

the real dish

with *Lauren*
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Adding *Nutritious* Foods into Your Diet

When we think about how to eat “healthy,” we’re often bombarded with ideas of restriction, like “less sodium,” “no sugar,” or “cut carbs.” Often times, when we focus on cutting things out, all we can think about is what we’re NOT eating. This can lead to a hyperfocus on restricted foods and leave us feeling deprived and uninspired when it comes to meals.

Instead of focusing on cutting out “bad” foods, I like to focus on what we can add to our diet to increase our nutrition. Prioritizing nutritious foods can naturally substitute some foods that we want to eat less of, but more importantly it shows us how to incorporate nutrient-dense foods into our diets, while still allowing some of our favorite treats too. The [healthy diet basics](#), haven’t changed; we still want to incorporate more fruits, vegetables, lean proteins (including [plant-based proteins](#)) and whole grains into our diet. Here are some ideas for how to do that!



For more information, visit:

- myplate.org
- wholegrainscouncil.org

Prioritizing Produce

Vegetables and fruits can be some of the most neglected food items, so they’re always a good place to start. If you are interested in prioritizing produce, I suggest planning meals around them instead of the protein. Starting with “what vegetable(s) will I have?” can make all the difference.





Entree salads are a great way to eat a lot of vegetables at once; but be sure to top with a protein and something starchy so it's satisfying enough to keep you full for a few hours. You can also consider adding a side salad to your lunch and dinner as your go-to default option, whether you're dining out or cooking at home! Make sure to pick a salad dressing you love so it doesn't feel like a chore (and those fats from salad dressing can help absorb fat-soluble vitamins).

If salads aren't your thing, or you need more ideas, consider a crudité platter—raw or lightly steamed vegetables with your [favorite dip](#) doesn't have to be just for parties. A [vegetable soup](#) is also a great way to batch cook on the weekend and have a serving of vegetables each day. Plan a [stir-fry](#) around whatever vegetables are lingering in the fridge at the end of the week. Stock frozen vegetables to use in [casseroles](#), [soups](#) or [side dishes](#). Fill a sheet pan with [vegetables for roasting](#) to use as sides or salad toppers.

Fruit also provides us with lots of antioxidants, vitamins and minerals. Eating fresh fruit seasonally will give you the best flavor and price, but frozen or canned fruit are also great options. Frozen fruit

is just as nutritious as fresh because the fruit is picked at the peak of freshness and then flash-frozen to ensure all the flavor and nutrition is intact. If you are looking for canned fruit, opt for fruit in water or fruit juice to avoid added sugars. Keep in mind that “no added sugar” labels often mean a sugar substitute has been used instead.

Skip the juicing trend and opt for a smoothie instead. Smoothies retain fiber and you can add in yogurt or milk, and flax or chia seeds for some extra protein and fiber to help fill you up and manage your blood sugar. Be mindful if you are buying a smoothie from a cafe as there are often added sugars; you can always ask for no or less added sugar/syrups. While fruit juice does provide some vitamins and minerals, choosing whole fruits will provide more fiber which help reduce the impact on your blood sugar.



What's the best fruit?
The fruits you enjoy eating!

Remember to opt for variety when choosing produce since you'll get a wider variety of nutrients from a range of colorful fruits and vegetables rather than just sticking with a couple of favorites. Eating seasonally can help you naturally add in variety - think berries in the summer, apples in the fall, citrus in the winter.



Whole Grain Goodness

Whole grains are another great food group to add some extra nutrition to your diet. Carbohydrates are often demonized, but grains have a ton of nutritious benefits including fiber, minerals like iron, magnesium and selenium and B vitamins. These nutrients help reduce cholesterol, stabilize our energy levels and help support our immune system.

Whole grains like brown rice, farro or barley make great side dishes, especially for stews or curries that need something to soak up the sauce. Or try them in [soups](#) since whole grains hold up better in liquid. Use leftover grains for [bowls](#) or [grain salads](#).

Think about starting the day with a hearty boost of whole grains. [Oatmeal](#) is a classic, but don't limit yourself to just one grain, try [adding in some quinoa](#) for a little bit of a crunch. Or stir up a bowl of [breakfast farro](#) for a completely different texture.

Batch cooking grains can help you plan for nutritious breakfasts all week. Try [stone-ground grits](#) paired with eggs or shrimp for something savory, or a batch of [nutty granola](#) or [lemony breakfast grains](#) for something sweet. Try out whole wheat bread or pasta. Be sure to check the ingredient list, as names like “multi-grain”



Whole grains include the whole kernel, which includes the bran, germ, and endosperm; whereas refined grains remove the bran and germ.

can sound like they're whole wheat, but are mostly mixture of refined grains. For a whole grain bread or pasta, the first ingredient listed should be “whole wheat flour.” Remember that variety in nutrition is key, so every starch doesn't always have to be a whole grain. Experiment with different grains until you find your favorites and incorporate them regularly.

Pack a Punch with Protein

While most Americans easily get enough protein in their diet, if you have increased needs (like going through cancer treatments or have wounds healing), or are starting to cut back on meat, you might need to be a little more intentional about adding protein to your diet.

Protein is also helpful for balancing our blood sugar, so try pairing a protein with a carbohydrate when having a snack. [Roasted chickpeas](#) are a growing trend in the snack world and are easy to make at home with canned chickpeas; these are a fiber- and protein-rich snack.

Greek or Icelandic yogurt make a quick and easy snack with higher amounts of protein than other yogurts. If you choose a non-dairy yogurt, check

the label for protein, as almond or coconut yogurts have very little protein. Plain Greek yogurt can also serve as a sour cream replacement for extra protein and less fat.



Other seeds are worth a sprinkle too; try ground flaxseed meal on hot cereal, sesame seeds on rice or hemp seeds on yogurt. Pumpkin or sunflower seeds are also nutrient-dense. Try mixing them into a trail mix or sprinkle on a salad.

Unsalted or lightly salted nuts are another great option for boosting your intake of healthy fats and adding in a little protein. Keep in mind that seeds and nuts have good unsaturated fats making them higher in calories, which means they're providing energy and will help fill you up.

What's your favorite nutrition boost?

Share your favorite nutrition boost on the [Barbara L. Posner Wellness & Support Center Facebook page](#).



Freezing *nuts + seeds* keeps them fresh longer!

Seeds are a nutritional powerhouse, with chia seeds being one of the most popular recently. [Chia seeds](#) are a great source of fiber, omega-3 fatty acids, protein and calcium. They plump up in liquid, forming a gel/pudding-like texture (if you're texture sensitive, try blending them). Try them in [chia pudding](#), sprinkled in with oatmeal or granola or just on top of sweet or savory dishes for a little extra pop of nutrition.

Eating "healthy" doesn't mean you have to overhaul your whole diet, buy a bunch of supplements, or even choose the latest "superfood." Start with the basics: lots of produce, some whole grains, and some extra plant-based proteins. There's lots of ways to add some extra nutrition to what you're already doing. Start small and build long-term, sustainable habits that feel good and that you enjoy!

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