

Plant-based Diet Guidelines

A plant-based diet is made up of mostly plant foods: vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes (lentils, dried beans, and peas), nuts, and seeds. These foods provide the body with fibre, vitamins, minerals, and phytochemicals while usually being lower in calories than other types of foods. Animal foods like skinless poultry, lean meat, and low-fat dairy may make up a smaller amount of the foods eaten in a plant-based diet.

There are many advantages to a plant-based diet. It can lower your risk of chronic diseases like heart disease and cancer, help manage your weight, and improve your overall health.

This handout provides ways to include more plant foods in your diet.



Steps you can take

When it comes to thinking about how to follow a plant-based diet, you may find the “plate model” a helpful tool to understand the types and amounts of foods to eat. The plate model divides the plate into four quarters.

Plate model for eating

Fill two quarters (1/2) of your plate with a variety of non-starchy vegetables and fruits.

- Include different coloured non-starchy vegetables and fruits every day. For example:
 - Dark green Swiss chard, bok choy, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, rapini, spinach, arugula, romaine and kale;
 - Orange carrots, oranges, cantaloupe and squash;
 - Red tomatoes, watermelon, strawberries, apples and peppers;
 - Purple grapes, eggplant, beets, cherries, and blueberries;
 - Yellow peppers, yellow wax beans, and spaghetti squash; and
 - White cauliflower, onions, and garlic.

- Choose fresh, frozen, or canned fruit instead of juice. Fruit has more fibre and is more satisfying and filling than juice. If you drink fruit juice, limit yourself to no more than 125 mL (½ cup) per day.

Note: Potatoes, yams, corn, and sweet potatoes are starchy vegetables and are included in the plate ¼ for whole grains or other starchy foods.

Tips to help you eat more vegetables:

- Make a vegetable stir-fry and serve with a small amount of cooked chicken, tofu, scrambled egg, nuts or seafood on top of brown rice or buckwheat noodles.
- Add extra veggies like tomato, shredded carrots, avocado, cucumber and sliced peppers to sandwiches.
- Have a plate of prepared raw veggies available for snacking.
- Add chopped red and green peppers, mushrooms, onions, and zucchini, along with greens, like spinach, kale, or arugula, to scrambled eggs.
- Use pre-washed or pre-cut vegetables to save time. These vegetables are ready to be quickly steamed, tossed into a salad, or packed to go for lunch.
- Start your meal with a salad or vegetable soup.
- Keep frozen vegetables on hand for a quick addition to any meal.
- Add vegetables, such as grated carrots or zucchini, to muffins and quick breads.
- Roast a big batch of mixed vegetables that you can use for a few meals. Serve them with a barley pilaf and poached salmon; toss with whole wheat penne, chickpeas and tomato sauce; puree and make a soup; or use them as a filling in a wrap.

Tips to help you eat more fruit

- Make a fruit-based smoothie: blend a banana with frozen berries, low-fat yogurt, and a liquid like milk, water, or soy beverage.
- Add fresh or frozen berries to homemade bran muffins. Try blueberries, chopped strawberries, raspberries, or blackberries.
- Choose larger pieces of fruit. These are often equal to two servings.

- Have fresh fruit or fruit salad available for snacking and dessert.
- Top romaine or spinach salads with fruit. Pear, papaya, unsweetened dried fruit, fresh apple, and orange all work well.
- Serve a vegetable or fruit salsa with grilled fish or chicken.
- Mix yogurt with chopped fresh fruit for a snack.
- Add fresh, frozen, or dried fruit to your whole grain, unsweetened breakfast cereal.

Use one quarter (¼) of your plate for starchy vegetables and whole grains.

- Starchy vegetables include potatoes, yams, corn, and sweet potatoes.
- When choosing grains, make most of them whole grains. Examples of whole grains include quinoa, oats, whole rye, corn, brown rice, barley, bulgur, spelt, whole wheat, and millet.
- Check the ingredient list of foods to decide if it is made with whole grains. A whole grain will be the first ingredient in a whole grain food. Look for words like whole grain barley, oats, brown rice, wheat berries, millet, whole-grain rye, cracked wheat or bulgur, quinoa or spelt, cornmeal, or whole grain flours.
- Limit the amount and how often you eat refined and processed grain products such as white bread, white pasta, cakes, pastries, cookies made with white flour, and white rice.

Note: Enriched wheat flour and unbleached flour are not whole grains and are low in fibre.

Tips to help you eat more whole grains:

- Start the day with whole grain porridge made with oats, amaranth, millet, teff or another whole grain.
- Use brown rice, barley or quinoa instead of white rice or noodles in soups and stews.
- Try a whole grain salad like quinoa or Tabouli made with bulgur.
- Serve barley, brown rice or quinoa as a side dish.

- If your favourite cold cereal is not whole grain, mix it with one that is.

Note: Many ready-to-eat breakfast cereals, granola bars, flavoured instant oatmeal, muffins, and other baked goods contain high amounts of hidden fat, salt and added sugars. These foods are often made from refined, not whole, grains and can be high in calories. Enjoy them as a sweet treat in moderation rather than something you eat every day.

Fill the last quarter (¼) of your plate with plant-based protein foods more often than meat and poultry.

- Eat a variety of plant-based protein-rich foods like tofu, legumes, seeds, nuts, and their butters. Examples of legumes include kidney beans, red and green lentils, split peas, chickpeas, black beans, navy beans, and black-eye peas.
- When choosing meat, poultry or seafood, think of it as a garnish rather than the centerpiece of the meal.
- For plant-based recipe ideas, try vegetarian and Mediterranean Diet cookbooks and other cuisines that include plenty of plant foods in their traditional cooking (e.g. Indian, Jamaican, Israeli).

Tips to help you eat more plant-based protein foods:

- Soak and cook dried beans or lentils when you have time, or use canned beans as a quick and healthy alternative. Rinse canned beans to reduce sodium (salt) and gas producing carbohydrates.
- Serve a bean dip, such as hummus, with raw vegetables for an appetizer or snack.
- Have a bean-based vegetarian meal weekly, and then work towards eating vegetarian meals several times a week. Try bean or lentil-based soups, vegetable stir-fries with tofu, or bean burritos.
- Use legumes or tofu to make dishes that usually have meat. For example, start by replacing part of the beef in a pasta sauce or chili with beans or lentils. Gradually decrease the meat while adding more beans. Some dishes may become meatless and others may have a combination of beans and meat, such as spaghetti sauce made with half soybean curd and half hamburger.
- Sprinkle chopped nuts or seeds on salads or hot cooked cereals.

- Try new recipes for salads, soups or casseroles using beans and lentils.



Additional Resources

Build a healthy meal: use the Eat Well Plate www.healthycanadians.gc.ca/eating-nutrition/healthy-eating-saine-alimentation/tips-conseils/interactive-tools-outils-interactifs/eat-well-bien-manger-eng.php

Dietitian Services Fact Sheets available by mail (call **8-1-1**) or at www.healthlinkBC.ca/healthy-eating:

- Healthy Eating Guidelines for Cancer Prevention: Diet and Cancer Prevention Basics www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthy-eating/cancer-prevention-eating-guidelines

Call **8-1-1** to get a copy of the Dietitian Services Fact Sheet below:

- Lifestyle Steps for a Healthier You

American Institute of Cancer Research - Healthy Recipes
www.aicr.org/can-prevent/healthy-recipes

Heart & Stroke Foundation - Recipes & Meal Plans
etools.heartandstroke.ca/HeartStroke/HWAP2/Recipes.aspx

Cookspiration <http://cookspiration.com>

Canadian Lentils www.lentils.ca/recipes-cooking/recipes

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