caused by the lack of a sufficient amount of a nutrient.

dietary antioxidant. A substance in foods that significantly reduces the harmful effects of oxygen on normal body functions.

dietary supplement. A purified nutrient or nonnutrient substance that is manufactured or extracted from natural sources.

digestion. The bodily process of breaking food down into simpler compounds the body can use.

fat. One of the six basic types of nutrients that is an important energy source.

fat-soluble vitamin. A vitamin that dissolves in fats and can be stored in the fatty tissues of the body.

fatty acid. A chemical chain containing carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen that is the basic component of all lipids.

fiber. A form of complex carbohydrate from plants that humans cannot digest.

fortified food. A food to which nutrients are added in amounts greater than what would naturally occur in the food.

glucose. The form of sugar carried in the bloodstream for energy use throughout the body.

goiter. A visible enlargement of the thyroid gland resulting from an iodine deficiency.

hydrogenation. A process by which hydrogen atoms are chemically added to unsaturated fatty acids in liquid oils to turn the oils into more highly saturated solid fats.

hypertension. High blood pressure.

macromineral. A mineral needed in the diet in amounts of 100 or more milligrams each day.

malnutrition. A lack of the right proportions of nutrients over an extended period, which can be caused by an inadequate diet or the body’s inability to use the nutrients taken in.

metabolism. The chemical processes that take place in the cells after the body absorbs nutrients.
**mineral.** One of the six basic types of nutrients that is an inorganic substance and becomes part of the bones, tissues, and body fluids.

**night blindness.** A condition resulting from a vitamin A deficiency, which is characterized by a reduced ability to see in dim light.

**nutrient.** A chemical substance in food that helps maintain the body.

**nutrition.** The study of how the body uses the nutrients in foods.

**osteoporosis.** A condition resulting from a calcium deficiency, which is characterized by porous, brittle bones.

**pellagra.** A disease resulting from a niacin deficiency, which is characterized by a raw and inflamed skin rash, abdominal pain, diarrhea, dementia, and paralysis.

**peristalsis.** Waves of muscle contractions that push food through the digestive tract.

**phytochemical.** A compound from plants that is active in the human body.

**protein.** One of the six basic types of nutrients that is required for growth, repair, and maintenance of every body cell.

**protein-energy malnutrition (PEM).** A condition that may result from a diet that does not contain enough protein and calories.

**rickets.** A disease resulting from a vitamin D deficiency, which is characterized by crooked legs and misshapen breast bones in children.

**saliva.** A mucus- and enzyme-containing liquid secreted by the mouth that makes food easier to swallow and begins to break down starches.

**scurvy.** A disease resulting from a vitamin C deficiency, which is characterized by bleeding gums, loss of teeth, and internal bleeding.

**trace element.** A mineral needed in the diet in amounts less than 100 milligrams per day.

**trans fatty acid.** A fatty acid with an odd molecular shape that is created in hydrogenated oils and found naturally in dairy products, beef, and lamb.

**vitamin.** One of the six basic types of nutrients that is a complex organic substance needed by the body in small amounts for normal growth, maintenance, and reproduction.

**water-soluble vitamin.** A vitamin that dissolves in water and is not stored in the body to any great extent.