

'EATING MORE PLANTS ISN'T A TREND



– IT’S A HABIT THAT’S HERE TO STAY’

Variety is the spice of life – and the key to a healthy one, says nutritionist *Anita Bean*

The world is full of delicious, health-giving plants – around 30,000 edible species, in fact – yet most of us eat the same few over and over again. But the latest research shows that it’s the actual variety of plants we consume that counts when aiming for a long and healthy life. To help people improve the range of plants in their diets, many experts suggest we aim to eat ‘30 or more plants a week’ – a category that includes fruit and veg, but also wholegrains, nuts and seeds, plus herbs and spices (see What Counts? overleaf).

The ‘30 a week’ goal was popularised by Professor Tim Spector, though others have taken it up too. *Waitrose* wrote about ‘30 a week’ in its publications for the first time in June 2023, and books on the subject include Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall’s *How to Eat 30 Plants a Week* and Catherine Rabess’ *The 30 Plan*. It also features in a Netflix documentary, *Hack Your Health*. “It’s a hugely successful message,” says Tim. “It’s a simple idea that resonates with so many people.”

While so much nutrition advice is about cutting down, ‘30 a week’ embraces a more-is-more approach. The idea originates from a 2018 study by the American Gut Project, an initiative that involved more than 10,000 people. Researchers found that those who ate 30 or more different types of plants a week had a greater diversity of gut microbes on average than those who ate fewer than 10.

“Thirty is a good target to aim for,” says Tim, who led the UK arm of the project. “There’s evidence that the more plant diversity we include in our diet, the better



our long-term health. Although the five-a-day message really stuck in the public consciousness, it doesn’t necessarily promote diversity – people could eat the same five fruit or veg each day. That’s why a 30-plant goal is likely to be better for long-term health.”

The advantages are seemingly endless. Gut health isn’t just about digestion; having a diverse gut microbiome has been shown to support brain health or mood and the immune system. It may also contribute to a reduced risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and Alzheimer’s. Dr Emily Leeming, a microbiome scientist at King’s College London and author of *Genius Gut*, says that while it’s great to have a goal of 30 plants a week, you don’t necessarily have to note down or record every one you eat. “Just making half your plate vegetables most days while keeping variety in mind is a great approach, along with getting more colours on your plate.”

The plant foods that count towards your 30 a week are wide-ranging – and often

unexpected. Coffee, tea, dark chocolate (with at least 70% cocoa solids), popcorn and extra virgin olive oil all count because each is rich in beneficial plant compounds. Dried, frozen and tinned fruit and veg have the green light too, and are handy and cost-effective ways to keep variety up and waste down. Even different types or colours of the same plant – green and red cabbage say, or yellow and orange peppers – count as multiple varieties. There are no exact serving sizes either, though Tim says a handful of fruit, vegetables, wholegrains and beans – or a teaspoonful of spices, seeds and herbs – is a good guideline.

All of which means there are myriad ways to add diversity to your diet. Emily’s top tip is to add something new to each weekly shop (eating seasonally can help with this), and to keep the abbreviation BGBGS (beans, greens, berries, grains and seeds/nuts) in mind. If that still feels like too much, reach for products that do the work for you. Look out for plant-variety logos on Waitrose products in store, or opt for ZOE’s Daily30+ supplement, which contains over 7,000 plant compounds in an easy-to-sprinkle form.

Eating more plants isn’t a trend – it’s a habit that’s here to stay. And we’ve still got a lot to learn about the benefits. “We’re doing more research to clarify whether eating more or less than 30 has the same effects on the microbiome,” says Tim.

“Research on diet and gut health is going to grow and escalate,” agrees Emily. “In the next five years there’s going to be a rapid progression in our understanding of the gut microbiome.” Better start writing that shopping list.

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INTRODUCING THE NEW PLANT VARIETIES LOGO

Look out for Waitrose’s new logo – it’s designed to help you reach 30 plants a week by highlighting products and ingredients that are full of fruits, vegetables, wholegrains, nuts, seeds,

herbs and spices. All ‘main meal’ products with the logo will contain at least five plants, while sides and snacks will feature at least three. Find out more at waitrose.com/30plants »



FRUIT

Avocados, apples, bananas, berries, citrus fruits, grapes, kiwi, mangoes, melon, pears, pineapple, tomatoes



VEGETABLES

Broccoli, cabbage, carrots, cauliflower, celery, leeks, onions, peas, peppers, spinach, squash, radishes, peas



NUTS & SEEDS

Almonds, brazils, cashews, walnuts, peanuts, pecans and pistachios; chia, flax pumpkin or sunflower seeds



WHOLEGRAINS

Barley, bulgur wheat, freekeh, oats, brown, red or wild rice, wholegrain pasta or bread



WHAT COUNTS?

Aim to eat a variety from these 'super six' categories. Each counts as one full 'plant', except herbs and spices, which count for ¼ each. Here are just a few examples to try...



HERBS & SPICES

Basil, chilli, cinnamon, coriander, cumin, curry leaves, lemongrass, mint, oregano, paprika, parsley, tarragon, thyme, turmeric



LEGUMES

Black beans, borlotti beans, butter beans, cannellini beans, chickpeas, haricot beans, kidney beans, lentils

WHAT DOESN'T COUNT?

White bread, pasta and rice; fruit and vegetable juices or purées; coconut oil; wine