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Chapter 2: Nutrients: The Building Blocks of Health—Glossary

amino acids. The smaller units that combine to form proteins

antioxidants. Special nutrients and other substances that protect the body's cells from damage that can be caused by oxygen.

calcium. A nutrient needed to build bones and teeth, transmit nerve signals, and contract muscles.

calorie. A measure of the energy value of food.

carbohydrate. A nutrient that provides energy. It is found in every food of plant origin. Sugars, starch, and fiber are types of carbohydrates.

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

complete protein. Food of animal origin that contains all the amino acids needed by the body.

Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs). A set of guidelines for the amounts of nutrients needed each day.

dietitian. A nutrition expert.

fat. A nutrient that provides energy. Fats are found in foods of both plant and animal origin.

fat-soluble vitamin. Vitamin that dissolves in fat.

fiber. A plant-based carbohydrate that humans cannot digest and does not furnish calories.

follic acid. Sometimes called *folate*, this B-vitamin is used to build strong, healthy blood and is needed to fight infections. This vitamin also helps prevent brain and spine birth defects.

free radicals. A form of oxygen created when the body burns calories.

functional foods. Foods rich in phytonutrients.

gram. A measure of weight.

hydrogenation. The process that turns an unsaturated fat into a saturated one.

incomplete protein. Food of plant origin that contains most, but not all, of the amino acids needed by the body.

iron. A nutrient found in red blood cells. Its job is to carry oxygen to body cells and remove carbon dioxide.

iron deficiency anemia. A common disease caused by a low intake of iron.

minerals. Types of nutrients that are inorganic substances needed in small amounts by the body to function, grow, and repair itself.

neural tube defects. Brain and spine birth defects.

nutrient supplement. Product used to add nutrients to the diets of people who are sick, injured, or known to have a nutrient deficiency.

omega-3 fats. A type of unsaturated fat that provides many important health benefits.

osteoporosis. A disease resulting from a lack of calcium in the diet that causes bones to wear away, become brittle, and break easily.

phytonutrients. Compounds that work together with vitamins, minerals, and fiber to promote good health.

protein. A type of nutrient needed for growth and repair of the body. Proteins are made of amino acids.

Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA). Level of nutrient that meets the needs of most (97 to 98 percent) individuals.

saturated fat. A type of fat that causes the levels of fats and cholesterol in the blood to rise higher than normal.

sodium. A mineral that performs many vital functions, such as maintaining the body's water balance, helping muscles relax, and helping nerves transmit messages to the brain.

spina bifida. A condition in which the spine did not close normally during fetal development.

starch. A type of carbohydrate stored in plants. It must be broken down by the body before it can be used as an energy source.

sugar. A type of carbohydrate that furnishes calories but no other nutrient. It is used by the body as an energy source.

trans fat. The type of saturated fat formed by hydrogenation. Small amounts are found in dairy products and some meats.

unsaturated fat. A type of fat that does not cause blood fat and cholesterol levels to rise.

upper limit of safety. The highest level of vitamins and minerals you can safely take.

vitamins. Types of nutrients that are organic substances needed in small amounts by the body to function, grow, and repair itself.

vitamin C. A vitamin that helps the body heal wounds and keeps gums healthy.

water-soluble vitamin. Vitamin that dissolves in water.

zinc. A mineral needed for normal body growth and repair.