

Meal Planning Guide: Restoring Healthy Eating Patterns With a Focus on Food Groups

Before Getting Started...

Take a few minutes to discuss the following questions with your nutritionist:

- How do your eating habits compare to how they were a year ago? Three years ago?
- What foods, if any, do you eat less of or avoid completely?
- What foods, if any, do you think are easy to overeat or feel out of control around?

Why Focus on Nutrition in Recovery?

Physically and/or mentally restricting your energy or nutrient intake only increases cravings for high fat, high sugar foods. Cravings make it easy to eat past the point of fullness and/or feel out of control when eating. The only way to break this restrict-overeat cycle is by consistently meeting your nutrition needs. Working with your nutritionist to establish regular eating patterns and increase flexibility in food choices can also help you reconnect with your body's hunger and fullness cues and heal your relationship with food.

Why Focus on Food Groups?

Thinking in terms of food groups when planning meals and snacks can help to ensure your body meets its energy and nutrient needs without relying on strict meal plan guidelines or focusing on numbers like calories. Each food group contains different nutrients, which play important roles in the body. Here are a few examples:

GRAINS give us carbohydrates for quick and long-term energy and prevent moods swings.

DAIRY has calcium and vitamin D, which are necessary for bones, hormones, and growth.

PROTEIN repair muscles, organs, and tissues and increase fullness at meals.

FATS/OILS keep our brains healthy and help us absorb vitamins A, D, E and K.

FRUIT gives us Vitamin C to heal wounds and fiber to prevent constipation.

VEGETABLES have Vitamin A to keep skin healthy and Vitamin C to help absorb iron.



Building meals and snacks with a balance of food groups provides the structure needed to help you relearn hunger and fullness cues and return to normal, healthful eating while also giving you some flexibility to choose the types of foods that you like within each food group.

What Does a Balanced Meal or Snack Look Like?

Everyone has different energy needs so portion sizes of food groups at meals and snacks will vary depending on your body's needs. Generally, aim for at least 4 food groups at meals and 2 food groups at snacks. Here are two examples:

Meal: **Grain** + **Protein** + **Vegetable** + **Fat** + **Dairy**

Sample Meal: Brown Rice + Grilled Chicken + Sautéed Spinach + Olive Oil + Milk

Snack: **Fruit** + **Fat**

Sample Snack: Apple + Peanut Butter

Remember: Developing normal, healthful eating patterns with flexibility and variety in food choices takes time. It's a marathon, not a sprint! Your treatment team does not expect you to repair your relationship with food overnight. Your team will meet you where you are and gradually help you develop eating habits that work best for you. Be patient with yourself, know that bumps in the road are learning opportunities, and trust in the process.



What Are Trigger Foods and How Do I Deal With Them?

A trigger food is a food that makes someone feel out of control when eating it or a food that someone may eat until feeling uncomfortably full because of emotional reasons. Trigger foods are often high in fat, carbohydrates, or sugar since our brains perceive these foods as highly palatable, especially when we consider them "off limits" or "bad" foods. Trigger foods are different for everyone but some examples include ice cream, cookies, potato chips, pizza, and peanut butter.

In the beginning stages of recovering from your eating disorder, your meals and snacks may not include your trigger foods since this can feel overwhelming. Instead, restoring healthy eating patterns with structure and a balance of food groups may be the first step. However, gradually reintroducing trigger foods in a safe and supportive environment is essential to reach full recovery where eating is flexible and no foods are off limits.

What If I Gain Weight When Following a Food Group-Based Eating Pattern?

The goal of using a food group-based eating pattern is to help you become more confident making food choices that nourish your body. A food group-based approach allows you to plan meals and snacks that meet your body's needs without a weight-focused or calorie-focused mindset. Your weight will naturally settle within a healthy range when you are taking care of your body and honoring your body's hunger and fullness cues.

What If I End Up Overeating or Binge Eating Again?

If you have a history of binge eating or eating to the point of feeling uncomfortably full, it's going to take time to break that habit since your body and brain has gotten used to eating this way. If there is a time that you end up bingeing or overeating, that is okay! The most important thing to remember is that you **can** break the cycle. Try not to feel guilty or regretful and do not resort to restrictive eating (fasting, skipping meals, dieting) and/or purging to “punish” yourself. Instead, continue to nourish your body with balanced meals and snacks. Also, be curious about why the binge or overeating may have happened:

- Did you go too long without eating?
- Are you limiting yourself to certain foods or food groups?
- Were you distracted, stressed, angry, bored, tired, or sad?
- Were a variety of healthful foods available to you?

What Does This Mean For Me?

1. Which food groups, if any, do you think may be restricting in your meals or snacks?

2. Are there any foods that you would categorize as your “trigger foods”?

3. What are two to three ways you feel comfortable making changes to your meals and snacks?

Looking for Recipe Inspiration?

Below are some resources that can be helpful if you're looking to add more variety, explore different flavors and cuisines, or simply get some food inspiration for meal planning:

Baker F. *Eating & Living: Recipes for Recovery* (2016).

Doctor Yum recipes: recipes.doctoryum.org

Food52 recipes: food52.com/recipes

What's Cooking? USDA Mixing Bowl recipe search tool: whatscooking.fns.usda.gov

Barefoot Contessa recipes: barefootcontessa.com/recipes

Jamie Oliver recipes: www.jamieoliver.com/recipes