



## Eat Plenty of Plant-based Foods

**CHALLENGE**  
Eat plant-based  
foods and limit  
meat this month.

### Requirements to complete this HEALTH CHALLENGE™

1. Read “Plant foods promote health,” “Can a plant-based diet provide all the nutritional needs?” and “Focus on variety.”
2. Each day, make the bulk of your meals whole grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes, and nuts. If you wish, you can supplement your meals with cottage cheese, low-fat or nonfat milk or yogurt, egg whites, or fish – but treat these foods as condiments, not the main course.
3. To complete the Challenge, you must eat predominantly whole, plant-based foods and limit meat (other than fish). Use your monthly **Health Challenge™ Calendar** to keep track.
4. Keep records of your completed Challenge in case your organization requires documentation.

### Plant foods promote health

If you want good health, start by choosing foods that promote health. Then avoid those that are known to promote disease. Fortunately, health and nutrition research has identified key guidelines that can help you make wise food choices.

- **Eat fruits and vegetables daily** to decrease the risk of heart attack
- **Choose vegetable protein** – such as beans and grains – to lower blood pressure levels and help prevent heart disease, stroke, and kidney disease.
- **Regularly eat whole grains** to lower the risk of heart attacks, strokes, certain cancers, and diabetes.
- **Eat whole grains, beans, nuts, and vegetables** daily to help lower cholesterol.

Plant foods may help prevent cataracts. Brightly colored vegetables have the most antioxidants and protective elements. Eating an abundance of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes can also significantly help reduce obesity.



The American Cancer Society’s first nutrition recommendation states “Eat a variety of healthful foods, with an emphasis on plant sources.” Specifically, they recommend:

- Eat 5 or more servings of vegetables and fruits each day.
- Choose whole grains.
- Limit consumption of processed and red meats.

### Can a plant-based diet provide all the nutrition I need?

The answer is yes. Whole grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes, nuts, and seeds are packed with nutrients and phytochemicals. Plus, they are cholesterol-free and low in calories.

#### Vitamins are found in abundance in plant-based foods.

- **Vitamin A** is found in darkly colored red, orange, or yellow vegetables and fruits.
- Yeast, whole-grain cereals, and green vegetables contain **B vitamins**. Sources of vitamin B12 include milk products, eggs, and foods that have been fortified with it. These include breakfast cereals, soy-based beverages, and most veggie burgers.
- All fruits and vegetables contain some amount of **vitamin C**. It is abundant in citrus fruits, strawberries, green peppers, green leafy vegetables, tomatoes, cantaloupe, and potatoes.
- Your body can make its own **vitamin D** when you spend time in the sunshine. While vitamin D is not found in plant foods, it is added to milk, soymilk, and some ready-to-eat cereals. You can get lots of vitamin D from fish, nearly all you need for a day from one serving of salmon or mackerel.
- Vegetable oils, nuts, green leafy vegetables, and fortified cereals are common food sources of **vitamin E**.
- Green leafy vegetables and some vegetable oils (i.e., soybean, canola, and olive) are major contributors of dietary **vitamin K**.

#### Minerals in plant-based foods ensure proper metabolism and growth.

- **Calcium** is found in some dark green leafy vegetables such as collard greens, turnip greens, bok choy, and mustard greens. It is also in legumes, whole grains, nuts, seeds, dairy products, tofu, and calcium-fortified orange juice, soymilk, and breakfast cereals.

- You can get **iron** in leafy green vegetables (e.g., spinach, turnip greens), whole-wheat breads, molasses, dried fruits (e.g., dried apricots, prunes, raisins), lentils, beans (e.g., kidney, black-eyed peas), iron-fortified breakfast cereals, and eggs. Vitamin C helps in the absorption of iron.
- You will find **zinc** in green vegetables, seeds, lentils, beans (white beans, kidney beans, and chickpeas), zinc-fortified breakfast cereals, wheat germ, and pumpkin seeds. Milk products are a zinc source for lacto vegetarians.
- **Iodine** is present in vegetables, dairy products, sea vegetables (e.g., seaweed, kelp), and iodized salt.

## Focus on variety

No single food can supply all the nutrients in the amounts you need. For example, some vegetables and fruits are good sources of vitamin C or vitamin A, while others are good sources of calcium or iron. Choosing a variety of foods within each group also helps to make your meals more interesting from day to day.

### Eat an abundance of fresh fruits and vegetables.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) and other agencies recommend eating 8-10 servings of fruits and vegetables daily. Not only are they good for your health, but they also add color, texture, taste, and enjoyment to any meal. Try:

- Raw veggies and leafy greens
- Onions, scallions, leeks, and garlic
- Broccoli and cabbage
- Tomatoes and peppers
- Berries and melons
- Apples and bananas
- Citrus fruits
- And more!



**Choose healthy fats.** Not all fats are bad. Some are essential for health. By eating a variety of plant fats (oils) you will obtain all essential fatty acids. Unsaturated fats are healthy choices. Include a healthy fat in every meal, such as:

- Non-hydrogenated vegetable oils (e.g., canola, olive, and soy)
- Trans fat-free margarine
- Olives, avocado, and nuts
- n-3 fatty acids (e.g., flax meal, walnuts, and fish)



**Limit saturated and trans fats.** The Institute of Medicine recommends as low an intake of trans fats and cholesterol as possible (zero is ideal). NIH recommends that less than 7% of calories come from saturated fat. Trans fat content in foods is on food labels along with saturated fat. Sources of trans fats include most hard stick margarines, shortening, and foods made with these hydrogenated fats. The major sources of saturated fat are meats and whole milk products.

### Choose whole grains.

Try a variety of whole grains:

- Amaranth (*contains the highest protein of all grains*)
- Barley
- Buckwheat (*technically a legume, but eaten as a grain*)
- Bulgur (*a form of wheat*)
- Corn
- Kamut (*a type of wheat*)
- Millet
- Oats
- Quinoa (*a gluten-free cereal and pasta*)
- Rice
- Rye
- Spelt (*a hybrid of two types of wheat*)
- Triticale (*a hybrid of wheat and rye*)
- Wheat



When choosing breads and cereals, read the food label. Look for the phrase, "100% whole wheat" or other grain. When eating rice, choose brown rice.

**Eat nuts/legumes daily.** Legumes are rich in protein, cholesterol free, and high in fiber. Nuts are rich in protein and healthy fats. Foods such as hummus and nut butters make healthy alternatives to butter or margarine.

### Choose healthy protein foods.

Build meals around protein sources that are naturally low in fat, such as beans, nuts, nut butters, seeds, peas, lentils, rice, tofu, low-fat or nonfat dairy products, and eggs. Don't overload meals with high-fat cheeses to replace the meat. Also, limit yourself to no more than 3 egg yolks per week. Try meat-free versions of your favorite dishes, such as:

- Pasta primavera, pasta with marinara or pesto sauce
- Tofu-vegetable stir fry
- Bean burritos or tacos
- Veggie pizza
- Veggie lasagna



### Choose healthy carbohydrates.

Refined carbohydrates (e.g., snack foods, sugar, soft drinks, white bread, white rice, and potatoes) are absorbed rapidly in the body. This contributes to high blood sugar and high insulin levels. It also increases the risk for obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. Instead, choose unrefined carbohydrates that are high in fiber (e.g., fresh fruits, vegetables, beans, and whole grains such as oats, brown rice, bulgur, and coarsely ground whole-wheat bread).

**Drink plenty of water.** It's good for the circulation and urinary system.

**Fill up on plant-based foods.** If you choose to eat some animal-based foods such as eggs, fish (broiled or grilled – not fried), or low-fat dairy foods, make sure the food takes up no more than one-third of your plate. And if you go back for seconds, make it plant-based foods!

Sources: National Institutes of Health; American Cancer Society; Archives of Internal Medicine; American Journal of Clinical Nutrition; Lancet; U.S. Department of Agriculture, INTERHEART study; Nurses' Health Study; Stanford University School of Medicine.





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 Eat plant-based foods and limit meat this month.

**Instructions**

1. Post this calendar where you will see it daily (bathroom, kitchen, bedroom, etc.).
2. Make a notation each day you make the bulk of your meals whole grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes, and nuts.
3. At the end of the month, total the number of days you were able to meet the goal. You must meet this goal at least 22 days during the month to complete the Challenge. Then keep up this healthy practice for a lifetime of good health!
4. Turn in your Health Challenge™ if requested, or enter your completion of this Health Challenge™ on the Health Activity Tracker report for the month, if applicable. Keep this record for evidence of completion.

MONTH:							HC = Health Challenge™	ex. min. = exercise minutes
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	Weight & weekly summary	
HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>		
ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____		
HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>		
ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____		
HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>		
ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____		
HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>	HC <input type="checkbox"/>		
ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____	ex. min. _____		

\_\_\_\_\_ Number of days this month I ate primarily plant-based meals

\_\_\_\_\_ Number of days this month I got 30+ minutes of physical activity such as brisk walking or biking

**Other wellness projects completed this month:**

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

