



How to Design a Balanced Eating Plan

Balanced eating means consuming the right mix of essential nutrients your body needs—not too much or too little.

To design a balanced eating plan, follow these steps:

- 1. Know Your Nutrients.** The two main types of nutrients are macronutrients and micronutrients. Macronutrients—protein, carbohydrates, and fat—are required by your body in greater amounts and provide fuel in the form of calories. Vitamins and minerals are micronutrients needed in smaller amounts, and these nutrients are involved in many chemical reactions.¹
- 2. Calculate Your Nutrient Requirements.** Online calculators can help you estimate your nutrient needs.² However, these calculators do not take into account your unique health goals or medical conditions, so it may be helpful to consult with a registered dietitian for guidance.
- 3. Plan Your Meals.** Planning your meals in advance allows you to carefully select nourishing foods, recipes, and cooking methods that match your needs and preferences. Mapping out a weekly menu can help make healthy eating easier.
- 4. Select Healthy Ingredients.** Choose healthy ingredients that match your meal plan and your budget. Cooking from scratch also gives you greater control over the nutritional quality of your meals.

- 5. Follow the Plate Method.** The “plate method” is a simple approach to help create balance in your meals. First, fill half your plate with fruits and vegetables that are rich in micronutrients. Next, fill a quarter of your plate with lean proteins. Finally, fill the last quarter of your plate with high-fiber carbohydrates.³
- 6. Know Your Hunger and Fullness Cues.** Your body’s internal hunger cues—stomach growling, low energy, feeling hangry—remind you to refuel regularly. Similarly, fullness cues tell you when you have eaten enough. Tuning into your body’s cues can help you achieve balance as well.

Designing a balanced eating plan is not about perfection, and there is no need to micromanage every bite you take. Your eating style is a reflection of your individual preferences and needs. However, being intentional about the foods you eat regularly can help ensure your body is nourished and well.

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1. Cleveland Clinic. “What Are Macronutrients and Micronutrients?” October 1, 2022. Accessed October 12, 2024. <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/macronutrients-vs-micronutrients>
2. U.S. Department of Agriculture. “DRI Calculator for Healthcare Professionals.” Accessed October 12, 2024. <https://www.nal.usda.gov/human-nutrition-and-food-safety/dri-calculator>
3. U.S. Department of Agriculture. What is MyPlate? Accessed October 12, 2024. <https://www.myplate.gov/eat-healthy/what-is-myplate>



Fueling Your Body for Better Health

Healthy foods offer a wide variety of nutrients to fuel your body and support vital bodily functions.

Consuming healthy, nourishing foods like those listed below provides the right mix of fuel for your unique body.

- **Plants** provide essential micronutrients. Aim for at least 5 servings of colorful fruits and vegetables each day.
- **Protein** regulates blood sugars, repairs muscles, and helps you stay full longer after meals. Incorporate high-quality protein sources into your meals, such as lean meats and poultry, fish (such as salmon and tuna), legumes (such as lentils and chickpeas), Greek yogurt, nuts, and seeds.
- **Carbohydrates** help replenish glycogen stores in your liver and muscles to be used as fuel source between meals and during physical activity.¹
- **Fats** are essential for absorbing vitamins, protecting your organs, and providing a long-lasting energy source. Focus on healthy fats like avocados, olive oil, nuts, fatty fish (such as mackerel and sardines), and seeds.
- **Fermented Foods** support a healthy microbiome and immune system, which are essential for balanced nutrition and healthy weight maintenance.²
- **Water & Electrolytes** help maintain fluid balance in your blood, which is needed for regulating blood pressure, body temperature, muscle function, and carrying nutrients throughout the body.

However, food is not the only fuel for the body. The following can also boost energy:

- **Sleep** is an often overlooked source of fuel for the body. Without sufficient amounts of rest, you may feel fatigued and sluggish. Adequate sleep supports immune function, weight regulation, and metabolism. When you fall short on sleep, a brief 10- to 20-minute nap can help you catch up on a sleep deficit.³
- **Meditation** is calming to the nervous system and can ease an overactive mind. Your thoughts can either be energizing or draining, so finding mindful-based strategies to support your mental wellbeing can also be a source of fuel.
- **Stretching** relieves muscle strain and tension to support your physical body.

Not getting adequate nutrients can trigger your body to break down stored energy for fuel, which can lead to loss of muscle and strength, vitamin and mineral deficiencies, and other medical complications. A balanced eating style can help ensure you have a consistent source of fuel for your body.

1. Cleveland Clinic. Glycogen. Accessed October 12, 2024. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/23509-glycogen>

2. Jalili M, Nazari M, Magkos F. Fermented Foods in the Management of Obesity: Mechanisms of Action and Future Challenges. *Int J Mol Sci.* 2023;24(3):2665. Published 2023 Jan 31. doi:10.3390/ijms24032665

3. Sleep Foundation. "Sleep Debt: The Hidden Cost of Insufficient Rest." January 16, 2024. Accessed October 8, 2024. <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/how-sleep-works/sleep-debt-and-catch-up-sleep>



Blue Zones for Healthy Aging

Blue Zones are geographic areas where people are happier, have lower rates of chronic disease, and live longer.¹ These regions include Okinawa, Japan; Sardinia, Italy; Nicoya, Costa Rica; Ikaria, Greece; and Loma Linda, California.

In the book *Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer From the People Who've Lived the Longest*, author Dan Buettner highlights common lifestyle practices that contribute to extraordinary health and longevity.^{2,3}

To transition to a Blue Zone lifestyle, consider incorporating these behaviors into your daily routine:

- **Move Naturally:** Engage in regular physical activity through walking, gardening, or other natural movements that fit into your daily routines.
- **Find Purpose:** Uncover and nurture your sense of purpose to boost motivation and engagement in life.
- **Reduce Stress:** Incorporate mindful practices such as meditation, prayer, or leisure activities to manage and reduce stress effectively.
- **Eat a Balanced Diet:** Opt for a predominantly plant-based diet that is rich in vegetables, fruits, legumes, and whole grains, and limit processed foods and excessive meat consumption. However, dietary needs can vary, so it is important to choose what works for your individual health and lifestyle.
- **Avoid Overeating:** Honor your internal hunger and fullness cues and eat mindfully to avoid consuming more calories than your body needs.

- **Drink Alcohol in Moderation (if at all):** If you choose to drink alcohol, do so in moderation, which is up to one to two glasses of wine per day. However, if you abstain from alcohol for any reason, continue to do so.
- **Foster Social Connection:** Cultivate strong, supportive relationships and engage in community activities that foster a sense of belonging and emotional support.

The combination of movement, purpose, stress management, diet, and social support offers a holistic approach to living well and aging gracefully.

The Blue Zone principles are not just trendy lifestyle hacks but rather an intentional lifestyle that has been linked to many health benefits. The combination of movement, purpose, stress management, diet, and social support offers a holistic approach to living well and aging gracefully. By adapting these Blue Zone habits to fit your lifestyle, you will enhance not only your physical wellbeing but also the overall quality of your life.

1. Healthline. "Why People in "Blue Zones" Live Longer Than the Rest of the World." Sep 29, 2023. Accessed October 12, 2024. https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/blue-zones#TOC_TITLE_HDR_9
2. Buettner, D., & Skemp, S. *The Blue Zones Solution: Eating and Living Like the World's Healthiest People*. National Geographic Society; 2015.
3. Blue Zones. *History of Blue Zones*. Accessed October 12, 2024. <https://www.bluezones.com/about/history>

MEDITERRANEAN QUINOA SALAD

This Mediterranean Quinoa Salad is packed with protein, fiber, and essential nutrients from the vegetables, making it a balanced meal that aligns with the principles of healthy eating discussed in the content provided. Enjoy this nutritious and flavorful dish as part of your balanced eating plan.

Ingredients

- 1 cup quinoa
- 1 can chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- 1 cucumber, diced
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1/4 cup red onion, finely chopped
- 1/4 cup fresh parsley, chopped
- 1/4 cup feta cheese, crumbled
- 1/4 cup Kalamata olives, pitted and sliced
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- Salt and pepper to taste

Instructions

1. Cook quinoa according to package instructions and let it cool.
2. In a large bowl, combine the cooked quinoa, chickpeas, cucumber, cherry tomatoes, red onion, parsley, feta cheese, and Kalamata olives.
3. In a small bowl, whisk together olive oil, lemon juice, salt, and pepper to make the dressing.
4. Pour the dressing over the salad and toss gently to combine.
5. Serve the Mediterranean Quinoa Salad chilled or at room temperature.



Nutrition Facts

Calories: 320
Total Fat: 12g
Saturated Fat: 3g
Cholesterol: 7mg
Sodium: 300mg
Total Carbohydrates: 45g
Dietary Fiber: 8g
Sugars: 5g
Protein: 10g