**The fundamentals of creating a “healthy” meal**

Creating a nutritionally dense meal can feel intimidating and even confusing at times given the amount of misinformation available on the internet.

It’s actually a lot simpler to achieve than what “experts” claim, and should be based around the following fundamentals;

* **A high quality** (contains all of the essential amino acids) **source of protein**. Animal sources would be considered high quality sources universally however plant protein sources would be considered low quality (bar some). Combining multiple sources may be beneficial in this instance and the dish would look slightly different (as presented)
* **A source of wholegrains** (rich in slower digesting carbohydrates to better regulate blood sugar / energy levels and a source of fibre).
* **Fruit and or vegetables** (rich in many vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients, these are critically important to virtually all people’s physical and mental health)
* **Legumes** (which include the likes of lentils, peas, chickpeas, beans, soybeans, and peanuts or any other form of plant seed. Legumes are a great source of fibre, protein and minerals).
* **Mono/ Polyunsaturated fat** (these are the “healthy” fats i.e., those associated with positive health outcomes when replacing “unhealthy” fats (saturated and trans fats), typically found in animal fats and processed foods).

Here’s what an “ideal” breakdown would look like on a plate. Obviously, your dish doesn’t need to be segmented like this in practice (unless you’re into that), but gives a general breakdown of how much of each component you should aim for per meal (if your goal is achieving a “healthy” meal).

The ideal nutritionally dense and balanced dish would however look slightly different for a vegan / vegetarian whereby there would be some increased crossover between these identified components.

Of course, this may vary dependant on your protein source (for example it may look more representative of the previous dish example if you choose to use a meat replacement like tofu or Quorn) but I hope it gives you a basic overview as to what an “ideal” nutritionally dense and balanced dish would look like.

In terms of which actual foods you would consider including in these dishes, here are a few that would be helpful. It would be highly advisable to discover your own which fit under the component group as this is a means of empowering your dietary choices whilst also identifying food sources most practical and relative to you, your lifestyle and your environment (which will help determine long term success and ability to stick to this behaviour change).

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Wholegrains** | **Legumes** | **Mono/Polyunsaturated Fats** |
| Brown / wholegrain rice | Chickpeas | Avocado |
| Wholegrain pasta | Lentils | Walnuts |
| Wholegrain baked goods (bread, bagels, pittas etc.) | Beans (kidney, runner, baked, pinto, navy etc.) | Plant oils (olive oil, flax oil, canola oil etc.) |
| Quinoa | Peas  | Seeds |
| Spelt | Nuts (peanuts, cashews etc.) | Other nuts |
| Wholegrain cereals (oats, Weetabix, shredded wheat | Fava beans | Nut butters |
| Bulgar wheat, rye, millet | Black eyed peas | Flax and chia seeds |
|  |  |  |

You can check out some fantastic protein and fruits / vegetables to include [here](https://www.balanceie.com/proteinandfibre).

Remember the password to access the member’s hub is “eatsmarter”.

Now, one other important note to make is portion control. Quality of food choice is important but so is the quantity. Quantity will impact weight change (or lack thereof) whereas quality of food will impact our health. These aren’t mutually exclusive but makes it a bit easier to understand and appreciate their individual importance when you separate the two.

**Portion Control**

Behind all the mysticism surrounding weight management, all the miracle diets, and all the “one trick you’ve not been told” adverts, there lies one eternal truth; our change in weight will always be dictated by the calories we take in vs. the calories we expend.

You can dress it up however you want, in whatever dieting style you’d like, but it always boils down to this one simple principle (it’s just that the factors which go into both sides of this principle are immensely complex).

If we can achieve less energy in vs. more energy out then we’ll achieve weight loss.

If we can achieve more energy in vs. the energy we’re expending then we’ll achieve weight gain.

If the energy in equals the energy we’re expending then we’ll maintain our weight.

Portion control is arguably the easiest and most straightforward technique to employ when regulating the amount of energy we take in, via food.

I’d like to use this technique Insert Name as it’s very fluid, yet there is a degree of control and simplicity. We can trial it for a few weeks and see how you fare and make adjustments as your level of comfort and trust within yourself improves.

Managing portions can be done easily in one of two ways; The first would be simply dividing up your plate. There are numerous iterations of this strategy (from the MyPlate in the U.S. to the EatWell Plate in the U.K.), and a general rule of thumb would be to divide your plate up into; 30 - 50% protein, 20 - 30% vegetables, 20 - 30% wholegrains and 5 - 10% fats. We’ll discuss the importance of protein in fat loss in a short while.

The other simplistic method of portion management is to use your hands as a reference for portion size. This is what I’d like you to do moving forward Insert Name if you’re not using recipes. I recommend using the following rules (as best you can) to determine portion sizes.

* Your **palm** determines your **protein** portions.
* Your **palm** determines your **veggie** portions.
* **One** **cupped hand** determines your **carb** portions (for women under 80kg)
* **Two** **cupped hands** determine your **carb** portions (for men under 90kg or women over 80kg)
* **Three** **cupped hands** determine your **carb** portions (for men over 90kg)
* Your **thumb** determines your **legumes** portions
* Your **thumb** determines your **fat** portions (unless referring to oils in which case it would be a tablespoon)

I’d advise using the above guidelines whilst also incorporating foods you’re comfortable with and recipes from the recipe books in our [member’s area](https://www.outwrk.co.uk/member-s-hub) in the more immediate future (which are very much in line with these listed guidelines).

Now, it won’t always be practical to have these “ideal” meals; maybe you’re eating on the go, away from home for a few days or out of routine. Life happens and, just like with surfing, fighting against rather than riding along with it will only cause frustration and a “crash”.

So, how do we approach things practically then if we’re on the go?

**A greater focus on practicality**

If practicality is the game, then ease of access is the aim!

And, what’s the most simplistic thing we can do that virtually everyone has access to use as a tool? Continue to use our hands as a portion management guide. We can even break it down to make it more straightforward if the situation is challenging.

Instead of getting hung up on achieving all of the previous guidelines whilst on the fly instead break it down and make it even more straightforward.

* Your **palm** determines your **protein** portions.
* Your **palm** determines your **veggie** portions.
* **One to two** **cupped hand** determines your **carb** portions
* Your **thumb** determines your **fat** portions (unless referring to oils in which case it would be a tablespoon)

With this you could even go a step further and simply aim to just **minimize fat intake** as best you can whilst focusing predominantly on **protein** and **veggies / fruit**.

One other simple way to eat on the fly (and if it’s more viable) is to give yourself an energy allotment and baseline targets for main meals / snacks.

For most people, the following guidelines will lead to an overall healthier dietary approach (in relation to the management of quality and quantity of food consumed).

* **Aiming for between 400 – 600kcals per meal (with larger bodies / more active individuals requiring more calories per meal)**
* **Aiming for between 20 – 40g of protein per meal**
* **Aiming for at least 1 portion of fruit and or veg per meal**

This may be particularly useful for those who are, for example, going for a meal deal option. If you have a rough estimate of energy intake for the total meal then you can find things which fit within it;

* A chicken wrap (350 kcals / 22g of protein)
* An apple or cereal bar (60 – 200kcals / 1 – 5/6g of protein)
* A bottle of water or zero kcal drink (diet pepsi, coke, monster zero, black coffee etc.)

**Breakfast**

One other thing to discuss around meals is Breakfast. For many people, I believe they think breakfast is a necessity. It’s really not; more down to personal preference actually. I’d like to know a bit more about your breakfast habits Insert Name and what you’d typically have and or if you even have breakfast. If we can suss that out then I can offer a few alternatives that’ll help you still enjoy it (if you have it) but also assist us in achieving our goals.

* How consistently would you have breakfast?
* Is there anything you’d like to keep from your current breakfast ritual that we can consider when thinking of alternatives?
* Do you feel a need to change your current breakfast options? Would you want to?

**Snacks**

One thing many people get hung up on is their “snacks” and I believe that’s because many of us have preconceptions of what snacks are.

Snacks are not necessarily unhealthy, uncontrolled times of eating; they’re simply smaller meals and smaller meals can serve an incredibly important purpose within our overall diet.

Use your snacks to compliment your overall diet aiming to focus predominantly on higher protein options or those that would constitute a portion of fruit and or vegetables.

I would also highly advise keeping space in your diet to explore the 80/20 approach; it may be best to keep this for the snacks (smaller meals) as it allows you to introduce foods that you have existing moral considerations of (this food is good; this food is bad etc.) and begin to unravel those.

Remember, all food is good food; it depends on how it is used and incorporated.

**Daily Meal Structure**

One of the most underrated features of long-term dietary success is structure. Adhered to dietary structure is associated with improved overall dietary quality, health and improved weight management outcomes.

I’ve included a sample structure below for you to incorporate however **I would ask you to spend 10 minutes to consider your schedule and construct a meal schedule which suits you. Once you’ve done this could you send it to me?**

Structure takes a lot of the stress away from eating and reduces the frequency of snacking / picking on / at things.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Example Day  |
| Breakfast |  | We’ll discuss meal options for this and a beverage of choice |
| Mid-Morning Snack |  | Skyr yoghurt, piece of fruit and a beverage of choice |
| Lunch |  | Create your own using the previous section |
| Afternoon Snack |  | Protein Bar and a piece of fruit |
| Dinner |  | Create your own using the previous section |
| Evening Snack |  | Snack option of choice  |
| Post-workout |  | 25 – 35g of protein post-workout |

This is just an example day, but hopefully it shows you how someone would structure their eating insert name; As I said, I’d like you for you spend time developing a flexible structure for you and perhaps for both working and non-working days as you begin to develop your trust around nutrition and yourself.

Structure is great, rigidity is not; enforcing your lifestyle to fit around diet is destined to fail. Having a diet that works around your lifestyle sets you up for success and will help improve your relationship with self and food 😊

Weight, waist and hip measurements are noted in the welcome pack and in the check in portal insert name but please leave these blank and do not record them until we feel like you are in a better spot with your self-talk and view 😊

What I’m more interested in is;

* Your general thoughts and feelings on the week in a brief summary
* Whilst weight does appear in the check in form, **I’d rather we exclude it** and used a more detail description of how you’re feeling and thoughts of the week; that’s what matters more 😊
* What you’ve learned that week
* How you’re feeling physically