

# AN INTRODUCTION TO PLANT-BASED NUTRITION

**Nutrition recommendations evolve and are often confusing or contradictory. Should you eat low-carb, high-carb, high-protein, low-fat?**



At the Physicians Association for Nutrition, we only follow the science, and evidence-based scientific research is consistent in telling us that the best nutrition for optimal health and disease prevention is whole food and plant based.



## **What is whole food plant-based nutrition?**

Whole food plant-based nutrition means that foods eaten are in their whole form, without processing, added sugar, salt, or other chemicals. Plant foods include whole grains, legumes, fruits, vegetables, herbs and spices, and nuts and seeds. Whole food, plant-based diets exclude or minimise animal products such as meat, dairy, fish and poultry.



## **Why is whole food plant-based nutrition healthy?**

The human body needs more than just carbohydrates, proteins and fats to survive. It needs a symphony of nutrients such as vitamins, minerals, fibre and phytonutrients to really thrive. Animal products such as meat contain saturated fat which raises LDL cholesterol and the risk of cardiovascular disease (1,2). In addition, strong and convincing evidence showed the link between processed meat products such as bacon, salami and deli meats and colorectal cancer (3).

## Benefits of eating plants

Whole plant foods contain abundant nutrients to facilitate optimal health.



### Phytonutrients

Phytonutrients are only found in plants (phyto = plant). They include vitamins and antioxidants that help combat cellular oxidative stress (4). The rainbow of fruits and vegetables is colour-coded to ensure an abundance of essential vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients that promote wellness.

### Fibre

Fibre is only found in plants. Fibre is essential for gut health and can lower cholesterol. Insoluble fibre (found in whole grains and vegetables) helps increase gut transit and adds bulk to the stool. Soluble fibre (found in oats, legumes and fruit) slows digestion, regulates blood sugar and absorbs fat as it travels through the intestine. Soluble fibre is fermented in the colon and assists in the creation of short-chain fatty acids that reduce inflammation and reduce the risk of colon cancer (5).

**Whilst nutrition is a major component of overall health, there is more to wellness than just what we eat. There are six pillars to living a healthy lifestyle (8):**



**Whole food plant-based nutrition**



**Physical activity** - daily movements and exercise for at least 30 minutes



**Stress management** - relaxation, mindfulness, meditation



**Avoidance of risky substances** - smoking, alcohol, illicit drugs



**Restorative sleep** - between 7 and 9 hours per night of quality sleep



**Social connection** - maintaining healthy relationships

### Protein

All edible plants contain all the amino acids required to build proteins. The human body makes all the protein it needs from a wide variety of plant sources. The benefit of plant-based protein is that it comes packed with fibre and phytonutrients beneficial for health. Animal-based protein sources are bereft of fibre, yet contain saturated fat and heme iron which might have negative health implications (6,7).

## References

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