

All About Plant-Based Diets

What is plant-based?

A **plant-based** or **plant-forward** eating pattern focuses on foods primarily from plants.

Omnivore, pescatarian, vegetarian, vegan, and many other eating patterns can in fact be classified as plant based because the focus is on the **proportion of plant foods** relative to non-plant foods. Start by simply including more plant-based foods and choosing smaller portions of animal-based foods and you are well on your way to a plant-forward and sustainable dietary pattern!

Choosing more plant-based foods can be good for your body and the planet! Many plant-based foods such as legumes, nuts & seeds, fruits, vegetables, and whole grains are nutrient dense and high in fibre. These foods are often environmentally sustainable, and many are can even be budget friendly choices!

What nutrients should I focus on in a plant-based diet?

Looking for a plant-based source of some of the most common nutrients we typically get from animal sources can be challenging. Here are 5 important nutrients to focus on, and some tips for getting them through plant sources.

1. Protein

Traditionally meat, fish, dairy and eggs have been considered 'protein' sources but there is a lot of protein to be found in a variety of plant foods such as:

- Soy and soy products: tofu, edamame (green soybeans), fortified soy beverages
- Legumes: lentils, dried peas and beans
- Whole grains: pasta, rice, quinoa, buckwheat
- Nuts and seeds: almonds, walnuts, pepitas, sesame seeds, flax seeds

2. Omega-3

Omega-3 fats are important for brain and eye health. The kind of omega-3 we get from plants is called ALA and the kind we get from animal sources is EPA/DHA. While our bodies can convert some ALA into EPA and DHA, this process isn't always the most efficient. If you are choosing a vegan or vegetarian eating pattern and are concerned about getting enough Omega-3, speak to your healthcare professional.

Sources of Omega-3 include:

- Canola, flax seed, and walnut oils
- Soybeans and tofu
- Ground flax seed, chia seed, and walnuts
- Omega-3 fortified foods (some soy beverages, orange juice, breads)

3. Iron

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Iron is an important nutrient for our muscles and for carrying oxygen through the body. Similar to Omega-3, the kind of iron in plant foods is different from that in animal foods. We don't absorb the iron in plant foods as well as the iron in animal foods, so it's important to make sure we eat a variety of iron rich plant sources. Some plant-based sources of iron include:

- Legumes (kidney beans, black eyed peas, red lentils)
- Fortified pasta and cereals
- Dried fruit (prunes, raisins and apricots)
- Dark green vegetables

Tip: To help your body absorb iron, eat iron-rich foods with a source of vitamin C. Examples of vitamin C-rich foods are strawberries, broccoli and oranges.

4. Calcium

Calcium plays an important role in our bone, muscle and heart health. Contrary to popular belief there are many ways to get calcium without drinking milk.

- Fortified beverages (soy, rice or almond)
- Calcium-set tofu
- Legumes (kidney beans, navy beans)
- Almonds, almond butter
- Dark green vegetables

5. Vitamin B 12

Vitamin B12 is important for our nervous system and is traditionally found in animal-based foods. Plant based B12 is found only fortified foods, so it can be challenging to get enough on a vegan or vegetarian eating plan. If you are concerned about getting enough B-12, speak to your healthcare professional.

- Fortified beverages such as soy, almond, or rice (check the label!)
- Red Star nutritional yeast
- Fortified meat alternatives: TVP, veggie burgers (check the label!)

***Note:** *this is not an exhaustive list of all the nutrients that may be important in a plant-based diet, but a few key ones to consider. If you have questions or concerns about eating well on a plant-based diet speak to your healthcare professional or a registered dietitian.*

Simple 1 Week Plant-Based Grocery List & Menu

Below is a sample 1-week grocery haul and menu on a plant-based diet. Please note that this is not intended as an eating plan, but simply an exercise to demonstrate simple ways plant-based foods might be included in a typical week.

For the purposes of this menu, a vegan friendly diet has been used to maximize demonstration of plant-based food uses. Menu items can be adapted to include some animal-based choices, for example a beef and lentil bolognese, a tuna and chickpea salad, or cow's milk instead of soy beverage.

Grocery Haul

Proteins & Dairy Alternatives		
	MorningStar Farms Spicy Black Bean Veggie Burger, 268g ✓ Substitutions ⓘ + Add instructions	\$4.97
	Natural Almonds ✓ Substitutions ⓘ + Add instructions	\$4.00
	Chickpeas ✓ Substitutions ⓘ + Add instructions	\$1.17
	Extra Firm Tofu ✓ Substitutions ⓘ + Add instructions	\$2.57 each (x 2 pk)
Fortified Soy Milk		\$2.47
	Natura Unsweetened Enrich ✓ Substitutions ⓘ + Add instructions	
	Green Lentils ✓ Substitutions ⓘ + Add instructions	\$2.77
	Just Peanuts Smooth Peanut Butter ✓ Substitutions ⓘ + Add instructions	\$4.97
	Coconut Milk Yogurt Vanilla ✓ Substitutions ⓘ + Add instructions	\$3.47

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Grains & Starches	
 <p>Pumpkin Flax Granola <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Substitutions  + Add instructions</p>	\$3.77
 <p>Spaghetti <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Substitutions  + Add instructions</p>	\$1.97
 <p>100% Whole Grain Oats, Large Flake <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Substitutions  + Add instructions</p>	\$2.00
 <p>Brown Coarse Bulgur <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Substitutions  + Add instructions</p> <p>Can swap for rice or quinoa</p>	\$2.67
 <p>Bread, Crustini Hamburger Buns <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Substitutions  + Add instructions</p>	\$2.00
 <p>Frontier Bakery Whole Wheat Pita Small 6 Pieces <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Substitutions  + Add instructions</p>	\$0.88
 <p>Triscuit Original Whole Grain Crackers <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Substitutions  + Add instructions</p>	\$2.00
 <p>Popping Corn <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Substitutions  + Add instructions</p>	\$1.77
Fruits & Vegetables	
 <p>Bananas, Bunch <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Substitutions  + Add instructions</p>	\$1.41
 <p>Cortland Apples <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Substitutions  + Add instructions</p>	\$4.97

	English Cucumber ✔ Substitutions ? + Add instructions	\$1.57
	Diced Tomatoes ✔ Substitutions ? + Add instructions	\$1.00 each (x2 cans)
	Broccoli ✔ Substitutions ? + Add instructions	\$2.47
	Cooking Spinach ✔ Substitutions ? + Add instructions	\$1.97
	Red Peppers ✔ Substitutions ? + Add instructions	\$1.84
	Yellow Onion ✔ Substitutions ? + Add instructions	\$0.91
	Mini Carrots ✔ Substitutions ? + Add instructions	\$1.00
	Celery Stalks ✔ Substitutions ? + Add instructions	\$2.47
	Avocado ✔ Substitutions ? + Add instructions	\$1.47
TOTAL		\$67.10

**Note: This list was costed in November 2020. Some items such as popping corn, oats, granola, and peanut butter may last more than 1 week*

Meal Ideas

Below are some easy meals that can be made with the ingredients in the above grocery haul. Links to simple recipes for making many of these dishes have been included.

To maximize use of the groceries purchased many use dried lentils as the legume, but these can easily be swapped for other legumes like black beans, romano beans, or kidney beans.

Most recipes also yield multiple servings for easy leftovers!

Breakfast Ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Oatmeal with peanut butter and apples• Granola with coconut yogurt and banana slices or diced apples• Scrambled tofu with spinach and red pepper, serve with toasted pita• Baked oatmeal cups with soy milk
Lunch Ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chickpea avocado salad served in a pita. Add carrots and cucumbers with an easy homemade hummus for dipping!• Bento box with carrots, celery, cucumber, crackers, hummus, almonds and apple slices• Easy lentil salad with crackers (or if you happen to have a few additional ingredients on hand, try this black bean salad)• Green goddess tofu wraps (serve in a pita or on a bun to use the groceries in this haul)
Dinner Ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Black bean burgers (premade in the grocery haul, but you can make your own here too) on bun w/ spinach, cucumber, and carrot salad• Lentil bolognese with spaghetti (<i>Tip: add in leftover veggies to reduce waste and boost nutrition, add nutritional yeast for a cheesy flavour</i>)• Easy tofu stir fry served over cooked bulgur (or rice/quinoa)• Lentil barley soup, top with nutritional yeast (optional) and serve with crackers• Use leftover lentil bolognese, and extra burger buns to make 'Sloppy Joe's
Snack Ideas
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Celery with peanut butter• Apples with almonds• Air popped popcorn (top with nutritional yeast if you have it for a cheesy flavour!)• Sliced veggies, pita, or crackers with lentil hummus (recipe in "lunch" section)• Banana nice cream• No bake energy bites

Note: Some basic pantry ingredients required for recipes (sweeteners, oils, lemon juice, and spices) have not been included in the grocery haul above.

Additional Resources

[UW Food and Nutrition Resources](#)

[Canada's Food Guide](#)

[Unlock Food Vegan and Vegetarian Eating](#)

[The Vegan RD](#)

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