

GET BALANCED NOW

Simple and delicious
ways to promote good
health with food



INSIDE



what, why, and how
to get balanced now



get started with our
easy self-assessment



simple balanced recipes,
menus & shopping lists



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WELCOME

If you're looking for guidance on how to achieve a balanced way of eating that promotes wellbeing, prevents chronic disease, and is easy to follow, then you've come to the right place. Here at Balanced our goal is to make truly healthy eating accessible to everyone through our community-based advocacy work and our freely available nutrition education materials.

Our approach to food and nutrition is rigorously evidence-based, yet surprisingly simple and always delicious.

In this resource, you will find:

- a quick and accurate assessment of your dietary baseline
- a snapshot of the evidence base supporting a plant-forward outlook of balanced eating
- practical steps on how to shift your diet in favor of balance
- three balanced recipes with handy shopping lists plus a list of healthy plant-based protein swaps
- and answers to frequently asked questions about plant-rich eating

While this resource is intended to educate and help people make informed dietary decisions for themselves and their families; it does not constitute medical advice or substitute for a consultation with a dietitian.

Be sure to seek the appropriate healthcare expertise for your individual health concerns!



SELF ASSESSMENT

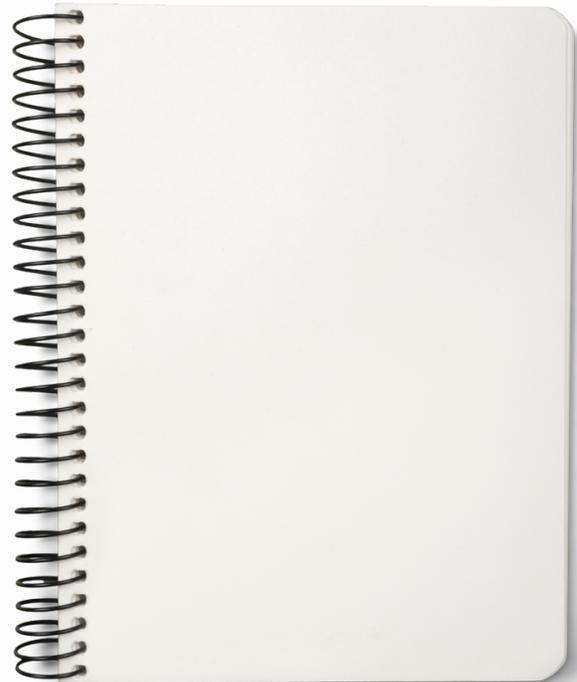
How healthy is your current diet *really*?

It's a difficult question to answer objectively without all the facts, and most of us tend to believe that we're eating more healthfully than we really are. Disinformation and mixed messages about nutrition don't help either!

That's why we created an incredibly simple, evidence-based tool to help you quickly identify which foods you should consume more or less frequently in order to achieve your optimal balance.

Healthy eating can often seem complicated, but this handy tool will show you how easy it is to tweak your diet in key areas to start eating for better health.

Of course, this self-assessment won't capture all the nuance of your diet. Rather, it provides a snapshot of your dietary baseline, broken down into 10 food categories.



On the next two pages, use your best estimate to circle the answer choice from column 1, 2, or 3 that most closely matches your typical intake for each question.

DID YOU KNOW?!

9 out of 10 Americans don't eat the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables daily?



SELF ASSESSMENT

	COLUMN 1	COLUMN 2	COLUMN 3
<p>Which of the following most closely reflects your intake of grains? (1 serving = 1/2 cup cooked grains, 1 slice of bread, or 1 oz. of dry cereal)</p>	Mostly or exclusively 100% whole grains, at least 3 servings per day	An equal mixture of whole grains and refined grains	Mostly or exclusively refined grains or fewer than 3 servings per day
<p>Which of the following most closely reflects your intake of vegetables? (1 serving = 1/2 cup cooked or 1 cup raw)</p>	3 to 6 servings per day	1 to 2 servings per day	Less than 1 serving per day
<p>Which of the following most closely reflects your intake of fruits? (1 serving = 1 cup raw, such as a large banana or one apple, or 1/2 cup dried)?</p>	3 to 6 servings per day	1 to 2 servings per day	Less than 1 serving per day
<p>Which of the following most closely reflects your intake of legumes? (1 serving = 1/2 cup of cooked beans, chickpeas, or lentils)</p>	4 or more servings per week	1 to 3 servings per week	Less than 1 serving per week
<p>Which of the following most closely reflects your intake of nuts and seeds? (1 serving = 1/4 cup or 1 oz.)</p>	1 to 2 servings per day	3 to 6 servings per week	Less than 3 servings per week

SELF ASSESSMENT

	COLUMN 1	COLUMN 2	COLUMN 3
Which of the following most closely reflects your intake of all meats, including red meat, poultry, and fish? (1 serving = 3 oz.)	Zero to 3 servings per week	4 to 7 servings per week	8 or more servings per week
Which of the following most closely reflects your intake of processed meats?*	Zero to 2 servings per month	1 to 2 servings per week	3 or more servings per week
Which of the following most closely reflects your intake of eggs?	Zero to 2 eggs per week	3 to 5 eggs per week	6 or more eggs per week
Select the options that most closely reflect your intake of dairy products and plant-based dairy alternatives	fortified plant-based milk alternatives, regularly	only drink non-fat or 1%, 3+ servings per day	cheese daily
	non-fat or 1% milk, 1 serving per day	2% milk 1 or more servings per day	full fat milk 1 or more servings per day
Which of the following most closely reflects your intake of highly processed foods?***	Zero to 1 serving per day	2 to 3 servings per day	4 or more servings per day

*Processed meats include, but are not limited to: deli meats, hot dogs, sausage, chicken nuggets and strips, and fish sticks.

**Highly processed foods include, but are not limited to: pastries, donuts, chips, white bread, candy, soft drinks, sugary cereal, canned soup, and crackers

RESULTS

As you may have guessed, Column 1 lists the optimal intake of each food category. Column 2 represents a modestly imbalanced intake, and Column 3 represents more pronounced imbalance.

Depending on the food category, imbalance may be the result of overconsumption or underconsumption. Perhaps you're eating too many processed meats and not enough legumes, for example.

If you selected answer choices from Columns 2 or 3, you can easily compare your current intake with the more optimal intake outlined in Column 1.

The good news is that balancing your meals and menus doesn't have to be hard!

To get started, all you have to do is pick a category in which you want to get closer to Column 1, then use it as a reference when planning your meals, menus, and grocery lists.

In the following sections, we'll show you why and how to bridge the gaps between your current diet and more health-promoting ways of eating that suit your tastes and preferences.



DEFINING BALANCE

With all the food marketing etc it is hard to know what a balanced diet really is.

In a world where the media messages conflict one another and big food industries write our public policy, it is only natural that we have such a skewed and confused sense of which foods are healthy and how we should construct our diets.

Cutting through the fluff from advertisers, industry talking points, and poorly designed nutrition research, a clearer image appears—one that is probably more intuitive than you realize.

According to the best science, a balanced diet is one in which whole plant foods abound. If 90% or more of your diet is composed of 100% whole grains, legumes, vegetables, fruits, and nuts and seeds, you're very likely eating in balance.

To break it down even further, roughly half of your plate at every meal should be composed of fruits and/or vegetables. Another quarter or so you should dedicate to whole grains. The rest of the plate is typically a richer protein source, preferentially from legumes, nuts, and seeds. Animal-source proteins, such as meat or eggs, make good occasional sources of protein at no more than four or five meals per week. In any case, animal proteins should not be the focal point of any given meal, except perhaps for rare or special occasions.

Of course, this model is a bit simplistic, and there's much more flexibility at your disposal than it implies. In the How To Get Balanced section, we'll delve further into detail on that point. For now, let's turn to a bit of the science behind our concept of balance.



HEALTH- PROMOTING FOODS



Centering your diet around whole grains, legumes, fruits, vegetables, and nuts and seeds is one of the best things you can do for your health.

All whole plant-source foods make a number of important contributions to our health. They contain biologically active “phytochemicals” that play a range of health-supporting roles, they are a rich source of vitamins and minerals that are essential for the body, and they contain dietary fiber. The antioxidants and key nutrients these foods provide help combat the damaging effects of the many internal and external sources of inflammation that, over time, lead to chronic disease and poor health.

Fiber is a particularly important nutrient.

Unfortunately, the average American consumes only half the amount of fiber needed to maintain good health.

Research demonstrates that individuals consuming the most fiber are significantly less likely to die from cardiovascular diseases and many cancers, particularly colorectal cancer. Dietary fiber from whole foods is also linked to improvements in blood cholesterol levels, immune function, blood sugar control, and insulin sensitivity and has a general anti-inflammatory effect on the body. Higher fiber intakes are also protective against weight gain, obesity, and constipation. Moreover, fiber not only helps bind and flush out excess cholesterol and hormones, it fosters growth of beneficial gut bacteria that have positive health impacts on the entire body.

DID YOU KNOW?!

97% of Americans are fiber-deficient!
Only 3% consume the recommended amount daily.



DISEASE-LINKED FOODS

While we all have a right to eat the foods we enjoy, we should first know all the risks and benefits of the foods we eat to make informed dietary decisions that will directly affect our short- and long-term health.

Regularly consuming saturated fats, high-cholesterol foods, and highly-refined or “ultra-processed” packaged foods entails significant negative health consequences that can otherwise be prevented through modest but impactful shifts in our diets. We've broken down how certain parts of our diets lay the foundation for disease in the brief explanations below.



Saturated Fat

The more saturated fat a person consumes, particularly from animal products and tropical oils, the greater that person's LDL or “bad” cholesterol will be, putting that individual at increased risk for heart disease, heart attacks, and stroke. Such cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases are leading causes of death in the United States.

The process of disease development occurs on a daily basis over a period of decades, ultimately manifesting later in life as cardiovascular disease, pain, and eventually premature death.

The USDA Dietary Guidelines for Americans advise that saturated fat intake be less than 10% of daily calories and preferably less than 7%, with further reductions conferring additional health benefits. Replacing animal-source and tropical fats with whole sources of plant fats, such as avocados or walnuts, will significantly reduce the risk of developing and dying from cardiovascular diseases.

DID YOU KNOW?!

Ultra-processed foods contribute almost 60% of calories and 90% of added sugars consumed in the USA



DISEASE-LINKED FOODS

Cholesterol

Cholesterol is a waxy substance found exclusively in animal-source foods. While cholesterol is essential to our health, our bodies produce all that we need, making food sources of cholesterol unnecessary.

Although taking in cholesterol from food only modestly raises our blood cholesterol numbers, it is still harmful when consumed regularly and at the high levels of intake most Americans have.

Dietary cholesterol becomes dangerous in its oxidized form, which is produced naturally through cooking and normal metabolic processes in the body after ingestion. Oxidized cholesterol, or “cholesterol oxidation products,” are likely involved in both initiation and progression of numerous chronic diseases, including atherosclerosis, neurodegenerative disease, kidney failure, and diabetes. Moreover, cholesterol intake, a general indicator of animal product consumption, has also been associated with greater risk of **numerous cancers, including stomach, pancreas, colon, rectum, kidney, bladder, breast, and lung cancers and non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma.**

Sodium

Sodium is yet another essential nutrient for which overconsumption leads to dangerous and often deadly health risks. Consumption of high-sodium meals results in damage throughout the circulatory system, in the stiffening and constriction of blood vessels, and in impaired blood flow—all of which characterize the initial development of atherosclerosis.



Research has implicated our high-salt diets in a number of autoimmune and inflammatory conditions, including **asthma, multiple sclerosis, type 1 diabetes, and rheumatoid arthritis**, among many others. In the American diet, the largest sources of sodium come from processed and prepared foods containing meat and cheese, as well as from refined grains and processed meats.

DISEASE-LINKED FOODS

Ultra-processed foods

The highly palatable, non-satiating, and convenient nature of ultra-processed foods easily leads to overconsumption, ultimately displacing in our diets the health-promoting whole foods that contain fiber, antioxidants, vitamins, minerals, and other essential nutrients for our health.

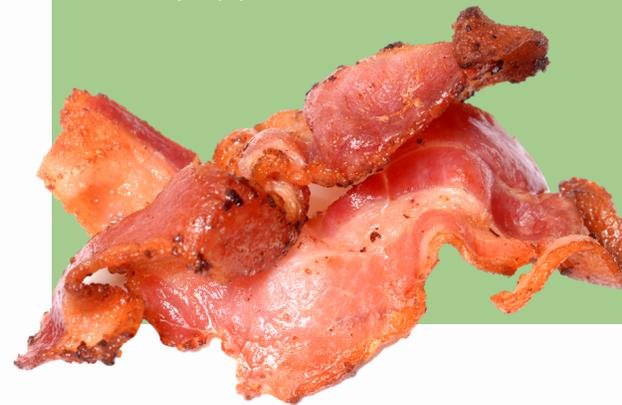
This fact in part explains the link between ultra-processed foods and higher mortality rates from virtually all causes.

Processed meats

Processed meats—those salted, cured, smoked, and/or treated with nitrate-containing preservatives—are especially dangerous to health and have been **categorized by the World Health Organization as a Group I carcinogen**. The nitrosamines present in these meats increase the risk of numerous cancers, especially those of the digestive tract.

EXAMPLES

- Frozen prepared foods like chicken nuggets, pizzas, and fish sticks
- Pastries, donuts, candy
- “Junk food” like chips, crackers, and cookies
- Processed meats like bacon, deli meat, and pepperoni



Any of these foods and nutrients can still be present in a balanced diet; it is simply a question of “how much” and “how often.”

Our simplest advice: keep saturated fat intake to 7% or less of your daily caloric intake, and preferably from plant-based sources like nuts, seeds, or extra virgin olive oil. Avoid trans fats, also known as hydrogenated oils, as much as possible; they are found in many ultraprocessed foods and naturally occur in meat and dairy. Keep sodium intake to 1500 milligrams per day or less. Consume refined products sparingly and not as entire meals, and completely avoid processed meats if possible.

WHY BALANCE MATTERS

Diet-related diseases are the leading causes of death among Americans, who are now living shorter, sicker lives than they were just five years ago. The fall in women's life expectancy in particular is largely due to women dying at younger ages from the usual diet-related diseases, especially heart disease.



Unfortunately, for both men and women, the death rates have gone up from multiple diet-related illnesses, including diabetes, stroke, and Alzheimer's disease.



The average American's lifetime risk for developing cancer is close to one in two — not much better than a coin toss; moreover, the lifetime risk of dying from cancer is an alarming one in five.

Heart disease remains our nation's deadliest killer, and advances in modern medicine are no longer improving the survival rate. Similarly, while cancers can have multiple causes, all cancers are impacted to some degree by dietary choices, and many originate in our diets and disease-promoting food environments.

By several metrics, the health of children and young adults is also in decline. Thirty-five percent of children ages two to 19 are overweight while about 20% are obese.

In turn, childhood obesity quadruples the risk of type 2 diabetes before age 25; in case it bears repeating, type 2 diabetes is a leading cause of death in the United States.

Imbalanced diets not only cause deadly chronic illnesses, but they also impair our immune function, exacerbating inflammatory conditions like asthma and leading to more deaths from infectious diseases like COVID-19. For these reasons and more, it has never been more critical to follow a more balanced dietary pattern that maximizes health-boosting foods, yet still allows us to keep our favorite disease-linked foods within reasonable limits.

GET BALANCED NOW

After reviewing the discrepancies between your current diet and a more balanced pattern, you probably have a clearer picture of:

- 1 what you aren't eating enough of
- 2 what you should consider cutting down on, and
- 3 some of the science explaining *why*.

The only thing left to understand is how to bridge those dietary gaps in a way that you find ***delicious, satisfying, and motivating***.

Before we break down what a balanced breakfast, lunch, and dinner can look like, here are a few simple guidelines to try out immediately for better health:

- Make all or nearly all your grains 100% whole. These include breads, pastas, noodles, rice, baked goods, and more.
- Dedicate half your plate at lunch and dinner to vegetables and fruits.
- Replace half of your highly processed packaged snacks with whole foods.
- Swap out half the animal proteins (meat, dairy, and eggs) you eat each week for plant-based proteins (see pg. ___ for a list of swaps)
- Replace all solid fats (like butter or coconut oil) with whole, plant-derived sources of fat like nut butters, avocado, or seeds. Oils like extra virgin olive oil are also better alternatives.
- Concerning dairy, milk, and soft drinks, choose lowest-fat, lowest-sugar options.

Following each of these steps alone can make a huge difference in your health but work optimally when followed all together.

To get a feel for how these guidelines can be incorporated into your diet in diverse, exciting ways, check out the next few pages for breakfast, lunch, and dinner meal ideas!



BREAKFAST

A healthy breakfast can take many forms, but in general, you'll want something that provides plenty of energy and is also filling and satisfying enough to get you through your morning.

Whatever you choose, be sure to include complex carbohydrates and fiber, and try to avoid refined grains and added sugars, such as those found in sugary breakfast cereals, pastries, and granola bars. Likewise, avoid high-saturated fat, high-cholesterol foods, like bacon, sausage, and eggs. Here are just a few healthy, delicious recipe ideas with customizable add-ons to power you all morning long.



STEEL-CUT OR OLD-FASHIONED OATS OR OVERNIGHT OATS

Topped with

- Chopped walnuts
- Stewed blueberries
- Sliced banana
- Fresh raspberries or blackberries
- Chopped apple & cinnamon
- Raisins
- Chia seeds
- Fresh mango
- Ground flax seed
- Almond butter or peanut butter

BROWN RICE BREAKFAST PORRIDGE

Topped with

- Chopped toasted almonds
- Coconut flakes
- Cardamom or nutmeg
- Finely chopped pistachio
- Fresh figs
- Banana chips
- Cocoa or carob powder
- Cacao nibs
- Cinnamon, agave & vanilla
- Hemp seeds
- Toasted pecans

UNSWEETENED BRAN FLAKES WITH NONDAIRY MILK

Topped with

- Sliced almonds
- Chopped dates
- Raisins
- Sliced banana
- Sliced strawberries
- Pumpkin seeds
- Ground flax seed



BREAKFAST

100% WHOLE GRAIN PANCAKES, WAFFLES, MUFFINS, OR BREADS

For Batter

- Berries
- Rolled oats
- Chopped walnuts
- Dark or semisweet chocolate chips
- Dried fruit
- Flax seed (in place of egg)
- Shredded carrot or zucchini
- Warm spices
- Banana
- Nut butters
- Pumpkin puree

Toppings

- Peanut butter or other nut butter
- Stewed berries
- Sliced banana
- Shredded toasted-coconut
- Fresh strawberries
- Fresh peaches
- Cocoa-sweetened hummus
- Avocado
- Agave-sweetened soft-tofu

100% WHOLE GRAIN BAGELS

Topped with

- Hummus
- Avocado
- Sesame seeds
- Muhammara
- Herbed bean puree
- Chopped dill
- Tomato
- Toun
- Tahini and lemon
- Oregano
- Nut-based cheese
- Cashew butter
- Sliced strawberries
- Balsamic vinegar
- Roasted peppers
- Chopped sun-dried tomatoes
- Cooked peas
- Basil pesto
- Sautéed mushrooms and greens
- Caponata
- Dijon or sweet mustard
- Tomato sauce
- Guacamole
- Soft tofu
- Preserves
- Olive tapenade
- Capers
- Caramelized onions
- Baba ganoush
- Salsa
- Roasted butternut squash puree



BREAKFAST

TOFU SCRAMBLE WITH AVOCADO TOAST

Topped with

- Red onion
- Garlic
- Peppers
- Cilantro
- Chives
- Green onions
- Tomato
- Nutritional yeast
- Black salt (kala namak)
- Chile powder
- Cumin
- Smoked paprika
- Spinach
- Arugula
- Black or kidney beans
- Crumbled plant-based chorizo
- Salsa
- Lime juice

OVEN-BAKED HOME FRIES

Roast With

- Onions
- Peppers
- Squash
- Asparagus
- Herbs
- Garlic
- Rosemary
- Thyme

Pair With

- Sautéed garlicky greens
- Baked beans
- Stewed tomatoes
- Plant-based sausage
- Avocado toast
- Sautéed string beans
- Fresh herbs
- Curried ketchup

BREAKFAST FRUIT AND NUT SMOOTHIES

Try these combinations

- Banana, frozen blueberries, basil, walnuts, water or plant milk
- Banana, frozen mango, greens (kale or spinach), fresh ginger, water or plant milk
- Frozen mango, frozen raspberries, avocado, lime juice, water or plant milk
- Banana, frozen strawberries, raw cashews, mint, water or plant milk
- Frozen banana, peanut butter, cocoa powder, water or plant milk

Top with

- Ground flax seeds
- Chia seeds
- Hemp seeds



LUNCH & DINNER

For your other meals of the day, try to incorporate 100% whole grains, plant proteins (e.g., nut butters, legumes), fruits, and vegetables. Ideally, at least three-quarters of your plate will be composed of plant-source foods, with half the plate dedicated to vegetables and/or fruits. It is a simple formula that affords endless flexibility and variety. Below are three easy recipes that you can use to start getting balanced right away!



Simple and filling avocado sandwich

Ingredients

- 1 small ripe avocado (or half a large avocado)
- 1 medium tomato
- 1 handful of arugula or spinach
- 2 slices of 100% whole wheat sandwich bread, toasted
- 1-2 dashes of dried oregano
- 1 small garlic clove
- 1-2 tbsp hummus
- 1 sprinkling of mild cheese (optional)
- 1 tsp extra virgin olive oil (optional)

Directions

1. Slice the tomato into thick rounds, then place on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper.
2. Slice the avocado into thin slices.
3. Peel the garlic. Set aside.
4. Put your slices of bread into a toaster and toast until your desired level of brownness.
5. Turn on the oven broiler and position your sheet of tomato slices just beneath it. Watch closely to prevent them from burning; it will likely take only a couple minutes. Take out when finished.
6. When your toast is finished, rub the small peeled garlic clove over one side of each slice while they are still warm.
7. On one slice, spread the hummus. On the other, sprinkle the oregano and drizzle with olive oil, if using.
8. Assemble the rest of the sandwich with the greens, avocado slices, broiled tomato, and crumbled cheese, if using.
9. Serving recommendations: cut at a diagonal and serve with a small bowl of balsamic vinegar for dipping and a side of your favorite fresh fruit.

DID YOU KNOW?!

The vitamins, minerals, and healthy fats you get from avocados help prevent disease.



LUNCH & DINNER



Rainbow Grain Salad

Ingredients (serves 6-8)

Adapted from Martha Shulman's recipe for NYT Cooking.

- 1 cup of your favorite grain, uncooked (e.g., quinoa, whole wheat couscous, or brown rice)
- 1 cup of your favorite leafy vegetable, packed, chopped (e.g., bib lettuce, kale)
- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup mixed dried fruits, chopped (e.g., cranberries, dates, apricots, currants, figs)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped cilantro
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped mint
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped fresh parsley
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup toasted pistachios, chopped $\frac{1}{4}$ cup toasted almonds, chopped
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup walnuts, chopped
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup fresh lemon juice
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tsp lemon zest
- 1 garlic clove, minced or grated
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp pomegranate molasses (or other liquid sweetener)
- Salt and black pepper to taste

Directions

1. Cook your chosen grain according to the package instructions. Transfer to a large bowl and let cool until warm.
2. Meanwhile, whisk together the lemon juice, lemon zest, olive oil, salt, pepper, garlic, cinnamon, and molasses in a small bowl.
3. Toss the warm grains with the lemon-oil dressing.
4. Check the seasoning and adjust as needed.
5. Add remaining ingredients.
6. Serve immediately, or refrigerate in an airtight container and serve cold.

DID YOU KNOW?!

A diet rich in whole grains has been shown to reduce the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity, and some forms of cancer.



LUNCH & DINNER



Chana Dal with Spinach and Brown Basmati Rice

Ingredients (serves 4)

Adapted from Julie Sahni's recipe for NYT Cooking.

- 1 cup split chickpeas (chana dal) or brown lentils or other split pea
- ½ cup chopped onion
- 1.5 tsp turmeric powder
- ½ tsp ground cardamom
- 1 bay leaf
- ½ tsp iodized salt, or to taste
- 1-2 tbsp vegetable or olive oil
- 4 large cloves garlic, minced or thinly sliced
- crushed red pepper flakes or cayenne pepper, to taste
- ¼ cup chopped cilantro
- 2-3 cups baby spinach, packed
- 2 cups basmati brown rice

Directions

1. Cook the brown basmati rice according to package directions.
2. In a large saucepan, combine chana dal, onion, turmeric, cardamom, bay leaf, salt, and 4 cups water; bring to boil.
3. Reduce to a simmer and leave partly covered for 40 minutes.
4. Stir occasionally and add more water if the contents become too dry.
5. When the dal is tender, remove from heat.
6. Once cooked and off heat, remove bay leaf.
7. Using an immersion blender or potato masher, puree the dal for about one minute. The consistency should be saucy.
8. In a small saucepan, heat the oil over medium heat and add garlic, stirring constantly until light brown.
9. Stir in chili flakes and turn off heat.
10. Add the oil to the dal, then wilt in spinach and garnish with chopped cilantro.
11. Serve in bowls with a scoop of brown rice.

Serving recommendations: your favorite fresh fruit.

DID YOU KNOW?!

One cup of Chana Dal provides up to 33% of an adult's daily protein needs!



SHOPPING LIST

Now that you've got a few recipe ideas, it's important to make sure you've got the right ingredients to make them. Here's a complete shopping list for the lunch and dinner recipes. This shopping list includes ingredients for 4 servings of the avocado sandwich, 6-8 servings of the grain salad, and 4 servings of the chana dal.

Produce

- 4 small avocados (or 2 large)
- 4 medium tomatoes (or 2 large)
- 1 large or 2 small lemons
- 1 large head of garlic
- 1 medium onion
- 1 small bag of arugula (or another green)
- 1 small bunch of your favorite salad green (kale, bib lettuce, etc.)
- 1 small bag of spinach
- 1 medium bunch of fresh cilantro
- 1 small bunch of fresh mint
- 1 small bunch fresh parsley

Refrigerated and Prepared

- 1 container of plain hummus
- 1 package of mild cheese (if desired for sandwiches)

Spices

- 1 container of oregano
- 1 container of cardamom
- 1 container of cloves
- 1 container of turmeric
- 1 container or bay leaves
- 1 container of red pepper flakes or cayenne pepper

Dry Packaged Goods

- 1 package 100% whole wheat sandwich bread
- 1 container of extra virgin olive oil
- 1 package of your favorite dried grain or short whole wheat pasta (quinoa, brown rice, WG couscous, farro, etc.)
- 1 small package of unshelled pistachios
- 1 small package of almonds (whole, slivered, or sliced)
- 1 package of walnuts (halves or pieces)
- 2-3 packages of different dried fruits (apricots, dates, cranberries, currants, etc.)
- 1 package of split chickpeas (chana dal), can substitute with lentils or other split pea
- 1 package of brown basmati rice
- 1 container or pomegranate molasses (or other liquid sweetener)



HEALTHY PROTEIN SWAPS



Most of our diets are imbalanced in the same way: too many animal-source proteins and ultra-processed food products and not enough fiber-rich legumes, whole grains, and produce. In practice, it's the little swaps that make all the difference - like using whole wheat pasta in place of regular refined pasta, or adding an additional serving of vegetables to your plate while cutting your meat portion in half.

Plant-based proteins from legumes, nuts, seeds, and produce are underutilized, as many people do not realize how easy it is to swap a disease-linked ingredient with a health-boosting plant-based alternative. Try some of these protein swaps when you're looking to balance your menus.

CHICKEN

- Chickpeas
- Hummus
- Falafel
- White beans
- Tofu
- Tempeh,
- Edamame
- Seitan

BEEF OR PORK

- Black beans
- Chickpeas, falafel
- Crumbled tofu or tempeh
- Jackfruit
- Kidney beans
- Lentils
- Seitan
- Textured vegetable protein (TVP)

EGG

For Baked Goods

- Applesauce
- Aquafaba
- Banana
- Chia seeds
- Ground flaxseed
- Pumpkin purée

For Scramble

- Tofu
- Chickpea flour



DAIRY

For Cheese

- Hummus and other bean spreads
- Avocado
- Tahini (cream cheese)
- Blended cashews or other nuts

For Liquid Milk

- Reduced fat coconut milk
- Plant-derived milks and creams, e.g. soy

MAYONNAISE

- Avocado
- Baba ganoush
- Hummus and other bean spreads
- Toux or aioli
- Muhammara or romesco sauce
- Tahini and water or lemon juice

DID YOU KNOW?!

A daily cup of beans, chickpeas, or lentils for three months may slow resting heart rate as much as exercising for 250 hours on a treadmill.

FAQ



DID YOU KNOW?!

According to a study at Yale, 94% of Americans are interested in eating more plant-rich meals.

Q: Can meat, eggs, and dairy be part of a balanced diet?

A: Yes, animal products like meat, eggs, and dairy can be incorporated into a balanced diet—with a few caveats. Should you choose to consume animal products, be sure to select the lowest-fat, lowest-cholesterol options (e.g., lean cuts of meat, low-fat plain yogurt). Keep your servings of meats to 3 ounces or less per meal, roughly equivalent to the size of a deck of cards. Do not exceed more than a few servings of meat per week.

Because eggs are typically very high in cholesterol, it is best to consume them sparingly (e.g., once per week), and boiling and poaching are the healthiest cooking methods. For dairy, choose lowest-fat, unsweetened options, and be wary of the sodium content in cheeses. In general, dairy is best used as a condiment rather than a main or central protein at any meal. If you opt for plant-based milks over cow's milk, be sure to reach for unsweetened varieties that are fortified with nutrients like calcium and vitamin B12.

Q: Will a balanced diet be significantly more expensive than the one I eat now?

A: It depends, but probably not. In fact, most people who switch to a plant-rich diet save money, particularly on proteins. Animal proteins, though heavily subsidized, are generally more expensive per calorie and per gram of protein than plant-based proteins like legumes and whole grains. Moreover, at restaurants, the healthiest and most plant-forward options are also typically the least costly.

Ultimately, investing in your health every single day by consuming a truly balanced diet will prevent a whole host of health-related expenditures in both the short run and long run.

Q: How should I navigate restaurant menus and social gatherings for my health?

A: The good news is that restaurants are realizing plant-rich diets are increasingly popular, and their menus reflect the changing preferences of customers like you! When you do make plans to eat somewhere with fewer plant-rich options, you can “pre-game” beforehand with your own food, order something small, or ask the waiter if the chef can make you a healthier custom order. Where those options aren't possible, don't sweat the one less-healthy meal if your usual, day-to-day diet is balanced.

With respect to social gatherings, many of the same strategies apply. In addition, if you are able to prepare a dish or two to bring to a gathering, doing so will ensure there will be at least one plant-rich item for all to share.



Q: Will I put myself or my family at risk of nutritional deficiencies by switching to a plant-rich diet?

A: If you and your family are regularly consuming a variety of whole grains, legumes, nuts, seeds, fruits, vegetables, and fortified products like soy milk or nutritional yeast, it would be very unlikely to develop nutritional deficiencies. However, there are a few nutrients to be aware of in your diet. The first is vitamin B12, which is not found in unfortified plant-based foods. If you choose not to consume products fortified with B12, you must take a B12 supplement, which are readily available at groceries and pharmacies. Second, be aware of your vitamin D intake. Some brands of plant-based milks are supplemented with vitamin D, and some brown mushrooms available in grocery stores contain vitamin D. Your body can produce all the vitamin D it needs when your skin is regularly exposed to midday sunlight for a period of 10 to 30 minutes, but if you prefer to stay out of the sun, or if the sun is low in wintertime, it is best to take a supplement with a meal containing some fat to enhance absorption,

Finally, ensure your diet contains a consistent source of iodine. Cooking with iodized salt should supply enough iodine for most people. Sea vegetables, like wakame or nori seaweeds, also supply significant quantities of iodine. If you do not like sea vegetables and do not want to add too much salt to your food, you should consider an iodine supplement. As always, consult with your healthcare provider for more guidance on your personal nutritional needs.

Q: How do I get my kids to eat more whole, plant-based foods?

A: Start with the ones they already like, and consistently expose them to ones they don't yet like. Introduce new foods one at a time and pair them with something familiar. Modeling healthy eating in front of children helps kids to self-motivate and be curious about new foods. Moreover, taking the extra step to explain the health benefits and consequences of certain foods encourages kids to make healthy decisions for themselves.

While it's not helpful to pressure children to eat, don't make it a habit to prepare special "kid" meals that differ drastically from the ones the adults are eating. In some cases, cooking the foods they don't like in a different way, using familiar seasonings and preparations, may help take away some of the "scary" novelty of those foods. On the other hand, hiding vegetables, such as by cutting them up smaller, cooking them longer, and blending them, can get kids to eat more healthfully as well. For example, if your child likes fruit smoothies but not greens, toss some spinach into the blender. Finally, starting kids as young as possible while limiting their access to highly palatable foods like sugar-sweetened beverages and ultra-processed/refined foods will help them develop and solidify a preference for whole foods.

For more information on this topic in particular, Kids Eat in Color is a fantastic resource and you can find more information at kidseatincolor.com

Q: Is a plant-rich diet feasible for everyone and every location?

A: For most of us, healthy foods are physically and financially within reach. However, many people lack access to high quality produce, whole grains, legumes, and other essential foods that promote health. Many people simply don't know how to prepare these foods in a way they find palatable. Moreover, unhealthy foods seem to be in overabundance no matter where you go, making healthy choices less convenient by comparison. This is why Balanced continues its advocacy work to improve local food environments in critical community-based institutions.

LEARN MORE

Where can you find more healthy-menu inspiration and recipe ideas?

There are countless food blogs, websites, and YouTube channels with free recipes to suit your preferences, be they for inexpensive, kid-friendly meals or for lavish, labor-intensive culinary creations. Cookbooks centered on plant proteins abound, and low-cost subscription services can help you take the guesswork out of healthy meal prep.:

- The How Not To Die Cookbook, nutritionfacts.org
- Forks Over Knives, www.forksoverknives.com
- New York Times Cooking (subscription required) cooking.nytimes.com
- The Deliciously Ella mobile app (subscription required) deliciouslyella.com/app
- Sweet Potato Soul, sweetpotatosoul.com
- Minimalist Baker, minimalistbaker.com
- The Vegan 8 Cookbook, thevegan8.com
- Naturally Ella, naturallyella.com

How can you get involved in healthy-food advocacy?

Visit Balanced.org to get involved leading the healthy-menu revolution in your community and to learn about other ways to make healthier eating easier for everyone.

Download your free copy of Balanced's Community Advocacy Guide and The Balanced Menu Guide for Food Service Professionals to get started, or visit PlantRichAging.com for tips on eating more plant-rich diets at any age.



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