10 Tips for Eating a Plant-Forward Diet

"Eat food, not too much, mostly plants."

This simple phrase from author Michael Pollan encompasses much of what we know about dietary patterns that are good for our health and the health of the planet. Plant foods include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, pulses, nuts and seeds. We're all told to eat more plants, but how can we do this in a simple way on a daily basis? Read on for simple tips.

1 Make Half Your Plate Fruits & Vegetables

This simple message is an easy way to increase healthful, plant foods in your diet. There are hundreds of different varieties of pulses grown all over the world, and their subtle flavors make them the perfect canvas for a variety of delicious herb and spice combinations. Also, pulses' unique combination of nutrients allows them to count as either a vegetable or protein food.

2 Build Healthful Meals With Pulses + Grains

Pulses and whole grains are both plant-based sources of protein and key components of a healthy diet. Proteins are created from twenty different amino acid building blocks; nine of which cannot be produced by the body and are called "essential." Most plant-based proteins lack one or more of the essential amino acids, but when two or more plant-based sources of protein are combined, each food can provide the essential amino acid(s) that the complementary food(s) is missing. Grains and pulses are complementary proteins. Therefore when you eat the two together, you get a complete protein or all nine essential amino acids. Beans and rice, anyone?

3 Make Eating Vegetables Easy

Preparing produce (washing, peeling, chopping, grating, etc.) ahead of time makes mealtime prep quick and easy. Also, having snack-ready vegetables on hand makes plant foods the easy choice. Have pre-cut broccoli, cauliflower, cucumbers, sliced peppers and carrots in the fridge and pair them with a pulse-based spread like hummus or bean dip. Also, keep canned or frozen vegetables on hand, like canned beans, peas, chickpeas and lentils, for fast, easy meal preparation.

4 Looks for Plant-Forward Snacks

There are countless snack options available to enjoy delicious plant-based foods. Check your grocery store snack aisle for all the latest snack options that incorporate pulses. You can also find pulses in chips, crackers, cereals and dairy alternatives, to name a few!

5 Up Your Plant-Based Proteins

Plant-based proteins are important foods. They include foods like beans, peas, chickpeas, lentils, nuts and seeds. Plant-based proteins provide a unique combination of nutrients including filling protein and fiber, plus other important nutrients for a healthy body. If you're making hamburgers, try replacing half the ground beef with mashed pinto beans. Cooking up homemade mac n' cheese for dinner? Try replacing up to half the cheese sauce with yellow split pea puree. Get creative with healthy cooking and baking swaps with pulses.

6 Eat a Mediterranean-Style Diet

The Mediterranean diet is the traditional eating pattern of countries along the Mediterranean Sea. Rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, pulses, nuts, seeds and olive oil, the Mediterranean diet is considered one of the world's healthiest dietary patterns. Numerous studies have shown that the Mediterranean diet promotes health and longevity and may prevent chronic diseases like heart disease. If you're trying to follow a Mediterranean diet, remember that consuming pulses is a key part of this dietary pattern.

7 Feature Fruit in Meals and Snacks

Fruit is a great choice for a healthy, convenient snack or dessert. Make fruit the easy and appealing choice by displaying fresh fruit in a beautiful wooden bowl on your kitchen counter. Keep sliced fruit on hand in the refrigerator for easy, frequent consumption. Add frozen fruit to smoothies. And keep snack mixes made with dried fruit and nuts in your car, purse, or office desk drawer for a quick, convenient and healthful snack option when hunger strikes.

8 Start Your Day With A Plant-Forward Smoothie

Smoothies are a great way to pack in lots of plants. But don't limit yourself; your plant options go way beyond fruit! Adding vegetables and pulses to smoothies is a great way to get a variety of plant-foods and all the healthful nutrients that go along with each plant. Adding pea protein powder is an easy way to up the protein and fiber in any smoothie.

9 Eat Seasonally

A juicy peach. Sweet, tender corn on the cob. The flavors of seasonal fruits and vegetables are a joy to savor. Eating foods in the season that they are harvested not only provides exceptional flavor, it also makes incredible flavors more affordable. Pulses are always affordable and always in season. Why? Because they are allowed to dry in the pod before being harvested, they can be stored safely for years. Pulses can enhance the flavor and nutrition of your favorite seasonal foods all year long!

10 Savor Plant-Based Spreads

Whether hummus is your jam or you prefer a roasted eggplant dip, plant-based spreads are so delicious. Use them as a dip for whole grain crackers or vegetable crudité, the base of a vegetable flatbread, or a meat alternative for a sandwich or wrap.

PULSES

To find more pulse inspiration + recipes, visit www.pulses.org/NAP