

# How to Build a Healthy Plate in Lockdown

Key nutrients, practical tips and  
recipes to keep your family nourished



SOUTH EASTERN ACTIVE HEALTH

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# Introduction

We all know the importance of eating well to enable us to feel our best and look after our health. Now more than ever, it's a great time to be conscious of how we can optimise food choices to best support our health.

Life in lockdown can be quite exhausting. What with juggling work from home, childcare, video calls and keeping up with the latest news. Figuring out what to eat for dinner shouldn't be yet another chore. And, it doesn't have to be!

This e-book has been designed to help you take out the guess work of healthy eating at home. You'll find practical tips and ideas to incorporate nutritious meals into your lockdown lifestyle, using simple staple ingredients.





# Around the Plate

Eating healthily doesn't just come down to having strong willpower. There are numerous factors which influence our food choices. Affordability of produce, dietary intolerances, accessing culturally appropriate foods and taste preferences are just some reasons why we eat what we eat.

Before focussing directly on what foods are best to eat, it's important to set up some foundations to make healthy eating easier. Here are a few strategies to try incorporating "around the plate" to set yourself up for success.

## ***Preparation is key***

It's easy to run out of inspiration to cook midway through the week, so planning in advance can save both the mental and physical energy of cooking. Plan out the main meals you can realistically prepare for each night of the week.

Before shopping, a good place to start is having a scout through your fridge and pantry. See if there is anything that needs to be eaten up soon and work those items into your meals for the start of the week.



### *Have a spare hour on a Sunday afternoon?*

This is a great opportunity to prep ingredients for your weekly meals. Try chopping up a bunch of vegetables to roast or steam, boil eggs, cook up rice, soak oats overnight in water or milk for breakfast the next day or cook some meat to save the time later in the week.

## ***Have a back-up plan***

Even when we have all the best intentions, sometimes life just gets in the way and we have to make adjustments. This is true to what we plan to eat too.

It's fine to order take away after a really busy day every so often. However, rather than letting meal deliveries become your go-to strategy, try stocking up on a few short-cut meal items that take less than fifteen minutes to put together, heat and plate up.

Ideas could include microwavable tuna, bean and rice packs, pre-made refrigerated soups, slaw/salad mixes to add to a serve of protein and wholegrain crisp-bread/crackers with avocado or a dip such as hummus.

## ***Separate your work space from your dining space***

As tempting as it is to eat at your home office or desk, this can easily lead to constant grazing and mindless eating. When our mind is elsewhere during meal times, we are less aware of how hungry or full we feel. Our appetite might be unsatisfied after the meal, leading us to grab more food to graze on shortly after.

Try to have a space you can eat away from your desk and workspace to foster a mindful eating routine. You may actually find that you enjoy your food more with an increased awareness of the flavour, texture and aroma.



# On the Plate

Making a healthy meal doesn't have to involve weighing every food item and strict calorie counting. Eating a wide variety of different foods is one of the best ways to eat to provide a broad range of nutrients to support various functions in the body.

How should that look? Whether eating from a plate, bowl or lunch box, this is general four-step guide to creating a balanced meal.

## *1. Start with a base of vegetables or fruit*

Colour is the key to variety! Aim to include 2-3 different vegetables to provide antioxidants and nutrients that support a healthy immune system such as vitamin C (broccoli, tomatoes, capsicum, potatoes) and vitamin A (sweet potato, spinach, carrots).

This can be as simple as using frozen mixed vegetables or a pre-made vegetable slaw mix – these quick options are just as healthy. For more of a sweet or breakfast meal, aim to include a serve of fruit. Berries, kiwi fruit, oranges and cantaloupe are all great sources of vitamins A and C.

**Aim to fill half your plate or bowl with non-starchy vegetables.**



## *2. Ensure you getting quality protein*

Protein plays an essential role in maintenance and repair of bodily tissues and cells, including cells of the immune system. Zinc is another mineral important for the immune system, which just so happens to be found in many protein-rich foods (meat, poultry, seafood, nuts, seeds and beans).

Whether you eat meat or not, there are a range of protein-rich foods to choose from.

**Aim to include a palm-size of protein rich foods in your meal.**

Tip: Strain and rinse canned legumes well with water before eating to make them easier to digest.

### **Animal Proteins**

- Red meat / poultry / pork
- Fish & seafood
- Eggs
- Milk / cheese / yoghurt
- Whey protein powder

### **Plant Proteins**

- Legumes/ beans / lentils
- Tofu / tempeh / Quorn / edamame beans: for an easy option buy frozen shelled edamame beans and pre-marinated tofu
- Quinoa and pulse pasta
- Nuts, seeds & nut butters/spreads made from 100% nuts
- Soy milk / pea protein milk
- Plant protein powder



### *3. Add a serve of ‘smart’ carbs*

High fibre, whole-food based carbohydrates provide a variety of vitamins, minerals and a range of different forms of fibre to fuel a healthy gut microbiome and help keep you regular.

**A good amount to aim for is about ¼ of your plate for carbs.**

Smart carbs include:

- Potatoes / sweet potatoes (rich in Vitamin A and C)
- Rice: opt for brown, basmati, black or wild rice
- Quinoa / buckwheat / millet / amaranth
- Oats
- Wholegrain pasta or pulse pasta
- Wholegrain / seeded / sourdough bread, crisp-bread and crackers



### *4. Top it off with healthy fats*

We need good quality fats in our diet to absorb fat-soluble vitamins (A, D, E and K) as well as supporting cardiovascular and hormonal health.

Fats also provide flavour to meals and allow us to feel more satiated after eating.

**Include around a heaped tablespoon of good fats in your meal.**

Food sources of healthy fats include:

- Nuts and nut butters/spreads (opt for those made from just nuts)
- Seeds
- Avocado
- Extra virgin olive oil
- Oily fish (eg. salmon, sardines, mackerel): a great source of anti-inflammatory omega-3 fats, aim for 2 serves per week





# Final Notes

## *Don't forget to hydrate*

If you're working at your desk all day or wearing a mask for a prolonged time, it's easy to forget to drink water. Drinking adequate water is crucial to help feel your best, improve concentration and prevent fatigue, headaches and constipation.

Tips from improving your water intake:

- Fill up a large water bottle (about 600-750ml) to keep at your workspace to remind you to drink. Aim to have two of these over the day.
- If you don't love the taste of water, try adding a cold-infusion tea bag for flavour, or make a pot of hot herbal tea to sip on.
- Try to have a glass of water either with, or just before or after each main meal.



## *What about snacking?*

In a similar way to planning ahead with your meals before shopping, try to make a list of nutritious snack foods you can keep around.

Think veggie sticks with hummus, yoghurt with fruit and nuts/seeds, fruit with nut butter, popcorn, or a homemade smoothie.

## *Allow a little indulgence*

Food is about a lot more than just nutrition. It's important to allow yourself to enjoy the foods you love rather than forbid them.

More often than not, restricting foods makes us crave them and binge on them even more. It's okay to enjoy and celebrate treats and foods you love – remember you are living through a global pandemic!

Try to eat these mindfully to get the most enjoyment and satisfaction out of them.





# Recipes

## *Simple Minestrone with Crispy Sunflower Seed Topping*



*Serves 4*

Vegetarian | Gluten Free | Pantry Staples

While this soup uses cheap, pantry staple ingredients, it certainly does not fall short on flavour.

Packed with vegetables, this soup is full of fibre and protein to keep you satiated.

The cooked tomatoes are rich in lycopene, a powerful antioxidant which is associated with health benefits such as protecting heart health and eyesight.

The sunflower seed topping is incredibly simple to make. It adds a delicious crunch as well as vitamin E and zinc.

### **Ingredients:**

- 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 4 stalks celery, roughly chopped
- ½ brown onion, diced
- 2 carrots, roughly chopped
- 1 zucchini, roughly chopped
- 1 tbsp dried mixed Italian herbs
- 2 x 400g canned whole tomatoes
- 2 x 400g canned mixed beans, strained and rinsed

### **Sunflower seed topping:**

- 1/3 cup sunflower seeds
- 2 tbsp shaved parmesan cheese
- 1 tsp extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tsp dried mixed Italian herbs

### **How to cook:**

1. Preheat the oven to 160C.
2. Heat the oil in a large pot over MED heat.
3. Add the onion and celery, sauté for 2 minutes to soften.
4. Add the carrot, zucchini and herbs. Cook for 5 minutes to lightly brown them.
5. Add the tomatoes (including juice from the cans), roughly crush them up in the pot. Add 1½ cups water. Stir well, cover with a lid and simmer on low heat for 20 minutes.
6. For the sunflower seed topping; Combine all ingredients well in a bowl, then pour onto a lined baking tray. Keep the seeds close together to create clusters.
7. Bake in the oven for 10-12 minutes, until golden and aromatic.
8. Add beans to the soup and simmer for 5-10 minutes to warm them.
9. Season with pepper and salt.

Serve soup with the crunchy seeds sprinkled on top and fresh sourdough bread.



# Recipes

## *Broccoli, Pea and White Bean Protein Pasta*

*Serves 2*

Vegetarian | Gluten Free | Vegan Option

Another great way to pack veggies into a meal is to add them to a pasta dish. This meal only takes 15 minutes to cook, making a quick, easy and healthy meal for lunch or a weeknight dinner.

This dish uses chickpea or pulse pasta, which is naturally gluten-free and a great option for anyone with a wheat allergy or intolerance. It's also high in protein and fibre which is great for gut health and helps keep you feeling fuller for longer.

However, if you only have regular pasta on hand you can certainly still use that, just cook according to the packet instructions.

### Ingredients:

- 150g chickpea or pulse pasta
- 2/3 cup cannellini beans, strained & rinsed
- 1/2 large fennel bulb, sliced thinly
- 1/3 cup frozen peas
- 4 large florets broccoli, finely chopped
- 1 handful spinach leaves
- 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tsp dried herbs (chives/oregano/basil)
- 2 tbsp grated parmesan cheese\*

\*Variation: To make Vegan, substitute the parmesan for nutritional yeast flakes.

### How to cook:

1. Cook pasta in boiling water until al dente (approx. 7 mins).
2. Heat 1 tbsp olive oil in pan, add fennel, broccoli and peas. Sauté until starting to brown.
3. Add the beans and lightly stir.
4. Strain cooked pasta then add to the vegetables with the spinach and herbs. Mix through.
5. Season with the remaining olive oil, salt, pepper and parmesan or nutritional yeast flakes.

