

Guide to a Healthier Relationship With Food

Learn about our volunteers' accessible and flexible approach to healthier eating that helps students feel and function at their personal best!

Topics Covered

- The Canada Food Guide
- Creating your own meals
- Addressing Diet Culture
- Mindfulness
- Resources



Guide to Having a Healthier Relationship With Food

This manual was created by the University of Manitoba’s Healthy U volunteers. This is not a replacement for medical advice or an expert’s opinion. It provides a peer-perspective on healthier eating for students with a focus on increasing accessibility.

We want to help you use food to feel your best! Food can be a great tool to aid in learning, exercising and overall well-being. There are many ways to increase these benefits through the understanding of the components of nutrition as well as dismantling diet-culture. Both of these aspects influence the way we eat and how we feel.

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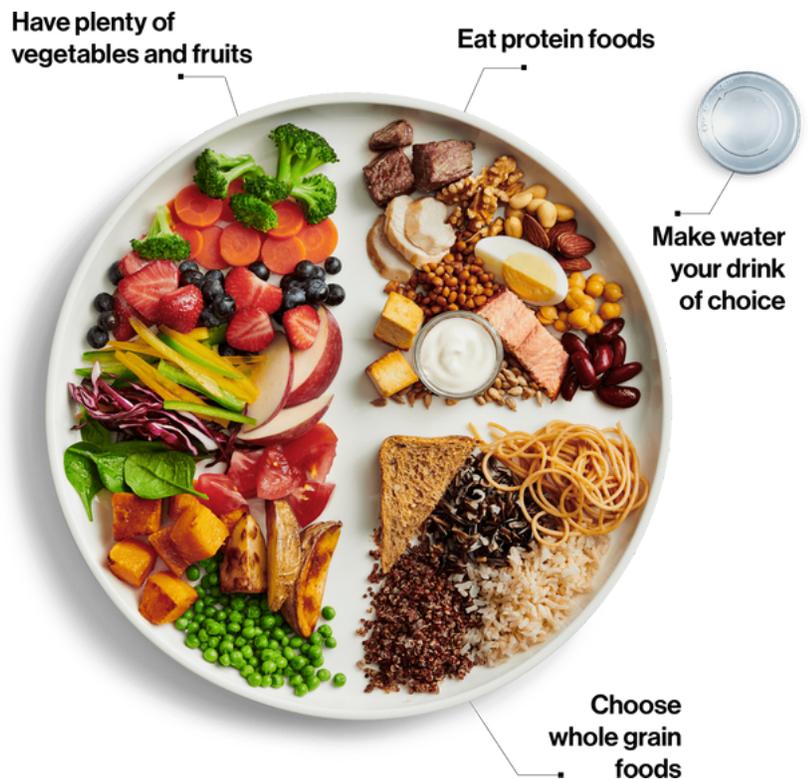
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The Components of Nutrition

The Canadian Food Guide

The Canada Food Guide was first introduced in 1942 to respond to the need for food rationing during the war, while also considering the nutritional needs of Canadians. Since this time, the food guide has continued to be updated to reflect what we are learning about healthy eating. For many years, the Canadian Food Guide was split into four food groups and recommended daily servings of each category depending on your age and binary gender. We remember scooping cups of fruits and vegetables trying to visualize how much exactly we needed to have in a day. Frankly, it was exhausting.

Luckily, the Canadian Food Guide has been updated as of January 2019! It now emphasizes a “proportions, not portions” philosophy. In other words, put your measuring cups away and eat as much as you feel you need to be satisfied.

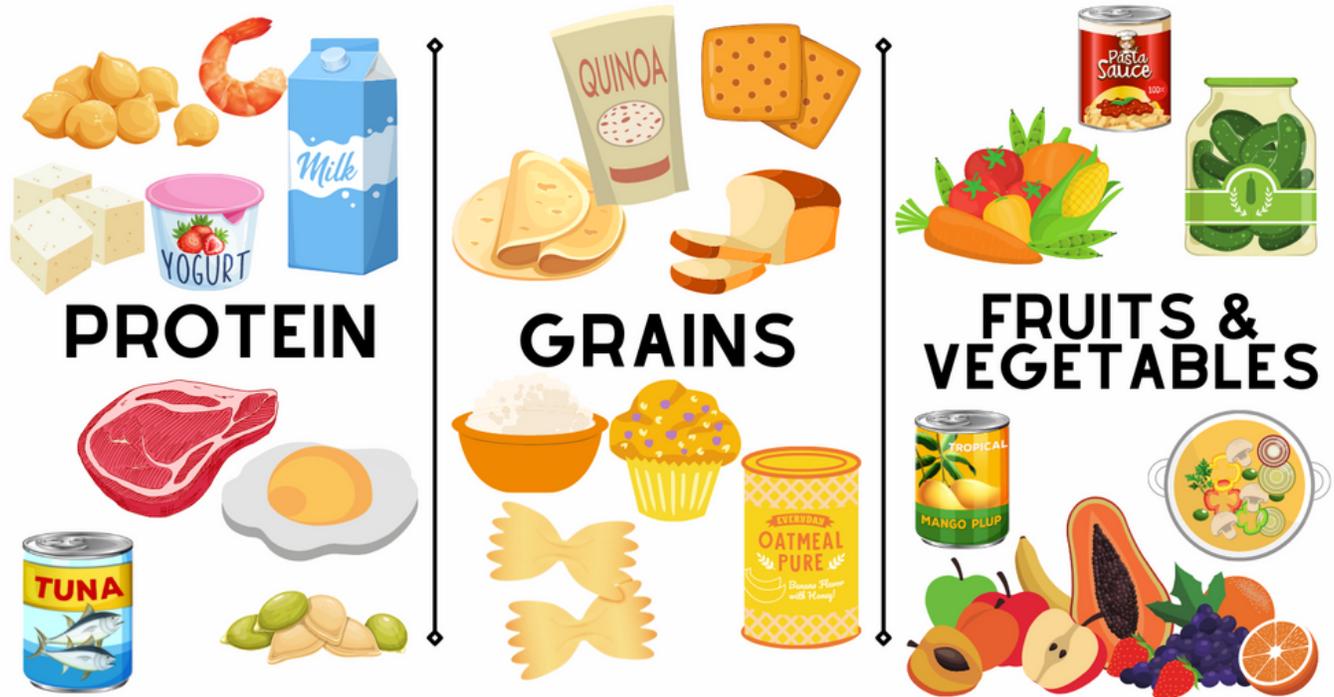


The government of Canada now recognizes three food groups in specific proportions at every meal. Specifically, it recommends that your diet consist of 50% fruits or vegetables, 25% whole grains, and 25% proteins. In case you were wondering, milk and alternatives (a category found in the old Food Guide) is now encompassed by proteins.

Of course, there's many ways to incorporate these three food groups into our diets. But this can also be confusing. We focus on how to apply this guide to build meals next!

How-to: Building Meals

Have you experienced the feeling of going to your fridge or cupboard and having no idea what to eat? It can be challenging to know where to start when deciding on what to make. The following activity is a good way to practice this useful skill.



Before planning what you're going to eat, it's important to take the following things into consideration:

- Do these items need to be cooked?
 - Using a microwave* is often faster than an oven.
 - *Stove or fresh foods are typically recommended cooking tools and that this is because microwaving gives off a radiation that actually reduces some of the nutrients. However, its still an acceptable and functional cooking skill!
 - A thermometer is often needed to ensure your food is safely cooked.
- How can I make this food tasty and enjoyable?
 - Seasoning packages at the grocery store are a great way to add flavour.
 - Sauces add flavour while also incorporating vegetables or fruit.
- Are the items versatile?
 - Try to choose items at the grocery store that you can use more than once.
 - Frozen food is a great way to reduce waste because it takes longer to expire.
 - Dried herbs last longer than fresh herbs.

Try it!

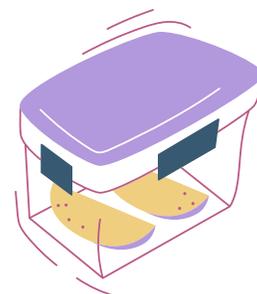
Fill out the table below to exercise your meal-building abilities! Start by thinking of examples of each component. Then, think of some ways you can incorporate each component. We've come up with some ideas for you as well. Finally, pick a protein, a grain and a few fruits and/or vegetables to make a meal with!

Component	Example	Tip	Pick one!
Protein	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chick peas • Canned tuna • Milk • • • • 	<p>Tofu is super versatile and a great option if you'd prefer not to have meat. Try it in your next stir fry!</p> <p><i>Your turn:</i></p>	
Grains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pasta • Oatmeal • Bread • • • • 	<p>Try using half whole wheat flour and half white flour the next time you're baking. This will keep you feeling full for longer!</p> <p><i>Your turn:</i></p>	
Fruits and Vegetables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canned peas • Tomato sauce • Banana • • • • 	<p>Choosing frozen vegetables and fruit instead of fresh ensures your produce stays fresh for longer and it tends to cost less!</p> <p><i>Your turn:</i></p>	
Spices etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Garlic powder • A microwave • A thermometer • 	<p>Try buying an all purpose spice you can use for multiple types of meals</p> <p><i>Your turn:</i></p>	

Peer Advice

Eating healthy is a struggle every student is too familiar with. Here is some advice on how to make your day go a little bit more efficiently. Feel free to pick and choose which tips you incorporate into your life!

Short on time?	Always on the go?	On a budget?
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Prepare meals on the weekends• Make frozen soups• Make slow cooker meals• Prepare individual bagged smoothie ingredients for busy days• Make a batch of hard-boiled eggs for the week (keep the shell on!)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Plan items that are easy to pack and take with you, such as no-heat sandwiches, hard-boiled eggs, nuts, egg wraps and muffins.• Choose a granola bar with less sugar and more whole ingredients.• If planning for the week is an overwhelming task, start by planning day-to-day. This works especially well if you have a busy schedule the next day!	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Homemade dishes are tasty and less expensive.• Buying whole foods like produce, grains, and nuts in bulk to save money.• Ditch the “fancy” items like bottled sauces, pre-made meals etc.• Buy frozen food! Frozen produce and meat are cheaper and stay fresh for longer.



Keep in mind: Progress not Perfection

It is not always possible to have a healthy meal every single time you eat. Take a healthy day approach if that is more suitable for your lifestyle. So, for example, instead of having a perfectly balanced meal with all the food groups for each meal, you can try and distribute the food groups throughout your day.

Have a hard time getting fruits in your daily diet? Try to have them for breakfast (smoothies or just plain fruit) or as an evening snack bowl (throw together whatever fruit you have with your favorite dressing).



Fueling Your Brain to Study: Complex vs. Simple Sugars

Our advice would be to be mindful of what kind of fuel your brain runs on. The answer? Your brain runs on sugar! Yes, sugar is not usually praised by our society, but the fact of the matter is your brain runs on and needs sugar.

There are two types of sugars: complex and simple. This refers to how hard the body has to work to break it down.

Simple Sugars

- Candy bars, soda, juice
- Quickly absorbed by the body
- Provides short-term energy

Complex Sugars

- Pasta or bread
- Broken down by body slowly
- Provides long-term energy!

Complex sugars have a lot of sugar molecules that are clumped together; in order to use it as energy, the body has to declump them. This takes time and lets off a steady stream of sugar. This keeps you fueled throughout the day! This includes food like pasta, bread, or potatoes.

The best analogy we can think of is those dog toys where you place treats inside and the dog has to gnaw at it to get little bits and pieces of the treat. The dog doesn't get all the treats at once—they have to work for it!

Simple sugars can give you a boost of short-term energy as your body doesn't require as much work to break down the molecules. Sometimes we want a jolt of short-term energy however, it is important to remember that moderation is key. Complex sugars will keep you fueled throughout the day, like you're cruising on the highway whereas constant consumption of simple sugars will continue to drastically change your energy levels in short term periods, like you're on a roller coaster.

When you're fueling your brain, you want to be mindful of what you are fueling it with. A high sugar / high fructose diet can actually have negative impact on our bodies such as challenges with cognitive functioning or sustaining energy. Like most things, it is important to compare the long-term and short-term impacts of the foods we are choosing. This process will be individualized as we all live different lifestyles (i.e. differences in accessibility, finances, coping strategies, baseline metabolic panels).

To takeaway, it can be helpful to remember to choose foods that feel good to you. Food and diet cannot be seen through a black and white lens. Ask questions, call your primary health care provider or find a dietician that can help you feel your best. Therefore, when you're fueling your brain, try to be mindful of what you're fueling it with.

Diet Culture

What is Diet Culture?

“Diet culture creates a **link between your eating habits and your moral character**. It’s not just about weight loss – it also takes the form of the categorization of food into “good” and “bad”” – Halimi, Dismantling Diet Culture Spilling the (Detox) Tea on an Exploitative Industry, [The McGill Daily](#)

Diet culture conveys that :

- Some bodies are more acceptable than others
- Some bodies are more valued than others
- Ignores that all bodies are different
- Ignores that all bodies are beautiful and deserve respect, acceptance and dignity

“Diet culture doesn’t just falsely establish these categories as objective truths, it also links them to one’s value as a person”. – Halimi, Dismantling Diet Culture Spilling the (Detox) Tea on an Exploitative Industry, [The McGill Daily](#)

Intuitive Eating

Intuitive eating is:

- Not a diet.
- A way of life.
- In alignment with the harm reduction approach.

However, for personal or medical reasons, this may not be appropriate or feasible for you. This is not intended to be medical advice; everyone has unique circumstances and needs. Please take what works for you and leave what doesn’t. Everyone has unique needs, a unique body, and a unique journey.

Intuitive Eating is Based on Principles

Challenge the food police

This refers to the idea perpetuated by diet culture or diet mentality that some food is inherently good while other foods are bad. This principle asks us to challenge this idea. For many of us (and certainly for myself), this way of thinking is engrained and natural. Diet culture can take many forms such as TV, social media, and even family members. We hear things like, this is “junk food”, or “I was so bad today, I had a chocolate bar”. This is what the so-called food police would have us believe. However, we have the power to say no; no food is good or bad.

Discover the satisfaction factor

This refers to enjoying food. Enjoying food with loved ones can be a beautiful experience and allows us to create fond memories. We can also derive satisfaction from food by trying a new recipe, ordering our favorite meal at a restaurant, or enjoying a meal that has been passed down in your family for generations.

Approach your emotions with kindness

This is related to self-kindness and self-compassion. We all have emotions and deal with our unique stresses. This principle highlights that it is important to recognize and deal with our emotions as they arise. Turning to food to cope either by restricting or binging will not get at the root cause of the emotional distress. Ultimately, it is important to address our emotions head on and try to learn healthier and more effective coping strategies.

Respect your body

This means treating your body with kindness by listening and trusting our bodies. This can look like eating when you are hungry, stopping when you are full, and treating your bodies with dignity and respect. This includes the way in which you think and speak about your body.

Honour your health

This means eating nutritious foods that fuel your body, have health benefits, and are enjoyable to you.

Shifting your mindset

An important part of dismantling diet culture and moving towards intuitive eating is changing your mindset.

Reframe your thoughts around food. Instead of thinking that some foods are bad for you and you shouldn't have them, consider reframing those thoughts into:

- It is okay to want _____
- I'm allowed to eat when I am hungry
- The human body needs food to survive
- Healthy eating is about balance
- I respect my body and am allowed to fuel it with food

One way of reframing our thoughts on food is adopting **food neutrality**. Diet culture has conditioned us to label foods as good/bad, healthy/unhealthy, or right/wrong. These labels can lead to an all or nothing mentality with food, but health and nutrition are more complex than that.

Shifting to **neutral descriptors** challenges the all or nothing mentality. This means not putting foods in good vs. bad or healthy vs. unhealthy categories. Making neutral observations can help you make decisions that are aligned with your needs and preferences.

Start by noticing the labels you are using to describe food. Then move towards actively stopping the use of words that suggest moral value in your descriptions. The goal is to view a cake as a cake, and a salad as just a salad. One isn't good and one isn't bad. In moderation they both are part of a balanced diet.



Mindfulness

Sometimes topics surrounding food can create negative or unpleasant emotions. Practicing mindfulness is a great way to manage these feelings, as well as other day-to-day challenges. The following activity takes about five minutes.

- Start by taking a few deep breaths and getting comfortable
- Look for 5 things you can see and name them out loud or in your head
 - For each item: notice it, take a deep breath and then move onto the next item
- Close your eyes
- Notice 4 things you can feel and name them out loud or in your head
 - Try to scan from head to toe
 - The items can be a sensation: e.g. I feel warm on my legs
 - The items can be an object: e.g. I feel the chair under me
- Notice 3 things you can hear
 - These can be an air vent, someone in your house, birds outside, etc.
- Notice 2 things you can smell
 - These can be your shampoo, the air around you, etc.
 - If you can't think of anything, think of something you enjoy smelling
- Think of 1 thing you enjoy tasting



UM Resources

UMSU Insurance-Registered Dietitian

University of Manitoba students (tend to) either have UMSU insurance or were able to opt out by providing proof of other private insurance.

Empower Me

Another service available to (some) UMSU or UMGSA members is Empower Me, which has a range of specialists including psychotherapists and nutrition professionals that can provide individualized support by phone, video conference, or by an in-person visit, depending on COVID-19.

Student Counselling Centre (SCC)

The Student Counselling Centre offers individual counselling, workshops, and groups.

474 UMSU University Centre

204-474-8592

The Health and Wellness Office

The Health and Wellness Educator is available to talk with you about your health and wellness, including eating patterns.

469 UMSU University Centre

healthandwellness@umanitoba.ca

204-295-9032

University Health Services (UHS)

Access health care services at UHS.

204-474-8411

Spiritual Services

Spiritual services are available to all students to discuss relationships, meaning of life, and spirituality.

spiritualcare@umanitoba.ca

204-474-8721

*Please check websites for remote services

Community Resources

Dial a Dietitian

Dial a Dietitian is a service available to individuals with a Manitoba Health Card where individuals are connected by phone with a registered dietitian. This service is available in several languages, including English and French.

Private Insurance

Individuals with private insurance, other than UMSU insurance, may also have some coverage for a dietitian, therapist or other mental health professional. This coverage is unique to the insurance plan.

Women's Health Clinic

An additional resource is Women's Health Clinic (WHC). The WHC serves all genders including women, men, non-binary, and trans people.

Steps to connecting: Phone WHC to set up an intake appointment in which you will discuss your situation in more detail (amount of detail disclosed is your choice). Should you be a fit for WHC (which is typical unless more intensive treatment is required) you may offered services directly or placed on a waitlist which will be dependent on availability at time of call. Should you be placed on a waitlist, you will be offered workshops in the interim to help support you. Once you are offered a space, you will complete a second intake for updated information, connect 1:1 with a dietitian and be offered 1:1 counselling.

Contact the Women's Health Clinic directly for more information and to find out if this is an appropriate option for you.

Winnipeg: 204-947-2422 ext. 137

Toll-free outside of Winnipeg: 1-866-947-1517 ext. 137