

# Nutrient-Dense Meal Planning Guide: Restoring Weight With a Focus on Food Groups

## Before Getting Started...

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

- How do your current eating habits compare to how they were a year ago?
- What foods, if any, do you eat less of or avoid completely?
- What foods do you feel most comfortable eating?

## Why Focus on Nutrition in Recovery?

When the brain is malnourished, it's natural for someone to spend more time thinking about food and nutrition because it's the body's way of saying, "feed me!" Often, these thoughts can distract from experiences, relationships, and interests. Meeting your nutrition needs allows your brain to have more space to think, learn, and connect with others. Working with your nutritionist to restore regular eating patterns and increase variety and flexibility with your food choices will also help you overcome disordered eating behaviors 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 restore weight and return to a normal, healthful eating pattern. This also gives 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 the portion sizes of different 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 + Salmon + Sautéed Spinach + Olive Oil + Milk

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

Sample Snack: Banana + 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 that you will repair your relationship with food overnight. Your treatment team will meet you where you are and gradually help you increase the amount and variety of foods that you feel comfortable eating.



Be patient with yourself, remember that bumps in the road are learning opportunities, and trust in the process.

## What If I Get Full When Following a Meal Plan?

When your body is malnourished, the muscles and tissues that make up your digestive system weaken which can cause you to feel full even when you are not meeting your nutrition needs. Unfortunately, eating past the point of fullness is often necessary to nourish your body and restore muscles and tissues. Most often, the discomfort resolves as you continue to provide your body with adequate nutrition.

Nutrient-dense foods are high in energy and low in volume, which can help to prevent or lessen stomach discomfort at meals. Examples include:

- Whole-fat dairy (milk, yogurt, cheese), nuts/nut butters, oils, butter
- Avocado, sour cream, hummus, drinks (ex. Carnation Breakfast Essentials, Ensure)



## What Are “Fun Foods” and Why Do I Need Them?

“Fun foods” are foods that you previously enjoyed before your eating disorder or foods that are commonly offered and enjoyed in social settings with friends or family (like cake at a birthday party or fries at a restaurant). Fun foods will vary depending on cultural values and taste preferences. They may not fit perfectly into a food group, and that’s okay.

If you are in the beginning stages of recovering from your eating disorder, fun foods may not be a priority. However, incorporating fun foods into your meals and snacks is essential to reach eating disorder recovery where eating is flexible and enjoyable. Exposing yourself to a variety of foods is the only way to move past the anxiety associated with certain foods and quiet eating disorder thoughts and behaviors.

## What Does This Mean For Me?

1. Which food groups, if any, do you think may be lacking in your meals or snacks?
2. What are three foods that *you* would categorize as “fun foods” (foods you used to enjoy but rarely eat anymore)?
3. What are some 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](http://recipes.doctoryum.org)

Food52 recipes: [food52.com/recipes](http://food52.com/recipes)

What’s Cooking? USDA Mixing Bowl recipe search tool: [whatscooking.fns.usda.gov](http://whatscooking.fns.usda.gov)

Barefoot Contessa recipes: [barefootcontessa.com/recipes](http://barefootcontessa.com/recipes)

Jamie Oliver recipes: [www.jamieoliver.com/recipes](http://www.jamieoliver.com/recipes)