



## BASKET BASICS:

# Healthy Eating Made Easy



"Whole foods" sounds like a buzzword or a current trend across social media platforms. Yet, it simply refers to foods that have not been processed or significantly altered from their natural state. Whole foods include vegetables, fruit, beans, eggs, plain yogurt, oats, nuts, seeds, fish, chicken, tofu, and whole grains. Meals developed around these foods tend to be more filling, less processed, and do not elevate blood sugar levels.

A simple way to balance portions is to envision your plate in thirds. Designate half for vegetables, a quarter for lean protein and another quarter for starches and carbohydrates. Be sure to add some healthy fat like olive oil, avocado, nuts, or seeds, which will help you feel satiated and may reduce snacking throughout the day.

### Hidden Sugar and Sodium

Added sugar is everywhere, appearing in items that may not taste particularly sweet, condiments like mayonnaise, catsup and salad dressings contain a surprisingly high amount of sugar. Other examples include flavored yogurt, granola, protein bars, cereal, sauces and a wide variety of coffee beverages. According to the American Heart Association, women should avoid exceeding six teaspoons of sugar daily and a max of nine teaspoons for men per day.

Sodium and sugar levels need to be monitored. Like hidden grams of sugar contained in non-dessert foods, high sodium levels are found in items that aren't especially salty – such as bread, deli meat, canned soup and frozen entrees. Federal guidelines suggest adults keep sodium levels below 2,300 milligrams daily.

Make it a habit to read labels when grocery shopping. Compare two similar products and select the one with less added sugar and sodium.

### Fast and Easy Lunch and Snack Alternatives

At work, lunch is often chosen for convenience. Rather than overhauling everything, keep what works for you and upgrade one piece at a time.

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We've highlighted some resources you may want to look into further. Simply click or tap the icon or its hyperlink to access these select materials!



**Chickpea crunch salad**

Rinse one can of chickpeas under running water and place in large salad bowl add chopped cucumbers, bell peppers, and cherry tomatoes to the bowl of chickpeas and drizzle with olive oil, a splash of lemon juice and a dash of salt and pepper and toss together. This is a delicious topping for wraps, soups, sauteed vegetables or simply enjoying as a standalone meal.

**Savory oats**

Boil oats with water or low-sodium broth. Stir in fresh spinach while hot and add a boiled or fried egg, top with sliced avocado. Add a sprinkle of chia seeds for a subtle crunch.

**Berry yogurt freezer bites**

Stir berries into plain Greek yogurt and a dash of cinnamon. Spoon onto a parchment lined sheet pan and place in freezer until completely frozen. Doesn't getter much easier than this recipe.

**AI PROMPTS FOR NUTRITION TIPS AND RECIPE IDEAS**

What's in your fridge? At the end of the week, when healthy ingredients have already been eaten, putting together a nutritious meal might feel impossible. AI tools can help. Even asking an AI tool to suggest a recipe with what you have in your fridge can be game-changing at mealtime.

Suggested AI Prompts:

- ▶ "Build a 5-day lunch plan using whole foods and minimal sodium."
- ▶ "Give me snack ideas under 200 calories that include fiber and protein."
- ▶ "Create three healthier versions of my usual sandwich lunch."
- ▶ "Make a grocery list for balanced plate meals for two adults, with quick dinners."

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**Supplements and Essential Nutrients by Age Groups**

Required nutrients and minerals are obtained directly from eating food. However, supplements can be useful when you are deficient in a particular mineral. Speak with your medical practitioner or dietician, especially if you are taking medications before adding supplements to your daily routine.

**Nutrient Guidelines According to Age Group**

AGE GROUP	NUTRIENTS TO WATCH	FOOD-FIRST SOURCES
<b>Adults 19-50</b>	■ Fiber ■ Potassium ■ Vitamin D	Beans, oats, berries, leafy greens, bananas, yogurt, eggs, salmon
<b>Women 51-70</b>	■ Calcium ■ Vitamin D ■ Fiber	Milk or fortified alternatives, yogurt, tofu, sardines, leafy greens, beans
<b>Men 51-70</b>	■ Fiber ■ Magnesium ■ Vitamin D	Beans, nuts, seeds, whole grains, leafy greens, salmon, eggs
<b>Adults 71+</b>	■ Calcium ■ Vitamin D ■ Vitamin B12 ■ Protein	Dairy or fortified options, eggs, fish, lean meats, beans, fortified cereals

**OVERVIEW:**

- Calcium needs increase for many women after age 50 and for most adults after 70.
- Vitamin D needs increase after 70.
- Vitamin B12 matters for energy and nerve health. Absorption can decline with age.
- Fiber needs vary according to age and gender. Women should aim for 25 grams of fiber daily. Men should aim for 38 grams of daily fiber.

A sandwich can become more satisfying with whole grain bread, extra veggies, and a lean protein with minimal sodium. Consider substituting sandwich bread with lettuce or spinach wraps and perhaps wraps or going 50/50 with whole wheat pasta when craving an entrée high in carbohydrates. Rotisserie chicken, tuna, egg salad made with Greek yogurt versus mayonnaise, hummus, or leftover beans are all delicious ingredients to liven an ordinary sandwich. Deli meat, in moderation is okay, though calories and sodium levels accumulate fast otherwise.

Now, let's talk snacks – healthy snacks that is. Pairing fiber with protein helps you stay full longer. Think apple and peanut butter, plain yogurt with berries, nuts and fruit, carrots with hummus, or air-popped popcorn with a sprinkle of seasoning.

If you prefer a sweet treat after lunch, enjoy a few bites of dark chocolate with a handful of nuts, or Greek yogurt with fresh or frozen berries. Prioritizing healthy snacks means you

can satisfy your sweet craving without experiencing a sugar crash.

**Superfoods Worth the Hype**

"Superfood" is not a medical term but is used to describe foods that are extremely high in nutrients. Berries, leafy greens, beans, nuts, seeds, and fatty fish are recognized as superfoods. research-backed eating patterns.

Fermented foods get a lot of attention, too. Yogurt, kefir, kimchi, and sauerkraut support gut and digestive health. If you have never tried fermented foods, start with a small serving to avoid any initial stomach discomfort. Consider adding a tiny amount of kimchi to a lean protein or adding sauerkraut to a protein wrap or sandwich.

**Benefit Resources**

[BCBSIL](#) can connect you with nutrition counseling, healthy eating tools, and wellness webinars. Your [BAM portal](#) is also a helpful place to explore digital programs and resources that support your goals.



**SOURCES:** [American Heart Association](#), [Centers for Disease Control](#), [National Institutes of Health](#), [eatright.org](#), [Harvard Health](#)