

Healthy Eating Made Simple

Familiar foods. Easy shopping. Meals you can repeat. No perfection required.

The basic idea

Let whole plant foods do most of the work: vegetables, fruit, beans or lentils, intact whole grains, potatoes or sweet potatoes, plus modest amounts of nuts and seeds. You do not need a special diet vocabulary. Think simply: more foods that still look like the plants they came from, and fewer sugary drinks, refined grains, ultra-processed foods, excess sodium, and foods rich in saturated fat.

Shop with a simple plan

Produce: leafy greens, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, peppers, onions, mushrooms, tomatoes, potatoes, sweet potatoes, apples, bananas, berries and citrus.

Beans & lentils: canned no-salt-added beans, chickpeas, lentils, split peas and edamame. Canned is fine - rinse and use.

Whole grains & starches: oats, brown rice, quinoa, barley, whole-grain pasta, corn tortillas and whole-grain bread.

Freezer helpers: frozen vegetables, berries, cooked grains and shelled edamame. They are nutritious, fast and help prevent waste.

Flavor makers: salsa, mustard, vinegar, lemon or lime, herbs, garlic, ginger, curry, smoked paprika, nutritional yeast, low-sodium tomato sauce, hummus or bean spread.

A smart grocery-cart rule

Spend most of your shopping time around produce, beans and lentils, whole grains, potatoes and the freezer case. Pre-washed greens, frozen vegetables, canned beans and plain microwavable brown rice are perfectly sensible shortcuts.

The one-formula dinner

1 starch or whole grain + 1 bean or lentil + 2 or more vegetables + 1 vivid sauce or seasoning.

- Potato + black beans + broccoli + salsa
- Brown rice + chickpeas + spinach + curry
- Whole-grain pasta + lentils + mushrooms + tomato-basil sauce

Easy meals you can memorize

Breakfast: oatmeal with berries, banana, cinnamon and ground flax; or whole-grain toast with nut or seed butter and fruit.

Lunch: lentil soup + salad + whole-grain toast; a hummus-and-vegetable wrap; quinoa-bean salad; or yesterday's grain bowl.

Dinner: a loaded potato; three-bean chili over sweet potato; vegetable fajitas with pinto beans; or whole-wheat pasta with tomato-mushroom-lentil sauce.

Snacks: fruit, raw vegetables with hummus, edamame, air-popped popcorn, roasted chickpeas or a small handful of nuts.

Fast combinations for busy days

- Oatmeal + berries + ground flax
- Whole-grain toast + nut or seed butter + fruit
- Soup + added beans + whole-grain toast + fruit
- Whole-grain pita + chickpeas + greens + tomato
- Frozen brown rice + edamame + frozen vegetables + salsa

Flavor without fuss

Keep a few bright flavors within reach: lemon or lime, balsamic or rice vinegar, mustard, salsa, fresh herbs, nutritional yeast, smoked paprika, curry powder, za'atar, garlic, ginger and toasted seeds. A simple meal becomes much more inviting when the seasoning is lively.

Emergency meal - under 10 minutes

Microwave a potato or plain frozen brown rice. Add canned beans and frozen vegetables. Top with salsa, mustard, lemon, low-sodium tomato sauce or hummus. Add a piece of fruit and dinner is done.

Remember

You do not need exotic ingredients or perfect recipes. Begin with familiar foods. Make the healthy choice the easy choice. Repeat meals you genuinely enjoy. Progress matters far more than perfection.

Cook Once, Eat Several Times

A little preparation can turn weekday meals into simple assembly instead of nightly cooking.

The 60-minute weekly setup

Pick a convenient hour and make just a few basics:

1. Cook a pot of brown rice, quinoa or another favorite whole grain.
2. Roast two sheet pans of mixed vegetables.
3. Simmer lentils, or rinse and drain several cans of beans.
4. Wash greens, or buy them ready to eat.
5. Mix one flavorful sauce or dressing.

Recombine these into bowls, wraps, soups, salads and stuffed potatoes. **Freeze leftover soups, casseroles, curries, etc. for quick "heat-and-eat" meals.**

A simple 7-day idea bank

Day 1: Oatmeal + berries. Lentil-vegetable soup + salad. Baked potato with black beans, corn, salsa and broccoli.

Day 2: Overnight oats. Chickpea salad pita. Whole-wheat pasta with tomato-mushroom-lentil sauce.

Day 3: Whole-grain toast + white beans + tomato. Quinoa-chickpea bowl. Three-bean chili over sweet potato.

Day 4: Oatmeal + strawberries. Black bean-corn-brown rice bowl. Vegetable fajitas with pinto beans.

Keep on hand

Oats, brown rice, quinoa and whole-grain pasta; beans and lentils; potatoes and sweet potatoes; canned tomatoes and low-sodium tomato sauce; frozen berries, vegetables and edamame; nuts, seeds, herbs and spices.

Three more easy days

Day 5: Berry-banana smoothie bowl. Tomato-white bean soup + hummus sandwich. Red lentil curry + brown rice.

Day 6: Steel-cut oats + pears. Big chopped chickpea salad with warm potatoes. Mushroom-lentil shepherd's pie.

Day 7: Whole-grain pancakes + fruit. Minestrone + salad. Stuffed peppers with quinoa, black beans and vegetables.

Shortcuts that still count as real food

- Frozen vegetables and frozen fruit
- Pre-washed greens and chopped vegetables
- Canned no-salt-added beans
- Plain microwaveable brown rice
- Oil-free hummus or bean spread

Helpful resources

For Fork's Sake - Rachel Brown

The Prevent and Reverse Heart Disease Cookbook - Ann Crile Esselstyn & Jane Esselstyn

The How Not to Die Cookbook - Michael Greger, MD & Gene Stone

Forks Over Knives - The Cookbook - Del Sroufe

Rochester Lifestyle Medicine Institute 15-Day Jumpstart

rochesterlifestylemedicine.org/about-jumpstart

A final word

Healthy eating can be colorful, abundant, satisfying and wonderfully ordinary. The goal is not culinary perfection. It is to build a way of eating that is healthy enough to matter, enjoyable enough to look forward to, and simple enough to live with.

Medication & nutrition safety: If you use insulin, sulfonylureas, blood-pressure medicines or diuretics, improved diet can change medication needs. Monitor as directed and stay in touch with your clinician. A fully plant-based diet requires a reliable vitamin B12 source.