

The Food Chain

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All animals get their energy from the food they eat. Some animals eat plants and they are called **herbivores**. Some eat meat, and they are called **carnivores**. Humans and some other animals are **omnivores**. This means that they eat both plants and meat. But all animals are part of the **food chain** regardless of what kind of food they eat. What is the food chain? The food chain is the system that connects how all living things get their food. The system shows how every living organism feeds off other organisms in order to survive and how this keeps populations and ecosystems balanced.

Plants are called **producers** because they produce, or make, their own food. They use energy from the sun to make food through a process called **photosynthesis**.



Primary consumers are animals that do not produce their own food. Primary consumers feed off the producers. An example of a primary consumer is a squirrel that eats nuts and seeds.

Carnivores are **secondary consumers**, and they feed off the primary consumers. Secondary consumers are meat eaters. A lion is a secondary consumer because it eats animals such as zebra, which is a consumer that feeds on grasses.



Humans and other omnivores are called **tertiary consumers**. They are the third level of consumers because they eat both primary and secondary consumers and producers. They can eat both plants (producers) and meat (consumers). Bears are another example of **omnivores**. They have eating habits similar to those of a human because they eat plants as well as fish.

So, what eats the tertiary consumers? When humans, animals and plants die they become food for the decomposers. **Decomposers** are organisms, such as bacteria and fungi, that break down dead organic materials into nutrients that are then used by the producers as they make their own food.

Have you ever seen a picture of the food chain? Do you know why it is called the food chain? Every animal in the food chain is connected to other animals in the food chain. They feed and survive off each other. What happens to the chain if an animal becomes **extinct** or **endangered**? When an animal's population shrinks from its usual size to very, very small, it can cause a collapse in the chain. For example, if a species of frogs becomes extinct, the birds that fed on the frogs may not have enough food to eat. This may, in turn, cause the birds to become endangered. The animal that eats the birds will not have enough food either. Every living thing plays an important role in the food chain. No matter how small an animal is they affect the existence of many more animals.