

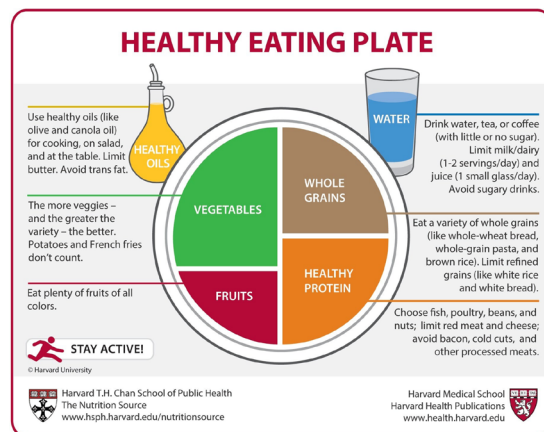
# A PLANT-BASED DIET OFFERS HEALTH BENEFITS

## Eating with the Intention to Thrive

### How to Shop, Cook and Eat Plant-Based

#### What is a Plant-Based Diet?

A plant based diet emphasizes foods like fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, oils, whole grains, legumes and beans. It doesn't mean that you are vegetarian or vegan and never eat meat or dairy. Rather, you are proportionately choosing more of your foods from plant sources. That means meat and seafood don't necessarily need to be off-limits – you might just decide to cut down on how frequently you eat those items.



### HEALTH BENEFITS



Plants have essential nutrients that you cannot get from other foods. The vitamins and minerals, phytochemicals and antioxidants in plants help keep your cells healthy and your body balanced so that your immune system can function at its best. A plant-based diet offers health benefits such as reduced risk of various chronic diseases:

- » Type 2 Diabetes
- » Heart Disease
- » Certain Cancers
- » Hypertension

### HEALTHY EATING PLATE



You can aim for every meal to look like this or you can aim for the food you eat over a day or week to broadly fall into these percentages.

- » Produce should be the star of the plate at every meal.
- » Most of the grains that you eat should be whole grains.
- » You should aim to drink mostly water.
- » Most of your protein should come from lean animal sources or plant based sources.

### EAT THE RAINBOW



One of the easiest ways to add variety is to eat a wide array of colors of fruits and vegetables. This means you are getting benefits from a variety of phytochemicals and antioxidants present in them.

- » Phytochemicals means that different colors provide different benefits. For example, orange produce is often high in vitamin A, while dark green vegetables are high in vitamin K.
- » By eating a colorful variety, you are getting broad nutritional benefits.

## Ways to Get Started



**Eat lots of vegetables:** Fill half your plate with vegetables at lunch and dinner. Make sure you include plenty of colors in choosing your vegetables. Enjoy vegetables as a snack with hummus, salsa or guacamole.



**Change the way you think about meat:** Have smaller amounts. Use it as a garnish instead of a centerpiece.



**Choose good fats:** Fats in olive oil, olives, nuts and nut butters, seeds and avocados are particularly health choices.



**Cook a vegetarian meal at least one night a week:** Build these meals around beans, whole grains, and vegetables.



**Include whole grains for breakfast:** Start with oatmeal, quinoa, buckwheat, or barley. Then add some nuts or seeds along with fresh fruit.



**Go for greens:** Try a variety of green leafy vegetables such as kale, collards, Swiss chard, spinach and other greens each day. Steam, grill, braise or stir-fry to preserve their flavor and nutrients.



**Build a meal around a salad:** Fill a bowl with salad greens such as romaine, spinach, Bibb or red leafy greens. Add an assortment of other vegetables along with fresh herbs, beans, peas or tofu.



**Eat fruit for dessert:** A ripe, juicy peach, a refreshing slice of watermelon or a crisp apple will satisfy your craving for a sweet bite after a meal.

## Protein Sources to Consider

Beans, broccoli, chickpeas, greens, lentils, peanuts, seeds, peas, potatoes, quinoa, seaweed, soy milk, spinach, tempeh, tofu, and edamame.

## Common Plant-Based Approaches (AICR)

Here are a few of the common plant-based diets you may come across. All can be cancer protective.

- » **Flexitarian:** mostly plant foods, but can include dairy, eggs, fish and occasionally meat
- » **Pescatarian:** mostly plant foods but can include dairy, eggs and fish
- » **Vegetarian:** mostly plant foods but can include dairy and/or eggs
- » **Vegan:** only plant foods; no dairy, eggs, fish, seafood, poultry, meat or other animal-derived foods

An important principle to keep in mind for all of these options is to choose whole foods and foods with minimal processing and little added sugar and fat.

### References:

Harvard Health  
<https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/healthy-eating-plate/>

Americas Grow-a-Row  
<https://www.americasgrowarow.org>

American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR)  
<https://www.aicr.org>

### For more information, visit us:



<https://www.hunterdonhealth.org/services/hunterdon-mercero-chronic-disease-coalition>



## Grocery Shopping Tips

As you embark on your new healthy eating path, choose what healthy plant-based diet works best for you. What matters most is to center your meals around plant foods and choose modest portions of animal foods.



# 1

Shop the perimeter of the store. Generally the fruits, vegetables, dairy and protein options are along the outside walls of the store.

# 2

Use your freezer. Stock up on ingredients that you love when they are on sale - most items can be frozen, including breads, cooked grains and fresh herbs.

Frozen and canned fruits and vegetables are a great alternative to fresh produce. Read the labels to avoid added salt, sugar or sauces. Buy low sodium canned beans when possible.

# 3

