

Healthy Whole Food Eating Checklist

Learning how to eat a healthy whole foods diet can be overwhelming. Having a good checklist can make a big difference as you begin on this journey. This checklist covers the basics of what to eat, what to avoid and tips for sticking to this style of eating.

What to Eat

- Choose all natural foods. The foods that are closest to how they are grown or raised are the best choices.
- All fruits can be eaten on a whole foods diet. Go beyond apples and bananas. Any fresh fruit is a great choice. Try some of the more “exotic” fruits such as mangos or yellow honeydew. Pineapples are just as good fresh in a salad or cooked on the grill.
- When fruit isn’t in season, you can try frozen or canned. Be careful though, many contain added sugar or syrups. Look for ones packed in water or their own juice.
- Like fruit, all fresh vegetables are allowed. Get creative here and try something new. Try grilling a variety of vegetables or steaming them with fresh herbs like rosemary or thyme. Panfry or sauté vegetables in a non-stick pan with a small amount of cooking spray.
- Again, try frozen or canned when your favorites aren’t in season. Look for ones with no added salt, cream sauce, or butter.
- Eat calcium-rich foods. These can include low-fat or fat-free milk and yogurt. Low fat real cheeses are a good source of calcium. Avoid processed cheeses.
- Another option to replace dairy is soy or almond milk.
- Whole grains. Pick up whole grains in the bulk foods aisle. Oats, nuts, seeds, brown rice, rye, millet, quinoa, and cornmeal are good choices to have on hand.
- Beans and legumes. These include lentils, chickpeas and kidney beans.
- If you don’t like soaking beans, opt for canned ones instead.
- Choose grass-fed and free range lean meat. This includes poultry, lean beef, lamb and pork, and fresh fish and seafood.
- Avoid processed meats like bologna and hot dogs.
- Free range eggs. These eggs are from chickens raised outside and eat a variety of natural foods instead of being caged and fed meat by-products or grains alone.
- Coconut oil. Olive oil. Butter.
- Seasonings and herbs.

- Snacks can include fruits, vegetables, cheese, hard-boiled eggs, beef jerky, cashew butter, nuts and dried fruits.
- Cocoa powder, unsweetened and honey mixed with fruit can satisfy a sweet tooth.

Avoiding Extremism

- Like any type of eating, it can be taken to the extreme. When you start limiting what whole foods you can eat as bad, you begin to lose some of the health benefits of those foods.
- Avoid limiting certain categories of the foods you can eat.
- Stay away from the **“Whole 30” program**. This style of eating doesn’t allow grains or any sugars. That means bananas, whole wheat, oats and peanut butter are off limits. Eliminating all traces of dairy, sugar and legumes for 30 whole days. The diet is strict and eliminates many foods that contain essential nutrients.
- Avoid the **Low carb/High Fat or Atkins**. On this plan, you eat 20 net grams or less of carbohydrates like fruit, bread and grains while eating bacon, eggs and other high fat foods. Eliminating carbs can lead to disordered eating, like Orthorexia nervosa.
- Ban the **Paleo diet**. This plan is based on how our ancestors ate. It eliminates grains, dairy and processed foods allowing for meat, fish, vegetables and fruit. The difference between a whole foods eating plan and a Paleo diet is the absence of grains and dairy.

Avoid Processed Foods

- Opt for products with 100% whole grains whenever possible. White bread or white pasta is made with white flour, a highly processed version of wheat. This means you are eating empty calories that have far less nutrition than the whole-wheat or whole grain alternatives.
- Read labels. If there are any ingredients that you can’t pronounce, avoid the product.
- Choose products that have 5 or less all natural ingredients.
- Avoid Load up on fresh fruits and vegetables. Include them in almost every meal and snack.
- Include beans in your meals and snacks regularly.
- Cut back on convenience foods. They’re loaded with added fat, sugar, salt, and additives.
- Can the sugary beverages. Drink water, mineral water, green tea (iced or hot), fresh fruit juice, and skim or soy milk.

- Processed food-like substances are designed to never rot, expire or go bad. Do you really want that in your body?
- The processed food industry over seasons its food with way too much salt, sugar, and oil.
- An estimated 90% of processed foods in supermarkets are made with either a corn or soy ingredient in the form of an additive. These are all under a variety of different names.

Shopping Tips

- Always create a meal plan for the week. Include foods that are in season and on sale.
- Shop with a shopping list and visit local farmers and farmer's markets to get the freshest foods.
- Load up on staples such as beans, grains and nuts. Keep dry pasta, honey and oats on hand for quick meals or desserts.
- Shop the perimeter of the store. Most of the whole foods will be located here with a few exceptions like whole-wheat flour and brown rice.
- Buy organic whenever possible, especially in the produce aisle.
- Shop the frozen foods section for produce that's out of season. Stock up on vegetables and fruit that have been packed fresh without sauces, butter or salt added.
- Fresh seafood should be wild-caught over farmed.
- Choose grass-fed humanely raised beef whenever possible.
- Avoid items like bread that list wheat or enriched wheat as the main ingredient. Sandwich bread that is made with 100% whole-wheat can be hard to find in supermarkets so this might be something you consider making yourself or from a local bakery.
- Choose products that don't have an ingredient list or have a short list of easily recognizable ingredients.
- Read labels on anything that is packaged.

Budgeting

- Buy bulk products online if your local store doesn't carry ingredients like whole-grain flours, coconut oil or raw nuts. Oftentimes buying online can be cheaper than going to a specialty health food store.

- Stock up on products from farmer's markets. You can preserve or freeze them to use later.
- Grow your own produce or raise your own chickens for the meat or eggs.
- Buy only what you can use within a week if you aren't going to be freezing or preserving it. This is especially important for produce and meat.

Preparation Tips

- Pre-chop vegetables such as onions and peppers so they are ready to add to your recipe.
- Create 2-for-1 meals. For example, when cooking a casserole for dinner, cook two and freeze one for a later meal.
- Batch cook and freeze meals ahead of time. You can do this for a week's worth of meals, or do up to a month's worth of meals. Basically what you do is prepare all your ingredients, mix and cook the recipes then freeze. Label everything. Casseroles can be cooked in disposable pans.

Make it a Habit

- Begin by thinking about your reasons for starting this eating plan. Do you want to improve your health? Do you want to feel better? Are you trying to set an example for your kids?
- Next, what small changes you can make? Pick ones you can keep doing, like adding more vegetables to your plate.
- Don't try to change everything at once. This will just cause you to stress about it.
- Set one easy goal at a time you can reach, like having a salad and a piece of fruit each day.
- Finally, set a long-term goal too. This can be as simple as having one vegetarian dinner a week.

Use this checklist to keep guide you when choosing healthy whole foods, whether you're just starting this way of eating or have been on it for a while.