

Pain Foundations

Nutrition and Pain

We choose the foods we eat for a variety of reasons including taste, convenience, cost, pleasure, comfort and nutritional value.

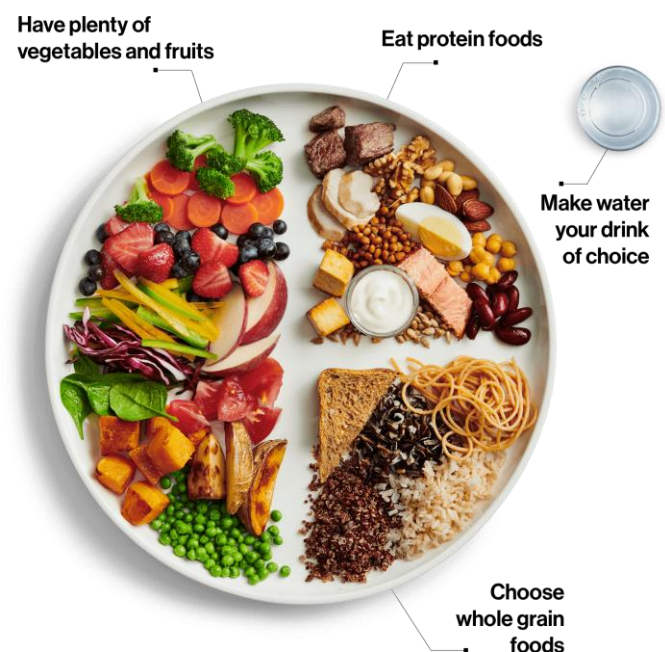
Healthy eating

- Include a **balance** of foods from each food group in your meals. Each food group contains different nutrients that your body needs to function properly.
- Include a **variety** of different foods each day to give your body a variety of vitamins, minerals, and nutrients.
- Practice **moderation** by getting familiar with your body's hunger and fullness cues.
- Eat **regular meals**. Avoid going a long time without eating.
- Be sure to **enjoy** the foods you eat. Having a good relationship with food is an important part of healthy eating.

Canada's Food Guide

Use the healthy plate image from Canada's Food Guide to plan and prepare your meals. Include enough vegetables and fruit to cover $\frac{1}{2}$ of your plate. Prepare enough protein foods such as fish, tofu, beans or low-fat meat to cover $\frac{1}{4}$ of your plate. The other $\frac{1}{4}$ of your plate should be whole grain foods like whole wheat pasta or whole grain bread.

The image below shows the amounts recommended. If you are mixing the foods together to make a stew or soup, try to follow the same amounts of each food group.



Canada's Food Guide is a great visual guide to some of the aspects of healthy eating.

From Canada's Food Guide Dietary Guidelines and available at food-guide.canada.ca/en/guidelines/

Constipation

If you are less active than you used to be, or if you have changed how you eat, you may become constipated. Many pain medications can also cause constipation.

High fibre foods

Eating foods that are high in fibre can help prevent constipation. Here are some examples of high fibre foods that can help prevent constipation:

- ✓ Bran
- ✓ Psyllium
- ✓ Many fruits and vegetables
- ✓ Whole grains such whole grain bread or brown rice
- ✓ Beans and lentils

When buying breads or cereals, read the label. Aim for 4g fibre or more per serving.

Be sure to drink plenty of water. Fibre and water work together to promote a regular bowel pattern and a healthy gut.



Image by pikisuperstar on Freepik

Physical activity

Activity can also help you have a regular bowel pattern. Try increasing your activity by walking more or even stretching. You might want to review the section on Movement so you know how much activity is right for you.



Image by Freepik

Laxatives

If you still have frequent constipation after trying some of the tips above, you might need a laxative. Talk to your doctor.

Inflammation and pain

Inflammation is your body's response to injury and harm. Inflammation helps you heal, but sometimes you can have too much inflammation. Many things can increase inflammation, such as poor diet, food allergies, food sensitivities, food intolerances, environmental toxins, and stress.

Some studies suggest that chronic inflammation might be a cause of chronic pain.

Anti-Inflammatory Diet

Highly processed foods, including the foods listed below, can increase inflammation. Try to eat less of them.

- ✗ White bread
- ✗ Candy bars
- ✗ Chips
- ✗ Sugar

Foods high in saturated fat, including the foods listed below, can also increase inflammation. Try to eat less of them.

- ✗ Cheese
- ✗ Beef, pork and other meats
- ✗ Butter

Unsaturated fats, often called healthy fats, can help reduce inflammation. These fats are found mostly in plant foods and fish, such as:

- ✓ Avocado
- ✓ Nuts
- ✓ Seeds
- ✓ Olive oil
- ✓ Fatty fish, like salmon and sardines

A few studies have shown that turmeric, ginger, dark chocolate, and green tea might reduce inflammation. Scientists still don't know if these foods actually help.

Be cautious with what you read

The information you read online or in books about anti-inflammatory diets can be misleading. There may be lists of foods that you are told to avoid, such as gluten, milk products, soy and more. You do not need to avoid all these foods. You only need to avoid foods you have an allergy, intolerance or sensitivity to.

Food allergies, sensitivities and intolerances can cause more inflammation in your body. If you think you have a food allergy, sensitivity, or intolerance, talk to a dietitian or your doctor. See the Resources section for how to connect with a dietitian.

What is the difference between a food allergy and a food intolerance?

Food allergies can cause a wide variety of symptoms in different parts of your body. Your immune system causes the reaction.

Food intolerances cause symptoms in your gut. For example, if you have lactose intolerance your body does not have the enzyme called lactase that breaks down lactose in your gut. This causes you to have gas and diarrhea.

Vegetables and fruit

Include vegetables and fruit in your meals and snacks. Many vegetables and fruit contain antioxidants, which can protect your cells against damage. They also contain vitamins and minerals, and fibre.



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Water

Drink water when you are thirsty and with meals. If you become dehydrated, you might be more sensitive to pain.

Thirst is often mistaken for hunger, and you might find that you have fewer food cravings when you are well-hydrated.

Supplements

Eat a wide variety of healthy food to make sure your body gets all the vitamins and minerals it needs. People with chronic pain are sometimes low in vitamin D, vitamin B12, and magnesium. Ask your dietitian or doctor if you should be taking any vitamin or mineral supplements.

Protein

Including protein with meals and snacks helps you feel full longer. It also keeps your blood sugar more stable. This can help your mood and make you feel better. It also gives you more energy.

Most people should aim for 20 to 30g of protein per meal. Some people with certain medical conditions might need more, or less protein. A chart showing how many grams of protein are in some common foods is on the next page.

Plant sources of protein

If you don't already eat plant sources of protein, consider trying them. Protein from plant sources is high in fibre, and vitamins and minerals. It can also be more affordable than meat. Search online for recipes with these proteins or other beans:

- ✓ Lentils
- ✓ Chickpeas or garbanzo beans
- ✓ Tofu
- ✓ Black beans
- ✓ Kidney beans

Make sure you eat enough of these protein foods. One and a half cups of chickpeas has the same amount of protein as 3oz of chicken breast (which is about the size of the palm of your hand).

What about protein bars and protein powders?

When your pain or tiredness makes it difficult to prepare a meal, protein bars or powder can be an easy source of protein.

When choosing a bar or powder, pick one that is low in sugar. Read the ingredients list and chose one that has ingredients you recognize.

Protein in sample meal plans

Including animal protein

Meal	Food	Protein (grams)
Breakfast	2 eggs	12
	2 slices whole grain toast	6
	1 cup skim milk	9
Lunch	¾ cup cottage cheese	23
	½ cup whole grain crackers	5
	½ cup canned peaches	
Snack	½ cup sliced cucumber	
	¼ cup mixed nuts	5
	1 piece fruit	
Supper	3 ounces salmon	22
	¼ cup wild rice	3
	½ plate green salad	
Snack	1/3 cup hummus	7
	½ cup baked pita chips	2
Total:		94 grams

Plant-based protein

Meal	Food	Protein (grams)
Breakfast	1 scoop veg. protein powder	25
	½ cup frozen fruit	
	2 tsp chia seeds	2
Lunch	1 cup edamame	17
	½ cup whole grain crackers	
	½ cup cherry tomatoes	
Snack	½ cup sliced cucumber	
	¼ cup mixed nuts	5
	1 piece fruit	
Supper	green salad with veggies	5
	¼ cup pumpkin seeds	10
	½ cup chickpeas	7
Snack	1/3 cup hummus	7
	½ cup baked pita chips	2
Total:		85 grams

Saving money

When you plan meals in advance, you waste less food. You are also less likely to go to a restaurant or order meal delivery.

If planning meals is new for you, start with dinners for just 2 or 3 days. Check what you have in your fridge and freezer, and try to use those foods first. Write the dinners on a blank piece of paper or a menu planner and post it where you will see it.



Image by pikisuperstar on Freepik

Before you go grocery shopping, make a shopping list.

Try to shop when your stomach is full so that you are less tempted to buy unnecessary food. Buy only the items on your list.

Buy frozen vegetables. They are usually cheaper than fresh, and they are just as nutritious.

Many grocery stores now have apps they use to sell food that would otherwise go to waste. The food is often sold at very low prices. Check online for the apps.

See the Resources section for a link to detailed information on where you can get food free or at a reduced price in your community.

Preparing food

When making meals, you might want to cook extra portions and put them in your freezer. You can heat them up on days when you don't feel like cooking.

If you have a crock pot, make one-pot meals. You can find many recipes online. Crock pots make preparing meals easier because you add the ingredients and then leave it until it is ready to eat. Make extra and put in to individual containers and freeze.



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Air fryers can also simplify meal preparation. You can cook almost anything in them without needing to stir or flip the food. You can cook extra portions for another day. Freeze your protein, vegetables, and whole grains separately, or in one package as a meal.

See the section on Energy Conservation for more tips on how to save your energy as you prepare meals.

What stood out to me in this section?

Questions I still have on this topic

Resources

Connect with a dietitian



[Dietitian Services HealthLink BC:](#)

Speak with a dietitian at HealthLink BC by calling 811, or use web-based services to get food and nutrition information, education and counselling. Service is free.

[Hospital or clinic dietitian](#)

Ask your doctor for a referral to an [outpatient dietitian](#) at a clinic or hospital. Service is free with your BC Services Card.



[Private practice dietitian](#)

Search online for a private practice dietitian. There is a cost for their service but if you have an extended health plan, it might include the cost for dietitian services. You can also read blogs written by dietitians.



Contact your local grocery stores and ask if they have dietitians doing healthy eating tours for the public.

Lower cost and free food sources



[Free and Low Cost Foods.](#)

Find where you can get food at a low cost or free in local communities.

[Quest Food Exchange](#)

Buy groceries at a low cost. Open to people who have a lower income or who are disabled, with a referral. Ask one of your healthcare providers or other support providers to write a [referral](#) for you.



[Healthy Eating on a Budget](#)

Get tips on how to eat healthy while living on a limited income.

Websites

[Canada's Food Guide](#)

Explore Canada Food Guide and browse new recipes.





[Healthy Plate](#)

Use this Healthy Plate as a guide to plan healthy balanced meals.

[Plant Proteins](#)

Learn more about plant-based foods and how to prepare them.



[Protein: South Asian](#)

Find a list of protein foods and tips on how to incorporate them into South Asian foods.

[Guide to Heart-Healthy Label Reading](#)

Learn how to read the Nutrition Facts label found on food items and includes definitions for the specific terms that are used.



[Managing Constipation in Adults](#)

Read this two-page resource with information on constipation, foods to help prevent it, and laxatives.