



HOW  
TO EAT

30

PLANTS  
A WEEK

(AND WHY YOU SHOULD)



## Getting more veg variety in your diet comes with masses of health benefits – and it's easier than you might think. Hit the 'magic 30' each week to help improve your immunity, gut health and mood

**T**hink back over what you've eaten during the past seven days. How many different types of plant foods made it onto your plate? If you opted for the same breakfast cereal, lunchtime sandwich, and meat and two veg combination each night, chances are you're not reaping the full array of health benefits that a varied diet has to offer.

Research suggests that for optimum gut health, immunity and mood, we should aim to eat at least 30 different plant-based foods each week. The recommendation comes from a study published in 2018 (the American Gut Project), which compared the gut microbiome of more than 10,000 volunteers. It showed that people who consume more than 30 different plant foods every week have more varied gut bacteria than those who eat fewer than 10. And, as we're increasingly aware, more gut bacteria means a healthier gut microbiome, which in turn means better overall health.

Sound a bit overwhelming? It's easier than you might think. "Broadly speaking, plant-based foods are any foods that originate from plants, not just fruit and vegetables," explains specialist gut-health dietitian Kaitlin Colucci. "They also include wholegrains, nuts and seeds, pulses (beans, chickpeas, lentils and peas), and even herbs and spices. In a system devised by Dr Megan Rossi, author of two books on gut health and a research fellow at King's College London, each different plant counts as one plant point (see page 103), while herbs and spices count as 1/4, because the quantities we eat are generally small. This is regardless of the portion size, as it's the *variety* of food that's

important here. It's still a good idea to get your 5 a day though – it'll help you reach that 30-a-week recommendation."

Helpfully, different varieties of the same plant count as separate points (see page 103). So, if you have a dish containing a red and a yellow pepper, this counts as two points. A three-bean salad is three; a handful of mixed nuts would be three or four; and a pouch of mixed brown, wild and red rice counts as three. Fresh, dried, frozen and tinned plants all count, too, but not refined versions, such as fruit juice, white bread, pasta or rice due to the processing they undergo (which strips them of fibre and many nutritional benefits). Similarly, plant-based alternatives to milk or yogurt and vegan meat substitutes don't count. "It's *whole* foods that contain fibre that count," explains Kaitlin.

From a scientific perspective, varying the plant foods you eat gives your body different mixes of fibre and nutrients, which in turn encourages the growth of more diverse types of beneficial bacteria in the gut. Plant foods are also rich in polyphenols – biologically active molecules that feed your gut bacteria and benefit your health in other ways. A study published in the *Journal of the American Heart Association* showed that people who eat more plants have a lower risk of diseases such as high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes, and have a consistently lower risk of death due to heart disease compared to those who eat a 'typical' Western diet high in refined carbohydrates, sugar and processed foods.

Professor Tim Spector is the co-founder of ZOE, the personalised nutrition company, and the author of *Sunday Times* bestselling book *The Diet Myth* (which introduced many readers to the notion of a beneficial »

### EASY WAYS TO EAT MORE PLANTS

#### #30A WEEK

##### BE A SUPER SWAPPER

Experiment with different heat-to-eat lentil or grain pouches, and vary tinned beans and pulses. Like chickpeas? Try green lentils instead; swap borlotti for black beans, or use a mixed pack of quinoa colours instead of just one variety.

#### #30A WEEK

##### PICK AND MIX IT UP

Perk up spice mixes with extra nuts, herbs and seeds. Try adding chopped pistachios or pumpkin seeds to dukkah, or boost zaatar with chilli flakes, cumin seeds or dried oregano.

**'From a scientific perspective, varying plant foods gives your body different mixes of fibre and nutrients'**

### #30AWEEK

#### VARY SNACKS

Choose crudités for dips according to the season. As well as carrot or cucumber sticks, try radishes, chicory leaves, sliced fennel, sweet peppers and baby corn.



## '30 a week sounds like a tall order, but break it down and it becomes more achievable'

microbiome) and, more recently, *Food for Life*. "In the last decade, people's understanding of the gut microbiome and the impact that diet and gut health have on overall health has changed hugely," he says. "It's gone from being something not many of us knew about to a dinner-party topic. The more we talk about the gut microbiome and how diet can help with our health, the more likely we are to experiment with new foods and lots of interesting plants. My hope is that, as microbiome and gut-health fame continues to grow, people will buy more whole plant foods and stop buying so much ultra-processed rubbish. Diets that put the microbiome at the centre have so many advantages, such as a lower risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, Alzheimer's and many other chronic diseases."

Hitting 30 a week may sound like a tall order, but when you break it down, the whole thing becomes a lot more achievable. Just by opting

for mixed leaves, nuts, seeds, grains and beans instead of single varieties (wherever possible), you're probably already halfway there. Like toast for breakfast? Choose bread with multiple grains or seeds, such as Waitrose Multi-seeded Farmhouse, or Waitrose No.1 Malt Sourdough Bread with Seeds. Load it up with nut butter, banana, avocado, houmous or berry compote and you have at least five or six points in one meal. A bowl of multi-grain granola with mixed nuts, seeds and fruit notches up around 10 points. A breakfast smoothie made with frozen mixed berries, banana, oats, ground flaxseeds, nut butter and milk will give you seven or eight.

Soup is a savvy way to add at least eight plant points at lunchtime. Blend roasted butternut squash, carrots, onion and garlic with tinned cannellini beans or chickpeas, coconut milk and vegetable stock. Add mixed seeds or chilli flakes to really drive up those plant points. 'Nourish' »

### #30AWEEK

#### BE A FLAVOUR SAVER

Batch-roast lots of colourful veg, separating them out in roasting tins by type and colour, boosting each section with different herbs and spices for variety. Add to salads or other cooked dishes – or freeze for future use.

### #30AWEEK

#### MAKE THE MOST OF VEG

You can buy cauliflower rice and grain mixes but, if you have time, make them at home: grate lightly steamed cauliflower or broccoli into cooked rice or grains such as freekeh, along with chopped parsley and citrus zest.

### #30AWEEK

## RELISH PICKLES

Stock up on plant-based ferments. Kimchi, garlicky dill pickles and sauerkraut will all keep for weeks in the fridge and can be added to mezze platters, wraps and salads in rotation.





## #30AWEEK

**STIR FRY:  
PICK A MIX**

Use packets of mixed stir fry veg, choosing a different combo each time – and don't forget the frozen packs. Start your stir fry with a chopped **onion**, **ginger** and **garlic**, then bump it up with **chilli** and **lemongrass**. Throw in tinned **water chestnuts** or **bamboo shoots** for added crunch.





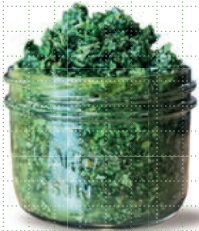
bowls, also known as Buddha bowls, can easily clock up nine or 10 plant points in a meal, and can be quickly assembled from tinned pulses, a few salad veg (or leftover roasted veg), mixed leaves, cooked mixed grains or quinoa, a spoonful of houmous and a sprinkle of mixed seeds.

Instead of traditional meat and two veg for supper, load up with colourful vegetables or salad, add a wholegrain such as brown rice or pulses, plus a smaller portion of meat, chicken or fish. Try a plant-based meal once or twice a week: think dal with spinach and cauliflower, sweet potato and chickpea curry, summer vegetable risotto or loaded five-bean burgers (find these dishes at [waitrose.com/recipes](https://www.waitrose.com/recipes)).

### #30AWEEK

#### EMBRACE GOOD TASTE

Gremolata adds taste and texture to almost anything. Mix finely chopped garlic with finely grated citrus zest and fistfuls of chopped parsley, mint and basil. Add chopped chilli and toasted coriander and fennel seeds, then scatter over vegetables, fish, chicken and wholegrains.



### #30AWEEK

#### START WITH SOFFRITTO

Save time with Cooks' Ingredients Frozen Soffritto Mix, which has chopped onion, carrot and celery. It's the Italian trifecta for soup, stew and sauce bases, and is an ideal building block to add to for more plant points.



Fancy chilli con carne? Add chickpeas, red kidney beans and cannellini beans. Or for bolognese, replace some, or all, of the meat with green, brown or red lentils.

Ready to give it a go? The key is to start with small steps and focus on what you can add rather than take away – this is a situation where more really is more. Kick off with the five Dinner For Tonight recipes starting on page 104.

*Health writer Anita Bean is a registered nutritionist specialising in sports nutrition. She has worked with the London Marathon and is the author of The Vegan Athlete's Cookbook and The Runner's Cookbook.*



### #30AWEEK

## FINISHING FLOURISHES

Enhancing supper stalwarts such as dals and curries is a win-win. A sizzled mixture of **mustard seeds**, **ginger**, **curry leaves** and **cumin seeds** provides zing and texture, plus they boost your plant points.



**HERBS & SPICES**

Rosemary, parsley, cumin, coriander, turmeric, paprika etc

**1/4**  
PLANT  
POINT

**VEGETABLES**

Carrots, peppers, courgettes, aubergines, broccoli, onions, mushrooms, spinach etc

**1**  
PLANT  
POINT

**WHAT COUNTS****WHAT ARE PLANT POINTS AND HOW DO THEY ADD UP?**

The 'plant point' system has been popularised by gut-health dietitian Dr Megan Rossi. Each different type of plant food from the six main groups counts as one plant point – apart from herbs and spices, which count for 1/4 of a point each because we eat less of them. Unlike trying to achieve your 5 a day, getting 30 a week is more about variety than quantity. Fresh, dried, canned and frozen plants all count towards your total, but try to choose those with no added salt and sugar. The foods shown here are just a tiny fraction of what counts as a plant point. The world of plants is vast – the more you can include in your diet, the better.

**FRUIT**

Apples, bananas, pears, kiwi, melon, strawberries, blueberries, grapes, oranges etc

**1**  
PLANT  
POINT

**NUTS & SEEDS**

Brazil nuts, almonds, cashews, walnuts; chia, flax, pumpkin, sesame or sunflower seeds etc

**1**  
PLANT  
POINT

**LEGUMES**

Butter, kidney, black or cannellini beans; chickpeas, lentils etc

**1**  
PLANT  
POINT

**WHOLEGRAINS**

Brown, red or wild rice; oats, barley, buckwheat, corn, millet etc

**1**  
PLANT  
POINT

**SHORT OF TIME?**

*Say hello to a few of your new favourite multi-taskers*

**GLORIOUS GRAINS**

- Merchant Gourmet Smoky Spanish-style Grains (£2.10/250g)
- Wholegrain Mexican-style Rice (75p/250g)
- Tilda Wholegrain Basmati & Wild Rice (£1.65/250g)

**FEELING FRUITY**

- Frozen Berry Smoothie Mix (£2.65/480g)
- Summer Berry Medley Bowl (£4.50/400g)
- Pineapple, Melon & Mango Fingers (£3/240g)

**INSTANT CRUNCH**

- Mixed Roasted Nuts (£3.55/250g)
- Linwoods Flaxseed, Almonds, Brazil Nuts, Walnuts & CoQ10 (£6.10/360g)
- Mixed Seeds (£2.75/275g)

**SPICE IT UP**

- Cooks' Ingredients Pickling Spice (£1.60/32g)
- Cooks' Ingredients Gunpowder Spice Blend (£1.50/60g)
- Cooks' Ingredients Shawarma Spice Paste (£2.50/180g)

**GET IN A PICKLE**

- Pickled Cornichons & Onions (£1.50/285g)
- Tricklements Particularly British Piccalilli (£3.85/270g)
- The Levantine Table Courgette & Radish Slaw (£2.45/155g)

**VERSATILE VEG**

- Cooks' Ingredients Frozen Stir Fry Veg Mix (£1.90/400g)
- Cooks' Ingredients Soffritto Mix (£1.40/400g)
- Mixed Vegetable Selection (£2/190g)