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General nutrition information only. This is not medical advice, not a diagnosis, and not a treatment. These pages do not treat, cure, prevent, reverse, or improve arthritis or any other condition. Talk with a qualified clinician before you change what you eat, especially if you have a health condition or take medication.

A balanced-plate eating pattern

A practical way to fill a plate: vegetables and fruit, a grain or starch, and a protein food.

What people usually mean

A balanced-plate pattern is a simple way to fill a plate: about half vegetables and fruit, about a quarter grain or other starchy food, and about a quarter protein food. Add the fat you already cook with, and drink water most of the time.

The quarters are a picture, not a measuring law. A larger or smaller appetite, another food culture, and what you have at home all change the plate. Mixed dishes such as soup, stew, and casseroles still count when you can see vegetables, a starch, and a protein in the pot.

- Half: vegetables and fruit. Fresh, frozen, or canned.
- A quarter: rice, pasta, bread, potatoes, tortillas, or another starch.
- A quarter: beans, eggs, fish, poultry, tofu, meat, or dairy you already eat.
- Fat for cooking or topping: oil, nuts, seeds, or avocado.
- Drink: water. Coffee or tea if you want them.

A day of example meals

Each meal below uses the same three parts.

- Breakfast: eggs or yogurt (protein), oats or toast (grain), and berries or orange slices (fruit).
- Lunch: a large portion of salad or leftover roasted vegetables, rice or a sandwich on whole-grain bread, and tuna, chicken, beans, or cheese.
- Dinner: half the plate roasted broccoli and carrots, a baked potato or a serving of pasta, and salmon, lentils, or tofu, with oil on the vegetables.
- Another dinner: bean tacos with a large side of cabbage and tomato, and a glass of water.

More meals in the same style

You do not need new recipes. Arrange a meal you already make so the vegetable portion is the largest one.

- Breakfast: leftover rice heated with an egg and a handful of spinach, plus a piece of fruit.
- Lunch: a baked potato, a cup of chili or lentil stew, and a pile of shredded cabbage.
- Dinner: pasta tossed with a larger volume of tomatoes, zucchini, and white beans, and a green salad.
- Dinner: stir-fried vegetables with a smaller amount of meat or tofu, served over rice.
- A snack plate, if you need one: fruit, a few crackers or a slice of bread, and cheese, yogurt, or nuts.

A grocery list

Buy enough vegetables and fruit for half of the meals you plan to eat at home this week.

- Vegetables and fruit: a mix you will actually eat. Frozen bags are a reliable backup.

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- Grains and starches: rice, pasta, potatoes, bread, or tortillas.
- Protein foods: beans, eggs, fish, poultry, tofu, or dairy you already use.
- Cooking fat: oil, plus nuts or seeds if you like them.
- Drinks: water, and coffee or tea if you drink them.

Prep tips

The plate method is a habit of looking at a meal, not a new cuisine.

- Fill the vegetable part first so it does not get crowded out.
- Use leftovers as the next day's protein or grain.
- When a meal is one mixed dish, ask whether it has vegetables, a starch, and a protein. Add the missing part on the side.
- Desserts and salty snacks can still show up. Many people have them less often, and in a smaller amount than the main plate.
- If you share meals with other people, cook one meal and let each person adjust the portions.
- Start with dinners only if changing every meal feels like too much.

These examples are ideas for generally healthy meals. They are not a plan written for you.