

Plant-Based Diet



A plant-based diet is healthy for almost everyone, but especially for those with heart disease and other chronic conditions.

This is not the same as a vegetarian diet, as it can include some lean meat protein sources.

A plant-based diet can:

- Decrease inflammation
- Speed up healing after surgery
- Lower cholesterol levels
- Help people lose weight



What is a plant-based diet?

The diet focuses on eating more vegetables, fruits, legumes, and whole grains.

- Foods have healthy protein, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins, and minerals.
- These foods are naturally lower in calories.
- Colorful plant foods have **phytochemicals** in them. “Phyto” means “plant” in Greek. “Chemicals” are compounds from plants.



Phytochemicals

Phytochemicals are naturally present in plant foods. They give plants color, odor, and flavor. They play a role in preventing damage to your body’s cells from free radicals, which may help prevent disease.

Phytochemicals can:

- Support overall health
- Decrease risk of heart disease
- Decrease risk for many cancers
- Decrease risk for type 2 diabetes
- May help prevent or delay Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s

Challenge yourself to try fruits and vegetables of different colors. Try to “eat the rainbow” during the week to increase the nutrients you take in to support your health.



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The 5 colors of phytochemicals

Eat a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables to get all of the vitamins, minerals, and nutrients your body needs to stay healthy and prevent disease. Add color to your plate each day, such as adding a colorful fruit or vegetable salad or a stir fry. Here are a few examples of these foods.

Color	Phytochemicals	Examples		
Red	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lycopene • Ellagic acid • Hesperidin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beets • Cherries • Cranberries • Guava • Papaya • Pink grapefruit • Pomegranates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Radishes • Raspberries • Red apples • Red bell peppers • Red chili peppers • Red grapes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Red onions • Red peppers • Red potatoes • Rhubarb • Strawberries • Tomatoes • Watermelon
Blue / Purple	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lutein • Zeaxanthin <p>These foods are also sources of vitamin C</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black currants • Black salsify • Blackberries • Blueberries • Dried plums • Eggplant • Elderberries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grapes • Plums • Pomegranates • Prunes • Purple potatoes • Purple asparagus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purple cabbage • Purple carrots • Purple figs • Purple grapes • Purple peppers • Raisins
Yellow / Orange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beta-carotene • Lycopene <p>These foods are also sources of vitamin C</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apricots • Butternut squash • Cantaloupe • Carrots • Grapefruit • Lemon • Mangoes • Nectarines • Oranges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peaches • Persimmons • Pineapples • Pumpkin • Rutabagas • Sweet corn • Sweet potatoes • Tangerines • Yellow apples • Yellow pears 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yellow peppers • Yellow potatoes • Yellow summer squash • Yellow tomatoes • Yellow watermelon • Yellow winter squash

Color	Phytochemicals	Examples		
Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lutein Zeaxanthin <p>These foods are also sources of folate, vitamin C, and calcium</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Artichokes Arugula Asparagus Avocados Broccoli Brussels sprouts Celery Cucumbers Chinese cabbage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Endive Green apples Green beans Green grapes Green onion Green pears Green peppers Honeydew Kiwifruit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leafy greens Lettuce Limes Okra Peas Spinach Sugar snap peas Watercress Zucchini
White	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beta-glucans Lignans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bananas Brown pears Cauliflower Dates Garlic Ginger 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jicama Mushrooms Onions Parsnips Potatoes Shallots 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Turnips White corn White nectarines White peaches

What does a plant-based diet look like?

1. Make half of your plate **fruits and vegetables**:

Vegetables

- ▶ Fresh, frozen, and canned vegetables are all good options.
- ▶ If you use canned vegetables, choose no added salt versions and rinse before eating.
- ▶ Buy vegetables in season to save on cost.
- ▶ Eat a variety to maximize health benefits of phytochemicals.

Fruits

- ▶ Choose whole, unprocessed fruits, if available, or frozen and canned. If choosing canned, choose those canned in their own juices rather than syrup.
- ▶ Buy fruit in season to save on cost.
- ▶ Eat a variety to maximize health benefits of phytochemicals.

2. Make a quarter of your plate **whole grains**:

- ▶ Choose grains with the term “whole” included in its ingredient list on packages.
- ▶ Choose high fiber grains that have at least 3 grams per serving.
- ▶ Look for “100% whole grain” on labels.
- ▶ Examples of non-traditional grains include: quinoa, teff, barley, amaranth, oats, flax, and millet.

3. Make a quarter of your plate **plant-based protein or lean cuts of meat:**

Plant-based protein

- Include protein for taste, texture, and flavoring – NOT as your whole meal.
- Aim for plant protein for at least ½ of your protein needs. Good examples include:
 - Edamame
 - Nuts, such as almonds, pecans, pistachio, hazelnut, walnut
 - Seeds, such as flax, chia, pumpkin (pepita), sunflower, sesame
 - Nut butters, such as peanut, almond, cashew
 - Legumes, such as beans (black, kidney, pinto, lima, great northern, etc.), lentils, split peas

Animal protein - lean cuts

- Animal protein can be used in small to medium amounts. Choose lean meats of high quality.
 - Fish is best choice, such as oily fish like salmon, mackerel, and sardines.
 - Avoid processed animal proteins, such as lunch meat, bacon, hot dogs, sausage, meat with marinades, or preservatives.
 - Avoid charred meat.

4. Use healthy **plant-based oils** in moderation.

- Avoid most animal fats, such as butter, lard, and bacon grease. Fish is the exception since it is high in omega-3 fatty acids DHA and EPA.
- Healthy oils and fats still need portion control. Examples include: Olive oil, canola oil, nuts, and avocado
- Cook with olive oil for low temperature cooking.

Where can I get these foods?

Grocery store

- Try to get foods close to their natural state.
- Don't have to buy organic.
- Buy bulk grains and legumes to save money.

Local farmer's market or your own garden

- This is the best option that is a good activity and therapeutic for many people.
- Most produce is pesticide free.

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.