

Sara's Tips on How to Eat More Vegetables

The following information is just my opinion. I have no nutritional training. This guide is meant to give you some ideas about how to incorporate more vegetables into your diet. Please consult with your doctor or a registered nutritionist if you have specific health concerns.

Eating a diet based on vegetables, whole grains, lean protein and healthy fats will make you feel better. It will take time to adjust, but once you do, you will wonder how you ever ate differently. Try incorporating one or two changes at a time until they become habit, then work on some more. I still have a fondness for junk food. The difference is I eat it infrequently. You don't have to give up pizza, potato chips and candy bars to be healthy. They just can't be the basis of your diet. Instead they are eaten occasionally. I crave vegetables because I have learned how good I feel after eating them. Healthy eating can be enjoyable and satisfying.

Many people feel they are too busy to cook. We all have many demands on our time, it is just a matter of what you make a priority in your life. Even after a 10 hour day working in the farm fields, I cook dinner. I might be exhausted, but cooking a nourishing dinner is my way of taking care of the body I rely on for my livelihood. After a healthy dinner I always feel so much better. I don't accomplish this because I am Superwoman, but because I have learned some tricks to make a healthy dinner happen with minimal effort and time.

How I approach dinner

I plan what we will eat a day ahead of time. This way I can be sure to defrost anything frozen. It also enables me to be on autopilot at dinner time. If I arrive home hungry with no dinner plans it seems the only thing that every occurs to me is to call for delivery pizza. When I have low blood sugar, I can't think straight, Dave refers to me in this state as psycho-glycemic. Some people like to plan the whole week, and recently I heard of someone who sits down at the beginning of the month and plans every dinner for the entire month. That sounds hard to me, but the idea is to find what works for you.

Every meal I cook has to have three elements - an assortment of **vegetables**, a **whole grain** and a source of **protein**. My pantry is stocked in a way that there are always a few to pick from for each category. Below is a list of items that I keep in the house at all times. There are many other possibilities, but these are our favorites. If you have things you enjoy eating on hand it will make cooking more appealing so stock up on your favorites.

- **Vegetables**

These are never hard to come by on the farm! By joining the CSA you have ensured that there will always be a seasonal assortment of vegetables in your house as well. I also freeze and can extra produce in the summer for winter consumption such as tomatoes, butternut squash and green beans.

- **Whole grains**

whole wheat tortillas, brown rice, wild rice, barley, quinoa, whole wheat pasta, soba noodles and whole wheat bread.

- **Protein**

Canned or pre-cooked frozen beans (black, kidney and chickpeas), dried mung beans, local free range eggs, frozen grassfed beef, Quorn (a frozen meat substitute) and frozen wild salmon.

The number of different dinners I can make from the above list by changing the cooking technique and seasonings is huge. I usually don't follow a recipe, but think of dinners in different categories. Here are some examples:

- ***Mexican flavor*** Saute any vegetables then add black or kidney beans and serve either in a tortilla, over rice or over corn chips with salsa and other toppings such as avocado, cheese or sour cream.
- ***Asian flavor*** Saute any vegetables in a ginger basil tamari base with either meat strips, scrambled eggs, Quorn, chickpeas or mung beans. Then I serve it over a whole grain or with soba noodles. (See the ginger basil stir-fry recipe on the recipe page of the website for a detailed example.)
- ***Indian flavor*** Saute any vegetables with curry powder and either meat strips, scrambled eggs, Quorn, chickpeas or mung beans. Then I serve it over a whole grain. (See the winter curry recipe on the recipe page of the website for a detailed example.)
- ***Italian flavor*** Serve whole wheat pasta with sauce (either canned or homemade depending on the season), steamed or sauteed vegetables and hamburger, chickpeas, or scrambled eggs.
- ***Traditional*** Whenever the protein is made alone like a salmon fillet, Quorn patty, hamburger, roast or veggie burger, I add a vegetable side dish. For the whole grain, I usually serve either bread or seasoned rice. (The website has many side dish recipes.)
- ***Casserole*** This one takes cottage cheese (which I don't always have) and more time but is good for a change. Make a whole grain, saute up some vegetables, and mix both together with cottage cheese. Place in a greased baking dish, sprinkle with bread crumbs and bake in the oven at 350 until it bubbles and the top is golden brown.
- ***Salads*** When the heat of summer takes hold of our house, the thought of turning on the stove makes me cringe. Then it is time for a large cool salad with a side of bread for dinner. This is easy since if it is hot, there are plenty of salad vegetables available. For a protein I add beans, left-over meat, tuna or hard boiled eggs. Yogurt based dressings add a healthy fat.

Most of the above examples involve sauteing vegetables as the first step. To saute I use one of two pans - either my 10" cast iron skillet or my 12" diameter 2 1/2" deep stainless steel casserole. If you heat your pan first then add 1-2 Tbsp of olive oil and let it heat before adding your vegetables, things don't stick. I am adverse to non-stick coatings, plus we all need some fat in our diet and the olive oil adds nice flavor. Onion is usually a staple so that gets added first and cooked for about 5 minutes to soften then I add my vegetables and cook them (stirring frequently) until they they are cooked but still firm and crunchy. Depending on the vegetable, this usually takes between 5 and 10 minutes. Often I use an assortment of vegetables and sometimes this means adding them at different times based on how long each will take to cook. Below are some some examples and reflect how I prefer each vegetable. Note about garlic, many people add it with their onion, but I find it gets burned that way, so I prefer to add it with my first vegetable addition.

- Longer cooking vegetables include: root crops, broccoli, cauliflower and Brussels sprouts.
- Medium cooking vegetables include: kale, collards, kohlrabi tops, cabbage, green beans and eggplant.
- Short cooking vegetables include: peppers, peas, zucchini, bok choy stems and asparagus.
- I add chard, bok choy leaves and spinach at the very end and stir to wilt them.

Time saving tips

Always cook more than you need. Left-overs save a ton of time. If you don't like eating the same thing two days in a row try freezing. Some things (like potatoes) don't freeze well, but many things do - so experiment. Also most things keep for several days in the refrigerator, so you can have a break before eating it again.

Use pre-made organic items such as pasta sauce, stir-fry sauces, curry sauces, salsa and salad dressing for quick seasoning of your dishes. Remember just because a packed food is labeled organic doesn't mean it is healthy. Always read the ingredient list. I saw organic aerosol pancake batter the other day!

We eat a lot of beans. They are a healthy, inexpensive source of protein. The problem is, they take so long to cook unless you use a pressure cooker. Since I don't have a pressure cooker, I make them in large batches in my crock pot. I fill mine about ¼ full with dried beans, fill to the top with water, and cook them on high for about 4 hours. No need to pre-soak them. Different kinds will vary in their cooking time. For example, kidney beans take less time than black beans, which take less time than chickpeas. This method cooks the beans evenly without splitting the skins. Every crock pot is different, so the first time you make them this way, check after about 3 hours. Don't remove the lid too often to check or they will never cook. Wait at least 30 minutes between each time you check. Soon you will learn how long each kind of bean takes in your crock pot. When they are done, drain them in a large colander and let cool. I then package them in 2 cup containers and freeze for later use. Even if you forget to defrost them ahead of time you can quickly do this by dropping them frozen in boiling water for a few minutes. If this sounds like too much work, just buy canned beans. Read the label to make sure they haven't added strange things. I buy Giant's Nature's Promise brand when I don't have time to make my own. They are organic, don't have strange additives and are relatively inexpensive.

Quick but healthy dinner ideas

Have several quick, but healthy meals on hand for those stressful nights when unexpected events have derailed your dinner plans.

- Frozen veggie burgers, I make my own in a large batch and freeze. Store bought can be great too, just be sure to read the ingredients.
- Use pre-cooked beans and fresh or sauteed vegetables to fill a whole wheat tortilla for a quick burrito. Just add your favorite salsa or other toppings and serve with a tossed salad.
- Use boxed organic mac and cheese (I like Annie's brand), but mix in pre-cooked black beans and vegetables such as spinach or steamed broccoli.
- Make whole wheat pasta and top with pre-made sauce, chick peas, and sauteed or steamed vegetables such as zucchini, spinach, kale, eggplant, cauliflower, broccoli, etc.
- Dinner salads are quick to throw together. For your protein add pre-cooked beans, hard boiled eggs, tuna or left-over meat. Top with a yogurt based dressing to add a healthy fat and serve with a side of whole grain bread.

Cooking with Whole Grains

Incorporating whole grains into your diet is an inexpensive way to eat healthy. A wide range of organic whole grains are available at Nature's Pantry and the Granary, as well as many of the local grocery stores.

Before I started using whole grains regularly, I had the impression they took forever to cook and were a giant pain. That's what happens when you grow up seeing commercials for Uncle Ben's instant rice! Once I became familiar with how long each different kind of grain took to cook, incorporating them into dinner became easy. On days when I am home early, I can plan on making a longer cooking grain. There really isn't any work - you just have to start it earlier. Then there are days when I am in a hurry and cook with the fast cooking grains. Below I have a list of grains I like to use and how I cook them. My cooking

recommendations are for grains that are still firm and chewy when done. Mushy, congealed grains are not my thing so I tend to serve them al dente. You might prefer to cook your grains longer and with slightly more water. Experiment to find what fits your tastes.

Before cooking any grain, I like to rinse it with water to remove any residue from the field or processing center.

Couscous

Very short time commitment.

Don't rinse first. Bring 1 ½ cups water to a boil, remove from heat. Add 1 cup couscous - stir, cover and let sit for 5 minutes off heat. Fluff with a fork before serving.

Couscous is just wheat processed into granules. Look for whole wheat varieties otherwise it is like eating white bread. Since I love bread, I eat way too much wheat already so I don't make this very often. However, when you are in a hurry, it is done very fast.

Quinoa

Short time commitment.

Bring 1 ½ cups of water to a boil. Add 1 cup - quinoa, cover and reduce heat to a simmer. Simmer without lifting the lid for 15 minutes. Turn off burner, but leave the pot on the stove. DO NOT lift the lid. Let sit for another 5 minutes to finish cooking. If using a gas stove cook for a minute or two longer since the burner will not stay warm the way an electric range does.

Quinoa has a mild nutty flavor. Technically it isn't a grain since the plant isn't in the grass family, but for culinary purposes it acts like a whole grain. It is one of my favorites since it has a nutrient profile that contains a balanced set of essential amino acids, making it a complete protein source.

Brown Rice or Wild Rice

Medium time commitment.

Bring 1 ½ cups of water to a boil. Add 1 cup of rice, cover, and reduce heat to a simmer. Simmer without lifting the lid for 20 minutes. Turn off burner, but leave pot on the stove. DO NOT lift the lid. Let sit this way for another 20-30 minutes to finish cooking. If using a gas stove cook for a minute or two longer since the burner will not stay warm the way an electric range does.

Barley

Longer time commitment

Bring 1 ½ cups water to a boil. Add 1 cup of barley, cover, and reduce heat to a simmer. Simmer without lifting the lid for 40 minutes. Turn off burner, but leave pot on the stove. DO NOT lift the lid. Let sit this way for another 20-30 minutes to finish cooking. If using a gas stove cook for a minute or two longer since the burner will not stay warm the way an electric range does.

Barley has an outer hull that is not edible. Look for barley where the hull has been removed; but do not buy pearled barley, since this is a refined form that has the bran removed. Dehulled barley with the bran intact is referred to by several names including hullless barley, scotch barley and pot barley.

Wheat Berries or Kamut

Longer time commitment - soaked overnight.

Soak 1 cup overnight in cold water. Drain water, place in sauce pan, add 2 cups of fresh water, cover, bring to a boil, then reduce heat to a simmer. Simmer without lifting the lid for 60-90 minutes. Drain any excess water before serving.