

Eat Right

Food, Nutrition and Health Tips from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

Smart Tips for Plant-Based Eating

Although the popularity of eating “plant-based” has grown, this term currently lacks a formal definition in the United States. In the past, plant-based was often used to describe a vegetarian or vegan diet. More recently, plant-based has been used to describe an eating style that includes more foods that come from plants, like fruits, vegetables, grains, nuts and seeds. It’s also a term that may be used in the marketing of a food, like dairy alternatives and meat substitutes.



Are there benefits to eating more plant-based foods?

People may choose to consume more plant-based foods for a variety of reasons, including:

- Health benefits associated with eating more fruits and vegetables.
- Concerns for the environment.
- A potential for lower grocery bills and food costs. *For example, a meatless chili using dried beans is less expensive than a chili containing meat or a textured meat substitute.*

Are plant-based foods more nutritious?

Just because a product is plant-based doesn't necessarily mean it is healthier. Premade plant-based foods and beverages can vary in the nutrition they provide.

While a variety of nutrients can be obtained from plant-based foods, this type of eating style may require some additional planning to make sure that you are getting all the vitamins, minerals, and protein you need. It will depend on your overall food intake and what foods are being replaced with plant-based sources.

The Nutrition Facts Label is a helpful tool to determine if a food or beverage is the right choice for you. This is especially true for dairy alternatives. As an example, some plant-based beverages only provide a small amount of protein. Plus, if it's flavored, there may be added sugars. According to MyPlate, only fortified versions of soymilk and soy yogurt are considered part of the Dairy Group, since the nutrition they provide is similar to cow's milk.



How to Get Started

For a healthy eating style that includes more plant-based foods, focus on ways to add more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. For example:

- Designate a certain night or nights for meatless meals.
- Try substituting some or all of the meat in recipes with plant-based sources of protein, such as beans, tofu, tempeh or unsalted nuts and seeds.
- Include more vegetables and fruit without added sugars or salt in meals and snacks.

Beneficial nutrients to look for in plant-based products include:

- Calcium
- Vitamin D
- Vitamin B12
- Dietary Fiber
- Protein

Meanwhile, aim for low amounts of:

- Saturated fat
- Sodium
- Added sugars

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This tip sheet is provided by:

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Sources: Merriam-Webster. MyPlate.gov.