

### SIMPLE WAYS TO SPIFF UP YOUR NUTRITION



Most of us want to eat healthy. We know that it will make us feel better, look better, and be healthier... but wanting to do something and *actually doing it* can be miles apart. What's the right way to go about it? Should we go on one of the current popular diets? Should we skip meals? Isn't there an easy-to-follow guide on healthy eating that won't leave us feeling starved and awful?

There's a lot of information out there, and it's important to know that what may work well for one person, might spell disaster for someone else. Of course, we're referring to extreme diets that are very restrictive and difficult to adhere to. So, let's start with some practical healthy nutritional tips that we can all do while maintaining a healthy and enjoyable relationship with our food.

**Make sure that you are eating enough.** Though you may want to cut calories to lose weight, or maybe because you just forget to eat sometimes, not having enough calories will make your metabolism slow down and cause you to feel tired and not on point. Find out through one of the many apps out there or ask an expert what your minimum calories should be.

**Add more healthy foods into your existing diet.** Do you love toast for breakfast? Add some slices of avocado for avocado toast or add some chopped veggies to your omelet. Is pizza a favorite? Start putting some veggies on top.

**Enjoy your meals.** There's more to eating than taking in nutrients, so if all you think about is nutrient density and calories, you are likely missing out on the joy of food. Remember to include social interaction, satisfaction, and fun at least several times a week or whenever possible.

**Describe your food in positive ways.** Most of us think of food as healthy or unhealthy. This can make us feel bad if we occasionally (or more often) eat something "unhealthy" and can set us up for failure with that all or nothing attitude of "I blew it; I'm just going back to eating whatever." Instead, be descriptive of your food. Is it spicy, full of flavor, extra crunchy? Does it remind you of good times?

**Make it simple.** Convenience is important to most of us - at least some of the time. Prepping meals in advance to be able to use throughout the week is one



### Healthy Green Smoothie

#### Ingredients:

- 1/2 frozen banana
- 3 green apples
- 2 celery stalks
- 1 cup organic spinach
- 1/4 avocado
- 1/4 cup of lemon juice
- 6-8 mint leaves
- 1 Tablespoon chia seeds
- 1 cup water
- 4 ice cubes

#### Directions:

Cube ingredients and add to a blender. Blend until smooth. Add more water if needed.

(Can substitute unsweetened almond or coconut milk for water.)

You'll have a delicious smoothie high in fiber and vitamins.

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tool for your toolbox. Another is to purchase bagged, pre-washed, pre-chopped vegetables. Many people have found that an air fryer is a game changer in cooking food – it is quick, and your meats and vegetables taste like they've been baked, fried, or roasted. Try seasoned frozen vegetables in the air fryer!

**Eat enough fiber-rich foods.** It keeps you regular and also helps your body to colonize good gut bacteria.

**ADD MORE VEGETABLES!** Most of us don't eat enough vegetables (5 servings). You can be inventive with them, i.e. smoothies, etc., or just add a cup of roasted broccoli or a salad with dinner.

**Give yourself permission to eat the foods you crave.** This doesn't mean overindulge or eat this way all the time. It does mean that you don't need to eat healthy everything all the time.

**Eat phytonutrients (plant food).** Do some research (internet) and you will find lots of information fruits and vegetables that are extremely beneficial to the human body. These include blueberries, dark leafy greens, and sweet potatoes.

**Eat when you are hungry.** Listen to your body. Many of us tend to eat for reasons other than being hungry such as when we are bored, upset, or watching TV.

**Use herbs often.** They more than give flavor, they are healthy in their own right! For instance, fresh parsley contains vitamins A, C, and K. Turmeric is anti-inflammatory and improves oxidative stress.

**Keep healthy foods on hand.** Instead of packing your pantry and fridge with processed foods, keep only whole foods. If you have a craving for something unhealthy, needing to go out to get it might make you think twice – do you really want it that badly? If you do, go for it!

**Read the ingredients on packages!** Is there too much sugar, salt, or the great unknown in there?

**Drink plenty of water!** Hydrate, hydrate, hydrate! Sometimes when we think we are hungry, we're actually just thirsty.

**Easy grilling** - Slice up zucchini, onions, bell peppers, and mushrooms, place them in foil, drizzle with a small amount of oil and seasoning, and toss them on the grill. You can use any vegetables you like!

**Choose lean protein** – such as chicken breast, turkey burgers, or fish and pop on the grill or in the air fryer.

**Enjoy nuts and seeds.** Add them to yogurt or oatmeal, or just enjoy a small handful as a snack. Almonds, cashews, filberts, hazelnuts, walnuts, pecans, and pistachios pack plenty of beneficial nutrients including vitamin E, folic acid, potassium, and fiber. Yes, nuts are high in fat, but it is mostly the healthy kind. Just keep in mind that a serving is about ¼ cup.



## Ridiculously Easy Bean Salad

The beans you choose for this simple bean salad are up to you. Both canned or home cooked beans will work. When using canned, drain and rinse the beans first before adding to the salad. Makes about 6 cups.

### Ingredients for the Salad:

- 3 (15-ounce) cans beans, drained and rinsed or use 4 1/2 cups cooked beans
- 1/2 medium onion, finely chopped
- 1 medium cucumber, finely chopped
- 3 tablespoons drained capers
- 1/2 cup finely chopped fresh parsley
- 3/4 teaspoon dried oregano

### Ingredients for the Dressing:

- 1/4 cup red wine vinegar
- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 1 to 2 teaspoons honey or maple syrup, optional
- 3/4 teaspoon fine sea salt, plus more to taste
- 1/4 teaspoon fresh ground black pepper

### Directions:

Add chopped onions to a small bowl and cover with cold water. Set aside for 5 minutes, drain, and then rinse. *This step helps to remove some of the "raw" flavor of the onion so that it does not overpower the salad.*

Meanwhile, in the bottom of a large bowl, whisk together the vinegar, olive oil, mustard, salt and pepper. Taste the dressing and then adjust with more salt/pepper. If the dressing tastes too abrasive, whisk in 1 to 2 teaspoons of honey or maple syrup to balance out the vinegar.

Add the beans, drained onion, cucumber, parsley, capers and dried oregano. Toss well, cover and chill in the refrigerator at least 1 hour to allow the beans to marinate in the dressing.

The salad will keep stored in an airtight container in the fridge up to 4 days.

Photo and Recipe: <https://www.inspiredtaste.net/46546/easy-bean-salad/>

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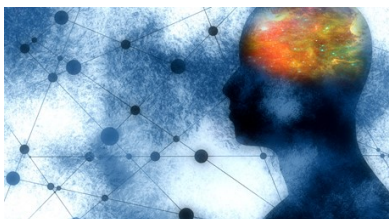
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**Try using the plate method.** Fill your plate with ½ vegetables, ¼ protein, and ¼ starch (potatoes, rice, etc.)

**Enjoy your meals!** *Mindful eating* is taking the time to experience the sight, smell, taste, and feel of your food. Try it. Not many of us will do this all the time, but on occasion, it can really add to the whole experience of enjoying a good meal.

## BOOST BRAIN HEALTH

Many different components can influence brain health. We know that *quality sleep, a healthy diet, staying hydrated, exercise, staying socially connected, and performing cognitively stimulating activities* all positively benefit our brains as we age. “The enemy of neuroplasticity is status quo thinking, or going on auto-pilot,” says Jennifer Zientz, MS, CCC/SLP, head of clinical services at Center for Brain Health at the University of Texas at Dallas, “Cultivating curiosity and being an active participant in life keeps neuroplasticity going.” “When people stop engaging in deeper level thinking, innovative thinking, novel experiences—whatever their interests are—that results in status quo function,” says Zientz. “We can be healthy people and not do anything challenging to us, but we won’t be leveraging neuroplasticity in a healthy way.”



### Brain Boosters

**Reading Fiction:** Reading fiction helps us to use our imaginations. This is much like muscle memory for an athlete. When we imagine doing something that we aren’t actually doing, the neurons in our left temporal cortex are activated and engaging our minds in embodied cognition. Long story short, reading helps our brains to become better at understanding and empathizing with others.

**Doodling:** Doodling helps us to concentrate on boring activities or conversations. It allows our brains to remain focused rather than daydreaming.

**Music:** Listening to music strengthens the right hemisphere of your brain and changes the structure of it. “There are few things that stimulate the brain the way music does,” says one Johns Hopkins otolaryngologist. “If you want to keep your brain engaged throughout the aging process, listening to or playing music is a great tool. It provides a total brain workout.” And if you want to obtain even further benefit, learn an instrument!

**Switching Things Up:** Routine isn’t a brain booster, so surprise your brain every so often. This doesn’t need to be complicated. Drive a different way to work. Bike instead of run if running is your norm. Try writing or eating with your opposite hand. If your job is monotonous, do challenging things on your down time.

## Healthier Broccoli Chicken Casserole



### Ingredients:

- 8 ounces uncooked pasta of choice
- 1 large head of broccoli\*, cut into bite-sized florets
- 2 tablespoons butter or olive oil
- 1 small white onion, thinly sliced
- 8 ounces baby bella (cremini) mushrooms, thinly sliced
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 3 tablespoons flour
- 1 cup chicken or vegetable stock
- 1 ½ cups milk
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- ½ teaspoon fine sea salt
- ¼ teaspoon freshly-cracked black pepper
- 2 cups shredded sharp cheddar cheese, divided
- 2 cups diced or shredded cooked chicken

### Directions:

1. Heat oven to 400°F.
2. Cook pasta in a large stockpot of generously-salted boiling water until it is al dente. However, about 1 minute before the pasta is done, add the broccoli to the boiling pasta water and stir until combined. Drain both the pasta and broccoli, and set aside.
3. Meanwhile, heat the butter (or oil) in a large sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add the onion and sauté for 3 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the mushrooms and garlic and sauté for 5 more minutes, stirring occasionally, or until the mushrooms are cooked through.
4. Sprinkle the flour evenly over the onion mixture and stir until combined. Cook for 1 minute, stirring occasionally. Add in the stock, and stir everything together until most of the clumps are gone. Add in the milk, Dijon, salt and pepper and stir until combined. Continue cooking the sauce until it reaches a simmer. Then remove from heat and stir in 1 cup of the shredded cheese until it is combined. Taste and season with additional salt and pepper, if needed.
5. In a large 9 x 13-inch baking dish, combine the cooked pasta, broccoli, mushroom sauce and chicken. Toss until combined. Smooth the casserole out into an even layer.
6. Bake uncovered for 15 minutes. Then remove pan from the oven, sprinkle the remaining cheddar cheese evenly on top of the casserole, and bake for 10 more minutes or until the cheese is nice and melty.
7. Serve warm, garnished with extra black pepper and/or fresh herbs, if desired.

6-8 Servings

Author: Ali

Find it online: <https://www.gimmesomeoven.com/healthier-broccoli-chicken-casserole/>

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**Playing Games:** Anything that makes you think is great! Card games, crossword puzzles, Sudoku, and brain training apps are just a few.

**Learning Something New:** Stretch your mind. Learn a new hobby or sport. Try learning a new language or instrument. Take an online course.

<https://brainhealth.utdallas.edu/news/curiosity-is-key-for-keeping-your-memory-in-top-shape-as-you-age-here-are-4-exercises-that-are-better-than-brain-games/>  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6787147/>  
<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/keep-your-brain-young-with-music>

## IMPROVING YOUR BALANCE

Who hasn't taken a tumble by losing their balance? According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 3 million older adults are treated in the emergency room for fall injuries each year. And it's not just seniors who fall, it can happen at any age. *The good news is many falls can be preventable by being more aware of our surroundings, strengthening our bodies and improving our balance.*



The following are some exercises to improve balance. *Always check with your health care provider before beginning a home exercise program. For safety during these exercises, position yourself near a countertop or sturdy surface that you can use for support.*

**Standing March** - Standing near a sturdy support, begin marching in place slowly for 20-30 seconds.

**Standing 3-Way Kicks** - Standing on 1 leg (with a soft, unlocked knee), slowly raise your other leg out in front of you. Keep your extended leg as straight as possible and return it to the center. Then gently lift the same leg out to the side and back down, and then extend your leg behind your body and back down.

**One Leg Stand** - Stand on 1 leg as long as you are able, up to 30 seconds. Remember to remain near a sturdy support surface that you can hold on if needed. Alternate legs and try to do this 3-5 times on each leg. As this becomes easier, challenge yourself by doing other tasks while standing on 1 leg, such as brushing your teeth, talking on the phone, or while doing the dishes. Balance exercises can easily be integrated into your daily routine this way.

**Sit to Stand and Stand to Sit** - Rise out of a chair without using your arms to push up. If this is difficult at first, place a firm pad underneath you on the chair seat to raise you. As you return to a seated position, slowly lower yourself all the way back down and ease into your seat (rather than dropping into the chair). Perform as many times as you are able. This can easily be done while watching TV.



## Southwestern Chicken Casserole

### Ingredients:

- 1 ½ cups minute brown rice, uncooked (white or brown minute rice will work)
- 2 cups low sodium chicken broth
- ½ medium yellow onion, finely diced
- 1 15-oz. can sweet corn, drained and rinsed
- 1 15-oz. can black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 lb. boneless skinless raw chicken breasts, cut into 1-inch chunks
- 1 16-oz. jar salsa (any spice level works!)
- ¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro
- ½ teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 2 teaspoons garlic powder
- ½ cup Colby Jack cheese
- **Optional toppings:** shredded Colby Jack cheese, Greek yogurt, salsa, and green onions.

### Directions:

Preheat oven to 375°F and spray a large casserole dish with nonstick cooking spray.

Add all ingredients (minus the shredded cheese) into the casserole dish and mix with a wooden spoon making sure that everything is well mixed and submerged in liquid. Then, cover with aluminum foil and bake at 375°F for about 50 minutes.

Uncover and top with shredded cheese. Bake, uncovered, for an additional 10 minutes.

Once fully cooked, let rest for 10 minutes before serving. Top with Greek yogurt, more shredded cheese, salsa, and green onions.

8 Servings - Calories: 366, Sugar: 6 Fat: 5, Carbohydrates: 54, Fiber: 12, Protein: 27

Author: [Lee Funke](#) Category: Casserole Method: Oven Cuisine: Southwestern

**Find it online:** <https://fitfoodiefinds.com/southwestern-chicken-casserole/>

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**Walk the Tightrope** - Lay a long piece of string or rope on the floor (or just use your imagination). Lift your arms and hold them out to your sides for balance. Walk without veering from the line for 10 to 20 steps, heel to toe or from one end of the room to the other. Once you've finished the line, turn around and go back the other way. Repeat four times. If you want to make it more challenging, hold your foot in the air for two or three seconds each time you take a step.

**Squats** - Squats are a great way to build core strength, and a sturdy core is key to good balance. Start this exercise with your feet shoulder-width apart and your hands at your sides. Tighten your abs, bend your knees, and push your buttocks out like you're sitting down in a chair. You don't have to go down too deep; a 30-degree angle is fine. Once you achieve the squat position, slowly stand up. Repeat several times until you feel your quads and glutes starting to burn. If you want to make the exercise a little more challenging, hold a five-pound barbell in each hand.

By incorporating these and other simple exercises into your normal workout routine, it's possible to slow down age-related balance issues while significantly lowering the risk of a fall.

If you want to maximize the benefits of exercise, it's important to consider nutrition as well.

<https://www.chooset.com/resources/detail/6-balance-exercises-you-can-safely-perform-at-home>  
<https://www.carewell.com/resources/blog/6-easy-at-home-exercises-for-2021-improve-balance-and-prevent-falls/>

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## Peanut Butter Oatmeal Bars

These Oatmeal Peanut Butter Cookie Bars are about to change your life. They're gooey on the inside, made with wholesome ingredients, and kid-friendly! This recipe uses all-natural sugar (hey, maple syrup!), white whole wheat flour, rolled oats, and all-natural peanut butter to keep these peanut butter oatmeal bars healthy and better for you! Yield 9 bars.

### Dry Ingredients:

- 1 cup rolled oats
- 1/4 cup white whole wheat flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- Pinch of salt
- 1/3 cup mini chocolate chips

### Wet Ingredients:

- 2 large eggs
- 1 cup creamy peanut butter
- 1/2 cup maple syrup
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

### Directions:

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F and spray an 8x8 baking pan with non-stick cooking spray or line with parchment paper.
2. Next, add dry ingredients to a bowl and mix well. Set aside.
3. In a separate bowl, whisk your eggs. Then add the rest of your wet ingredients to the eggs. Mix well.
4. Slowly add your dry ingredients to wet ingredients. When ingredients are well combined, pour dough into your baking pan. Spread evenly.
5. Bake at 350°F for 15-18 minutes (depending on your oven) and how gooey you want your bars.

**Tips & Notes:** Option to sub any drippy nut butter such as cashew or almond for the peanut butter. Option to sub the white whole wheat flour for a gluten-free flour blend. We do not recommend subbing for coconut flour.

Calories: 361 Sugar: 19 Sodium: 179 Fat: 21  
Carbohydrates: 37 Fiber: 5 Protein: 9

Author: [Lee Funke](#)

Find it online: <https://fitfoodiefinds.com/oatmeal-peanut-butter-cookie-bars/>