

Every organism needs to obtain energy in order to live. For example, plants get energy from the sun, some animals eat plants, and some animals eat other animals.

A food chain is the sequence of who eats whom in an ecosystem to obtain nutrition. A food chain starts with the primary energy source. The next link in the chain is an organism that make its own food from the primary energy source -- an example is a photosynthetic plants that make their own food from sunlight using a process called photosynthesis. These are **primary producers**. They depend on **abiotic factors (not living)** such as water, soil, temperature and climate. **Biotic factors (living)** are things that depend on animal life, human activity and vegetation.

Next come organisms that eat the plants; these organisms are called **herbivores** or **primary consumers** -- an example is a rabbit that eats grass.

The next link in the chain is animals that eat herbivores - these are called **secondary consumers** -- an example is a snake that eat rabbits. In turn, these animals are eaten by larger predators -- an example is an owl that eats snakes.

Trophic Levels:

The trophic level of an organism is the position it holds in a food chain.

1 Primary producers (organisms that make their own food from sunlight and are the base of every food chain - these organisms are called **autotrophs**).

2 Primary consumers are animals that eat primary producers; they are also called **herbivores** (plant-eaters).

3 Secondary consumers eat primary consumers. They are **carnivores** (meat-eaters) and **omnivores** (animals that eat both animals and plants).

4 Tertiary consumers eat secondary consumers.

5 Quaternary consumers eat tertiary consumers.

Food chains "end" with top predators, animals that have little or no natural enemies.

A network of many food chains is called a food web.

