

# Healthy eating habits for 2023: 23 dietitian-approved tips



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Do your 2023 resolutions include a goal to optimize your diet for long-term health? Or a commitment to drinking more water, and eating more fruits, vegetables and whole grains? What about including plant-based meals on a weekly rotation?

Don't set yourself up for failure by attempting an overnight revamp of your habits. Instead, review these 23 healthy living tips from registered dietician Leslie Beck and incorporate some tips each week. At the end of January, take a moment to review your progress and pick one you feel requires more attention to master in the next month.

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## 1. Keep a food diary for a week

One of the biggest assets in making dietary change is a food diary. It can provide a huge amount of self-awareness and pinpoint areas for improvement. And if your goals include weight loss, research suggests that faithfully keeping a food diary will enhance your success.

Record your food intake – and portion size – after each meal. Don't wait until the end of the day or you'll likely forget a few foods.

Assess your food diary at the end of each day. What do you notice? No fruit? Not enough vegetables? Too many sweets? Portion sizes larger than you thought?

Use this information to help focus your efforts over the next few weeks.

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Women need nine cups of water each day and men need 13 cups – more if they exercise. All beverages – even coffee! – count to your daily recommended intake.



## 2. Drink a large glass of water before each meal

Drinking water before each meal helps you feel full and, as a result, may prevent you from overeating. Also, many people don't drink enough water in the winter months because they don't feel thirsty. So this easy trick will also help you meet your daily water requirements.

Women need nine cups (2.2 litres) of water each day and men need 13 cups (three litres) – more if they exercise.

Here's the good news: All beverages – with the exception of alcoholic drinks – count toward your daily water requirements. Yes, even coffee and tea.

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## 3. Eat more fibre at breakfast

It's estimated that Canadians get only half the fibre they need each day. Women, aged 19 to 50, need 25 grams a day; men should strive for 38 grams. (Older women and men need 21 and 30 grams of fibre a day, respectively.)

To help you meet that target, start by increasing your fibre intake at breakfast. Try one of the following:

- Enjoy chia pudding made with milk or your favourite unsweetened non-dairy milk; 2 tablespoons serve up 10 grams of fibre;
  - Blend ¼ to 1/3 cup of 100-per-cent bran cereal into your breakfast fruit smoothie;
  - Sprinkle 2 tablespoons of ground flaxseed or pumpkin seeds over oatmeal;
  - Include whole fruit at breakfast; raspberries and blackberries, for example, provide 8 grams of fibre per one cup;
  - Add black beans to a veggie omelette or tofu scramble;
  - If you eat toast, buy 100-per-cent whole grain bread with at least 2 to 3 grams of fibre per slice;
  - Add ¼ of an avocado to a smoothie or spread on whole grain toast for an extra 3 grams of fibre;
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## 4. Focus on heart-healthy fats

Emphasize polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats in your daily diet, the types of fat linked to a lower risk of cardiovascular disease. When replaced for saturated (animal) fats, these healthy fats help lower LDL (bad) cholesterol in the bloodstream and may also improve how the body uses insulin.

Good sources of polyunsaturated fats include grapeseed oil, sunflower oil, canola oil, walnuts, chia seeds, ground flax, hemp seeds and pumpkin seeds. Foods that contain mostly monounsaturated fats are olive oil, avocado and avocado oil, peanuts, peanut oil, almonds, cashews, pecans and pistachios.

The following tips can help shift the balance of fats in your diet:

- Replace butter or cream cheese on your toast or bagel with peanut or almond butter.
  - Instead of butter, add a drizzle of olive oil or grapeseed oil to the pan before scrambling or frying eggs.
  - Snack on a handful of nuts and fruit instead of cheese and crackers.
  - Swap butter on sandwiches with hummus or avocado.
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## 5. Reduce food waste at home

With climate change firmly on the radar, sustainability underscores food trends for the year ahead. Reducing food waste is something we can all do to help reduce our carbon footprint. Food waste that ends up in landfills produces methane gas, a powerful greenhouse gas that affects climate change.

Practice the following tips to reduce food waste:

- Make a weekly meal plan and write a grocery list to match. That way you'll buy only what you need.
  - If you don't eat everything you cook, freeze it for later use instead of throwing it away.
  - Avoid buying in bulk; purchase only what you need whenever possible.
  - Buy "ugly produce," misshapen fruits and vegetables often thrown away by farmers and grocery stores.
  - Use vegetable scraps to make soup stocks and broths.
  - Store leftovers at the front of the fridge so you don't forget them; eat within three or four days.
  - Buy frozen produce; unlike fresh produce, it doesn't spoil quickly. Plus, you use only what you need at one time and store the rest.
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## 6. Practise eating slowly

If weight loss is among your 2023 goals, this resolution is well worth making. Studies show that people who eat quickly – and eat until they're full – are three times more likely to be overweight.

Eating slowly allows appetite-related hormones to kick in and tell your brain you've had enough to eat. Since it takes 20 minutes for these signals to register, if you eat too fast you will be more likely to overeat before your body is aware of it.

At breakfast, lunch and dinner: After every bite, put down your knife and fork and chew thoroughly. Don't pick up that knife and fork until your mouth is 100-per-cent empty. Take sips of water between bites.

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## 7. Add vegetables to (at least) two meals

To increase your vegetable intake, be sure to include them in at least two meals each day.

Despite the overwhelming evidence that eating plenty of produce is good for us, most Canadians eat too little of it. Canada's Food Guide advises making half of your plate vegetables and fruits.

Work toward this target by adding more vegetables to your diet. Try these tips:

- Add sliced tomatoes, cucumbers, grated carrot and greens to your sandwich or wrap.
- Add leftover grilled or roasted vegetables to your brown-bag lunch.
- Add quick-cooking greens such as spinach, kale, rapini or Swiss chard to soups, chili and pasta sauces.
- Add baby greens to a breakfast smoothie or protein shake.
- Serve poached eggs on a bed of sautéed spinach or kale.
- Stir pumpkin purée into your overnight oats or breakfast smoothie.
- Bake, microwave or boil a sweet potato for a change from rice or couscous.
- Serve a veggie pizza topped with fresh baby arugula.
- Snack on carrot sticks, cherry tomatoes, red or yellow pepper strips, broccoli florets and mushroom caps with hummus.



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## 8. Serve your dinner on a smaller plate

This smart strategy that can help you achieve your 2023 weight-loss goal. It really works. In fact, one of my clients did this for six weeks and lost 10 pounds.

Serve your evening meal on a luncheon-sized plate (seven to nine inches in diameter), rather than a full-sized dinner plate.

You'll put less food on the plate – which means fewer calories – but the plate will look full. You'll find your appetite adjusts quickly to eating less food.

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## 9: Snack on fruit – at least two servings per day

To get more fibre, vitamins, minerals and antioxidants into your diet, eat at least two servings of fruit each day.

- What does one serving look like? It could be one medium-sized fruit (e.g., apple, pear, orange), two clementines, one small banana, one cup of cut up fruit/berries or 1/4 cup unsweetened dried fruit.

To help you meet your daily target, snack on fruit (whole fruit, not juice) midmorning and afternoon.

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## 10. Drink a cup of green tea

Drinking three to five cups of green tea a day has been linked with protection from heart disease and high blood pressure. Studies also suggest that drinking green tea regularly can help lower LDL (bad) cholesterol in the bloodstream. Green tea leaves are an incredibly rich source of phytochemicals called catechins, which have potent antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties.



Here are a few ways to add green tea antioxidants to your diet:

- Start your day with a cup of freshly brewed green tea.
- If you drink coffee or diet soft drinks with meals, replace with a cup of green tea.
- For a midday snack, try a green tea latte.
- Brew green tea in cold water for 20 minutes and use as a liquid in marinades, sauces and gravies.
- Use brewed green tea to sauté or stir-fry vegetables.

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## 11. Eat leafy green vegetables

Leafy greens are high in fibre and a good source of cancer-fighting vitamins A and C, vitamin K, folate (a B vitamin), iron, calcium and potassium. What's more, they're an exceptional source of lutein and zeaxanthin, phytochemicals thought to protect against cataract and macular degeneration. Also, research suggests that eating lutein-rich leafy greens on a regular basis slows age-related cognitive decline and lowers the risk of Alzheimer's disease.

Include a leafy green vegetable in your daily diet. Choose from arugula, beet greens, collard greens, dandelion greens, kale, mustard greens, leaf lettuce, romaine lettuce, rapini (broccoli raab), spinach, Swiss chard and turnip greens.

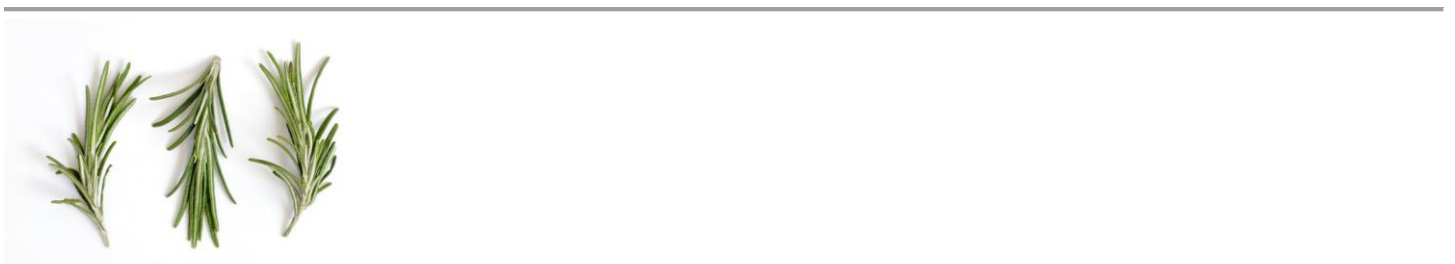
Here are a few serving suggestions:

- Sauté kale with fresh garlic and chili peppers and drizzle with roasted sesame oil just before serving.
  - Add chopped collard greens, along with golden raisins and slivered almonds, to sautéed onion and garlic. Cook for 5 minutes or until tender.
  - Add sautéed or steamed rapini to a tomato-based pasta sauce.
  - Toss fresh spinach with sliced strawberries and mandarin orange segments for a salad. (Plus, the vitamin C in the fruit increases the amount of iron your body absorbs from the spinach.)
  - Add steamed Swiss chard to omelettes, quiches and frittatas.
  - Use dark green lettuces to make salads instead of paler greens.
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## 12. Plan a week of meals in advance

The key to successful long-term healthy eating is planning ahead to make sure you're fuelling your body with nutritious foods. Plus, knowing what you're going to eat for dinner takes the stress out of having to figure it out at the end of a hectic day.

Try mapping out next week's dinners. I encourage you to plan breakfasts, lunches and snacks too, if appropriate. As you plan, think about how you can cook once and make two or more meals out of it. Batch cook soups, casseroles, pasta sauce or chili on the weekend and freeze to serve on a busy weeknight. Cook a batch of whole grains such as brown rice, farro or barley in your Instant Pot. Grill or roast an extra portion of salmon or chicken at dinner for a simple, no-prep lunch the next day.



Herbs and spices contain potent antioxidant and anti-inflammatory phytochemicals called polyphenols that may boost brainpower and guard against cancer, diabetes and heart disease.

## 13. Flavour with herbs and spices

Adding herbs and spices to meals is an effective and tasty way to de-salt your meals. But the benefits of cooking herbs and spices goes beyond reducing your sodium intake. Herbs and spices contain potent antioxidant and anti-inflammatory phytochemicals called polyphenols that may boost brainpower and guard against cancer, diabetes and heart disease.

Try these tips to add herbs and spices to your meals (to convert fresh-to-dried herbs use 1 teaspoon dried for every tablespoon fresh):

- Add dried basil to pasta sauces, soups and homemade salad dressings.
- Top salmon with fresh dill before baking or grilling or add chopped dill to coleslaw and steamed carrots and green beans.
- Add chopped fresh mint to fruit salad, berries, yogurt, smoothies and green and pasta salads or sprinkle over roasted vegetables.
- Add ¼ teaspoon turmeric to water when cooking rice or stir into olive oil and drizzle over cauliflower before roasting.
- Sprinkle ground cinnamon over oatmeal, mix into Greek yogurt or mix cinnamon with almond butter and add to protein shakes.

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## 14. Eat three plant-based meals per week

There's no doubt that eating a plant-based diet helps guard against a myriad of health problems, including high cholesterol, high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke, Type 2 diabetes, obesity and certain cancers.

Foods such as beans, lentils, nuts, tofu, edamame and tempeh are loaded with plant protein, as well as vitamins, minerals and many different phytochemicals. Plus, they're incredibly low in saturated fat and many are excellent sources of fibre.

Replace meat, poultry or fish with a plant-based protein at three meals each week. Here are a few ideas:

- Add chickpeas to a green or Greek salad.
  - Replace meat or chicken with tempeh or cubes of firm tofu in a stir-fry.
  - Make bean tacos. Swap ground beef or turkey for black beans or pinto beans.
  - Substitute white kidney beans for ground meat in a marinara pasta sauce.
  - Instead of a beef or turkey burger, make veggie patties from black beans, chickpeas or lentils.
  - Make a batch of vegetarian chilli or lentil soup to enjoy for lunches during the week.
  - Try noodles made from black beans, lentils, chickpeas or edamame for a plant-based pasta meal.
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## 15. Add ground flaxseed to your diet

Tiny flaxseeds offer soluble fibre, omega-3 fatty acids called alpha linolenic acid (ALA) and phytochemicals called lignans. Research suggests that a regular intake of ground flax can help lower LDL blood cholesterol and blood pressure, and possibly guard against breast and prostate cancers.

Two tablespoons of ground flax deliver 60 calories, four grams of fibre and more than a day's worth of ALA. (You need to eat flaxseeds ground because when whole, they pass through your intestinal tract undigested, meaning you won't reap all their benefits.)

Add ground flax to hot cereal, overnight oats, smoothies, yogurt, applesauce, muffin and pancake batters, or mix into lean ground beef or turkey when making burgers or meatloaf. Stir it into egg whites to make a "breading" for fish or chicken. You can also try adding a little ground flax to mustard or mayonnaise for a healthier sandwich spread.

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## 16. Eat orange vegetables

Carrots, sweet potato and winter squash are loaded with beta carotene, an antioxidant linked to a lower risk of heart disease and certain cancers. Some of the beta carotene you eat is also converted to vitamin A in the body, a nutrient that supports a healthy immune system.

There's no official recommended intake for beta carotene, but experts maintain that a daily intake of 3 to 6 milligrams is needed to help prevent chronic diseases. Guess what? A medium sweet potato packs 13 milligrams of beta carotene, half a cup of carrot juice has 11 mg, half a cup of cooked carrots has 6.5 mg (half a cup of raw carrots has 5 mg) and half a cup of butternut squash has 4.5 mg. So it's not hard to get your fill.

Try one of these suggestions:

- Add a shredded carrot to soup, green salad, pasta sauce and muffin batters.



- Add diced sweet potato or butternut squash to your favourite curry recipe.
- Serve roasted sweet potato wedges instead of roasted white potatoes.
- Add ¼ cup of carrot juice to a smoothie or protein shake.
- Blend pumpkin purée into smoothies or stir into oatmeal and overnight oats.
- Enjoy roasted squash as a side dish at dinner; drizzle with maple syrup and a dash of cinnamon.



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## 17. Skip the sugary drinks

Consuming too much sugar – especially from sweetened beverages – is linked with a greater risk of Type 2 diabetes, heart disease and obesity. The goal is simple: Replace all sugary drinks with water, clear tea, black coffee, herbal tea, unsweetened milk or unsweetened non-dairy milk.

- What constitutes a sugary drink? Sugar-sweetened soft drinks, sweetened iced tea, lemonade, fruit punch, vitamin waters, energy drinks and sports drinks all count.

While 100-per-cent fruit juice does not have added sugar, it's still a concentrated source of natural sugar (and calories) that lacks fibre. For this reason, it's considered a sugary drink. Replace fruit juice with a serving of whole fruit. And if you regularly drink fruit juice to quench your thirst, replace it with water.

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## 18. Cut 100 calories a day

It's estimated that adults gain, on average, one to two pounds a year. For some people, this gradual creep could lead to obesity. The good news: You don't have to make major changes to your diet to prevent incremental weight gain.

Instead, studies show that adopting a “small change approach” – cutting 100 to 200 calories a day by eating less, exercising more, or a combination of the two – can do the trick. Making small tweaks to diet and exercise are easier to integrate into your everyday life and easier to maintain long-term than are bigger lifestyle changes required to lose weight.

Here are a few small easy changes to implement:

- Eat one medium orange instead of drinking 12 ounces of orange juice to save 117 calories.
- Skip the cheese slice on your sandwich to drop 115 calories.
- Reduce your portion size of brown rice by one-half-cup to lose 128 calories.
- Add one less tablespoon of cooking oil when sautéing and save 120 calories.



- Try 2% milk instead of 10% cream in your coffee to cut 80 calories per one-quarter cup.
  - Add 20 minutes of brisk walking, 12 minutes of hiking or 10 minutes of moderate cycling to your day to burn roughly 100 calories for a 170-pound person.
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## 19. Eat an afternoon snack

If you arrive home from work hungry and ready to eat everything in sight, this tip will help prevent overeating at the end of the day. But that's not all.

Eating every three to four hours also helps keep your blood glucose (energy) level stable and fuels late-afternoon workouts. Healthy snacks also provide an opportunity to boost your intake of important nutrients such as protein, fibre and calcium.

Snacks should include slow-burning carbohydrates to fuel your muscles and your brain, along with protein and a little healthy fat to keep you feeling energized longer.

Healthy snack ideas include:

- Fruit and a small handful of nuts.
- Apple slices with almond butter or pumpkin seed butter.
- Greek or Icelandic yogurt with berries.
- A homemade fruit smoothie made with milk or soy milk.
- A cup of black bean, lentil or chickpea soup.
- Half of a whole wheat pita with tuna and baby arugula.
- Whole-grain crackers and cheddar cheese.
- Raw veggie sticks with hummus (or guacamole).

If you like the convenience of energy bars, choose bars made with whole food ingredients such as fruit and nuts.

If the lag time between breakfast and lunch is long, include a midmorning snack too.

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## 20. Eat dinner earlier

If you're watching your waistline, it's a wise idea to set a cut-off time for eating dinner. (Unless, of course, you work a night shift.)

Ideally, avoid eating a large meal after 7 p.m. and eat it earlier if you can. If you've had an unusually long day and there's no avoiding eating after that time, keep it light – a bowl of bean soup, salad with lean protein or an omelette with vegetables.

While there's no scientific evidence that eating after a certain time of the night can make you gain weight, eating late in the day has been tied to increased obesity risk and less successful weight loss, outcomes that couldn't be explained by differences in calorie intake. Research has also shown that, compared to people who ate dinner early, late-eaters were hungrier during the day and burned fewer calories.

But there are other reasons to avoid eating late. My clients who stick to the rule tell me they sleep better, wake up with an appetite for breakfast and feel less bloated in the morning.

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## 21. Eat whole-grain foods

Eating foods made from whole grains is linked with protection from heart disease, Type 2 diabetes and colorectal cancer. Whole grains contain all parts of the grain: the outer bran layer where nearly all the fibre is, the inner germ layer that's rich in nutrients, antioxidants and healthy fats, and the starchy endosperm.

Research suggests that you need to eat at least three servings of whole grains each day to reap their health benefits. One serving equals: one slice of 100-per-cent whole-grain bread, 30 grams of breakfast cereal, ½ cup cooked whole-wheat pasta or ½ cup cooked whole grains such as oats, brown rice, farro, quinoa and millet.

Ideally, most – if not all – of your grain choices should be whole grain.

Try to replace all “white,” refined grains with a whole grain. The following tips can help you do so:

- Read labels on packages of whole grain breads, crackers and breakfast cereals. If you don't see a statement of “100 per cent whole grain,” scan the ingredient list to make sure the product doesn't contain refined grains (e.g., wheat flour, rye flour).
- If you buy rye bread, look for whole-grain terms such as whole grain, coarse rye meal, rye kernels and rye flakes on the ingredient list.
- Try whole-wheat or brown rice pasta instead for white pasta.
- Batch cook whole grains so that you have them ready to add to meals; they'll keep in the fridge for three to four days.
- Toss cooked quinoa, bulgur or farro into green salads.
- Add barley, red rice or spelt berries to soups, stews and chili.
- Make whole-grain bowls with freekeh or brown rice.
- More often, replace white pasta with whole wheat, whole-grain spelt or brown rice pasta.
- Try one new whole-grain food each week such as barley, farro, freekeh, millet, sorghum, red rice or quinoa.

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## 22. Use the ‘plate model’ at dinner

Use this quick and easy technique to help manage portion sizes and fill half your plate with vegetables at dinner (or lunch).

Here’s how it works: Visualize your dinner plate in quarters, and fill those quarters as follows:

- One quarter: Protein-rich food (e.g. lean meat, chicken, fish, tofu, tempeh, beans/lentils);
- One quarter: Starchy food (e.g. brown rice, quinoa, whole-wheat pasta, sweet potato);
- Two quarters: Cooked or raw vegetables and/or salad greens;

It’s also a great strategy for when you’re eating buffet-style: It helps make sure your eyes aren’t bigger than your stomach – and prevents you from needing to loosen your belt after the meal.

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## 23. Review your healthy habits

The last day of January is a perfect time to reflect on the nutrition strategies you’ve embarked upon during the past few weeks.

Changing your eating habits takes practice. It’s easy for things to slip, especially when you’re given a nutrition tip to implement each day. That’s a lot to ask of anybody ... so give yourself a pat on the back!

Consider the nutrition tips you’ve worked on this month. Choose one you feel requires more focus and attention in order for you to really master it.