

how to get started eating *healthy*

[The 7 Essential Steps To Getting Healthy & Losing Weight]



by Darya Pino





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Introduction

Getting healthy can be one of the most daunting tasks on earth. If you are overweight and know you have bad eating habits, simply the thought of what it would take to turn things around can leave you paralyzed with inaction.

Most of us have tried to take control and get in shape at some point, and usually we hop aboard one of the popular diet plans, choosing whatever we think best suits our personality (or, more likely, something a friend has recently had some success with).

Some people choose Weight Watchers because it offers the freedom to eat the foods you want so long as you are willing to limit your portions, do a little math and go to meetings. Jenny Craig fans don't want to think about eating at all, and prefer to have every meal pre-packaged and ready to go, no matter how bad they taste. People who are good at following strict rules and looking for quick results are often drawn to low-carb, paleo or primal diets.

Problem is, none of these things work for very long. You know it. I know it. So why do we try them anyway?

Diet plans are tempting because they do usually work for a little while. But when we ultimately gain the weight back (and probably a little more) we always blame ourselves rather than the diet plan for the failure. So in a few months or years we will try it again in hopes that maybe this time we will have what it takes to make it work.

But the odds are strongly against you, not because you do not have enough will power but because diets don't work. In fact, one of the best predictors of weight gain over a 3 year period is having tried some kind of diet.

There is an abundance of data on this and I can't stress it enough.

Diets Don't Work

Are you ready yet to try a different strategy?



Focus On Healthy Eating

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.”

-Aristotle

If you really want to make meaningful changes in your health (including weight loss), you must abandon the idea that a diet will ever get you there. Permanent changes are the only way to get permanent results.

But giving up on the promise of diets isn't easy because we have been conditioned our entire lives to the binge and starve lifestyle. Also, thanks to television we expect change to happen rapidly, like the stories you see on *The Biggest Loser*.

Unfortunately, rapid changes in weight are only possible when the body is under extreme and unpleasant conditions, and these are the least likely to result in lifetime success. Real change happens slowly, but our desire for quick results makes us believe diets are the answer.

The first step toward breaking free is truly accepting and believing that a diet will never, ever help you achieve your long-term goals.

Once you dismiss dieting as a viable option, you can begin to find an approach to health that actually works for you. That is, you can upgrade your healthstyle.

Healthstyle is your own eating and exercise habits that influence your health. When you **upgrade your healthstyle** you optimize these behaviors to look and feel your best without sacrificing your personal style and flavor.

The cool thing about upgrading your healthstyle is that, unlike dieting, the changes you make will not only be painless but will likely bring a lot more joy and freedom into your life. This is because you will no longer rely on will power to achieve success. Instead success will be built into the way you live your life.

The end result will be that food will be transformed from an enemy into your best friend.

Make up your mind now to focus on eating healthy instead of quickly losing weight and you have made your first step toward achieving your goals.

Start your healthstyle upgrade by making small, simple, gradual changes to your habits, changes that are easy and that you enjoy. Build on your successes by layering on more complex changes with time. For example, most people feel motivated to begin an exercise program after experiencing some initial success from healthy eating. Over time these incremental upgrades will transform you into a healthy person.



Getting Started Eating Healthy

The purpose of this report is to get you set up to start your healthstyle transformation. Once you have integrated these 7 steps into your normal routine, nothing at [Summer Tomato](#) should pass over your head. You will be able to follow any recipe, conquer any ingredient, get healthy and love every minute of it.

Keep in mind I was once as [clueless in the kitchen](#) as I was at the farmers market. I found my healthstyle through trial and error and created Summer Tomato to share what I have learned. This report is simply a loose guide for you to find your own healthstyle. Feel free to modify anything and everything to suit your own preferences and lifestyle.

If you get stuck at any point or have questions, feel free to send me an email using the Summer Tomato [contact form](#).

The 7 essential steps to get started eating healthy

The cornerstone of upgrading your healthstyle is feeling comfortable enough in the kitchen to prepare most of your own meals using simple, fresh ingredients. This is not difficult, but it can be intimidating if you don't have much experience using a stove or buying vegetables.

But trust me: if I can do it, you can do it. I was 21 years old before I even learned to sauté an onion. If you start with good ingredients, it is hard to mess up too much. But here are the basic tricks you need up your sleeve in order to get started.

1. Stock Your Gear

If you are beginning with a barren kitchen and are not sure what you need to get started, check out the [Summer Tomato Shop](#) for my recommendations on basic cooking supplies.



Please don't get the wrong idea. I'm not giving you this report to sell you cookware. While I do use the Amazon affiliate program, I make very little money from the Shop and encourage you to buy whatever kitchen gear you like or can afford from any resource. Obviously I'll be happy if I make a few sales, but the Shop was mainly designed to provide inspiration and guidance when making your healthstyle purchases.

Navigate the shop by using the navigation in the sidebar on the right and browse through [Kitchen Gear](#). I consider the items listed in the [Basics](#) category to be essential for elementary cooking. The gadgets in [Accessories](#) are also super useful. The snobbier among you (that's a compliment) might have fun searching [The Finer Things](#).



2. Stock Your Pantry

Once you have all your pots, pans, knives and cutting boards you need to **Stock Your Pantry**. I have created a list of essential items that should always be in your kitchen. Because these things store well and can be purchased in large quantities, you do not need to buy them often. But check your supplies regularly and be sure you always have everything here:

- **Olive oil**

You really cannot cook anything until you have olive oil. I go through olive oil relatively quickly, so I am sure to buy large bottles. Look for cold-pressed olive oils in dark bottles. For cooking I try to get the highest quality oil I can find at a reasonable price. My current favorite is Whole Foods 365 Organic brand extra-virgin olive oil. I buy the full 1 liter bottle.

- **Sea salt**

Whenever I come across vegetables I do not like they tend to have two things in common: they are 1) over-cooked or 2) under-salted (or both). But salt is bad for you, right?

Yes, it is bad to eat the inconceivable volumes of sodium present in processed and packaged food. Processed foods are loaded with salt to cover up their lack of flavor. But you would be hard pressed to ingest that much salt if you add it to your own food.

You can add a reasonable amount of delicious sea salt to natural foods to enhance their flavor without much worry.

It is possible to over-salt your vegetables, but under normal circumstances you can determine the appropriate saltiness by taste.

Sea salt helps make fresh vegetables taste amazing, and if you eat them you are substantially better off than you would have been otherwise, even with the salt.

(Note: If you have very high blood pressure, potassium salt might be better for you. Talk to your doctor about your options.)

- **Pepper**

Pepper is an essential spice you should always have in your pantry. It has better flavor if it is freshly ground.



- **Vinegar**

Often the easiest way to salvage a struggling dish is to add some kind of acid. Acid has a slightly sour flavor that can help brighten a dish that tastes bland. Vinegar and lemon are the go to choices for most cooks, so you need to have them around.

Vinegar (and oil) is also what I use to dress salads. [Balsamic vinegar](#) is particularly wonderful because of its sweetness. But if you don't like it, experiment until you find a vinegar you like. Red wine or sherry vinegar is my next recommendation. Rice vinegar is also handy to have around, particularly if you like cooking Asian cuisines.

- **Fancy olive oil**

Speaking of salads, I always keep a top-shelf, fancy olive oil in the house for when the dish I'm creating depends on olive oil itself for flavor. Salad is the most basic example, but there are many instances where a better oil is worth the investment.

You should enjoy the taste of your food, a few extra dollars for an outstanding olive oil is more than worth it. Expect to pay around \$15-20 USD.

- **Soy sauce**

One of the easiest ways to change up the flavor profile of a dish is to add a splash of soy sauce. You should always have some in the house. Keep it in the fridge after opening it though.

- **Whole grain cereal**

I have found it incredibly difficult to find cereals—even whole grain cereals—that aren't loaded with sugar. [Muesli](#) is my favorite recommendation, but it usually needs some help in the flavor department. I add fruit to fix this.

Oatmeal (stove top) is a perfect breakfast if you have time for it (10 minutes). Whatever you choose, make sure you find a cereal made of [intact grains](#) that you are happy to eat most every day. For variety, I alternate between cold and warm cereals and change the fruit I use with the seasons.

- **Assorted whole grains**

Intact grains are so old-fashioned these days they are pretty hard to come by. If you do not eat them at home, you will almost certainly never eat them. Brown rice and quinoa are the two I rely on most.



[Quinoa](#) cooks easily in 15 minutes. [Brown rice](#) takes longer, but I make it in large batches and freeze it in single servings that microwave in 1 minute. I also keep whole grain couscous around, even though it isn't a real whole grain. I just love it in [Moroccan food](#).

- **Dried legumes**

Legumes are some of the healthiest foods on the planet, and are notoriously underappreciated. Lentils and beans are not just a [vegetarian protein source](#), they are essential to a healthy diet regardless of carnivory.

One benefit of them being out of fashion is that they are incredibly cheap and can usually be purchased in an unadulterated form.

Lentils are wonderful because they cook quickly, in about 20 minutes. There are many varieties of lentils with different purposes. I recommend starting with regular brown or French green lentils because they keep their shape well.

Beans require soaking and still take at least an hour to cook, unless you have a [pressure cooker](#) (I couldn't live without mine). You can buy canned beans if you prefer, but they are far more expensive and have inferior taste and texture.

- **Bouillon cubes**

I had never heard of these until I started cooking, but I use them pretty regularly now. Bouillon cubes are essentially dried, concentrated broth. I keep chicken bouillon around for couscous and soups. Beef bouillon tastes amazing and I love to add it to beans and richer dishes. You can get veggie bouillon too, but I only use it when cooking for vegetarian friends. You can find these cubes almost everywhere, probably even your local liquor store.

- **Boxed broth**

Hardcore foodies will scoff at this (they make their own stock by saving bones in the freezer), but I still think boxed broth is worth keeping around. For one thing, I hardly ever have leftover bones in my freezer.

Since boxed stocks keep for at least a year, it is good to always have a few quarts in your pantry. Soups are great to whip up for dinner when you are tired and don't feel like cooking anything fancy. If you always have broth, you can always have soup. I buy the 1 qt chicken and veggie broths. The smaller boxes or cans are good for making sauces.



- **Canned tomatoes**

I keep at least one 28-oz can of diced tomatoes at all times (preferably 3 or 4). Canned tomatoes are the base of so many different cuisines and store so easily I consider them essential. Tomatoes are, ironically, one of the few canned vegetables that don't repulse me.

- **Nuts**

You should see the shoebox I use to store all the nuts I buy, it is bursting at the seams. Nuts are healthy, filling and seem to magically turn food from average to awesome.

I throw cashews in stir fries, cook my chard with pistachios and have almonds for a snack almost every day at work.

Get in the habit of cooking with nuts or adding them to salads rather than just eating them plain. My kitchen always has raw walnuts (store in the freezer, they go rancid the quickest), roasted unsalted pistachios and sliced almonds. Hazelnuts, macadamia nuts and peanuts are also wonderful. Go nuts!

- **Dried fruit**

With plump, juicy raisins in my oatmeal I do not need to add sugar or honey to make it taste good. Dried apricots are wonderful in [Moroccan soups](#) or couscous. I make trail mix for a [post-workout snack](#) that includes dried bing cherries.

Dried fruits store well and come in handy. I recommend keeping the ones you like around and being creative with them while cooking.

- **Canned fish**

My canned fish of choice lately is sardines. Sardines are incredibly rich in omega-3 fatty acids and [vitamin D](#). When skinless and boneless, they are also delicious on bread or in a stir fry.

My second choice is canned salmon (again, please get boneless—even if it costs extra). Tuna is okay, but it is too high in mercury for me to eat it at the frequency I prefer (you should [limit tuna](#) to 1-2 servings per month, particularly if you are a woman of childbearing age). Salmon is high in omega-3s and lower in mercury than tuna. I eat canned fish 2-3 times per week.

If you are concerned about the ethical implications of eating seafood, I've compiled many useful resources [here](#).



- **Basic spices**

When I first discovered cooking I went to the seasoning aisle of my grocery store and bought every spice and herb I had ever heard of. This was a mistake.

I have since learned that most of the ones I bought are much better fresh (e.g. parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme). But there are a few dried spices I still use a lot.

I always keep Saigon cinnamon, cayenne pepper, chili flakes or whole dried chilies, coriander, cumin (seeds and powder), turmeric, curry, ground ginger, garlic salt and chili powder in the house. I recently got a spice grinder, so sometimes I grind my own. But these are spices that are good to have around.

- **Natural nut butter**

Almond butter on good bread is one of my favorite quick, filling midday snacks. It is high in calories, but very effective at curbing the appetite. I always keep an unopened jar in my pantry. If you buy the natural kind (which you should), refrigerate after opening.

- **Pasta**

I know it sounds sacrilegious, but I do keep [pasta](#) in my pantry because sometimes it is just the easiest option. A healthy-ish choice is Japanese soba noodles that are made from buckwheat rather than semolina. I do not have pasta very often, so I do not worry too much if I eat it occasionally.

- **Plastic wrap and zipper bags**

I know these aren't food, but I consider them essential items that need to be stocked regularly. I also happen to keep mine in the pantry. Don't forget to buy them!

Once you have these basic ingredients in your pantry you have the foundation to start cooking for yourself. Please do not consider this list exhaustive. This is simply a blueprint for how to get started stocking your pantry to cook healthy food.

3. Essential Groceries

Having the necessary pantry items is critical to getting started eating healthy, but obviously you need a lot more than that if you actually want to cook fresh, delicious food. This is a list of essential groceries that should always be in your refrigerator.

Many of these items are fresh, which means you need to buy them regularly. Set aside a small amount of time once a week to do your grocery shopping or else healthy eating will be nearly impossible. **This time needs to be non-negotiable;** you must find a way to make it happen. It really isn't as hard as it sounds once you make food a priority. You probably find time to sleep every night—buying groceries requires less than 1 hour per week.

A comprehensive guide to finding these items can be found in section 4.

Put these groceries on your weekly shopping list and never take them off:

- **Shallots or leeks**

These are members of the onion family, but milder and sweeter than you might be used to. Even if you think you do not like onions, I recommend starting most vegetable dishes with one of these ingredients.

Shallots are like small, mild red onions. Leeks are like large green onions, but tender and delicate in flavor. Cippolini onions can also be used.



- **Garlic**

People feel very strongly about garlic, some can't get enough while others avoid it. I have found myself in both camps at some point, but now I am somewhere in the middle.

I go through a small garlic bulb every week, but rarely use more than one clove per dish. With subtle amounts of garlic you can add depth and dimension to your meal. But too much can overpower all the other flavors.

- **Lemon**

As I explained when discussing vinegar, acidic foods are extremely important in cooking. Lemon has the added bonus of possessing an amazing zest that adds both sweetness and brightness to your food. I panic a little if I don't have lemon in the



house, though they are not always available at the farmers market. Citrus is a winter fruit.

- **Parsley**

Flat leaf or “Italian” parsley is the perfect herb for everything. I always buy it, even if I do not know what I am going to use it for. It is also rather robust and keeps longer in the fridge than more delicate herbs, like cilantro. If you do not normally cook with parsley, definitely buy some and try it in your next vegetable dish. I think you will be pleasantly surprised.

- **Fresh herbs**

For all the other fresh herbs I have a different strategy. Since a little goes a long way, I usually only pick one or two to have in my kitchen each week (in addition to the parsley). Which I choose depends on the other foods I am buying.

For example, Mexican food thrives with cilantro and oregano. French style vegetables are beautiful with thyme. I cannot live without rosemary on my roasted potatoes. Mint is perfect with Moroccan food.

Experiment!

Fresh herbs can change the way you approach cooking. If you don’t know how to use something, [ask me](#) or ask Google.

- **Eggs**

I do not buy eggs every week, but I buy them regularly (always a half dozen farm fresh eggs—as fresh as possible). Eggs are incredibly versatile and can be a great, quick meal any time of day.

Check out my favorite [scrambled eggs recipe](#).

- **Tofu or tempeh**

However you think you feel about tofu should probably be reexamined. It can be very delicious when it is made with care and [prepared correctly](#). If you prefer to get protein from plants for ethical, financial or health reasons, these soy products are very convenient.

I love meat in all its forms, but during the week I usually stick to vegetable protein and fish. And sometimes eggs. Soy fits into this rotation nicely.



- **Plain yogurt**

I eat [yogurt for breakfast](#) several times a week. Although I have mild lactose intolerance, I find yogurt improves my digestion and is a satisfying source of protein. Yogurt is also great as a garnish in other meals and can be used as a substitute for sour cream or crème fraîche.

- **Condiments**

I mentioned I keep my soy sauce and almond butter in the refrigerator. The other condiments I keep handy are [tahini](#) (sesame paste), mustard, tomato paste in a tube, anchovies, capers and olives. None of these are absolutely necessary, but they are nice to have around to mix up your flavors. They do not need to be purchased very often.

These groceries are always in my refrigerator and it is fair to say that I consider them essential. However, this list is by no means exhaustive.

4. Seasonal Shopping

Every Saturday morning I wake up as early as I can (usually not very early) and head to the San Francisco Ferry Plaza Farmers Market to buy my vegetables for the week. Seasonal vegetables are the foundation of a healthy diet, and buying them each week is the single most important step you can take to upgrade your healthstyle.

Why Vegetables?

Decades of research on diet, nutrition and health have shown that a vegetable-based diet can reduce your risk for (and even reverse) almost every disease. Debates still rage regarding the mechanism by which vegetables improve health (Is it because they replace bad foods? Contain antioxidants? Are low in calories? Low in fat? Low in carbs? Low in protein? Have low glycemic index?), but for you and me the reason doesn't really matter.

The important point is that vegetables are proven to make you healthy. Those other questions are only necessary for people who want to bottle the benefit and sell it to you at a premium.

Interestingly, one of the most consistent findings in nutrition science is that any attempt to isolate a specific element from food and create a useful dietary supplement fails to mimic the benefits of the whole food.



The lesson from all of this is that *you are much better off spending your money on vegetables and other whole foods than on nutritional supplements.*

Why Seasonal?

If you have ever wondered how much vitamin C is in a tomato, please stop. The idea that one tomato is the same as the next is ludicrous, yet this is the kind of logic we have accepted from grocery stores and the food industry in general.

Anyone with taste buds can immediately tell the difference between a sweet, ripe heirloom tomato at the height of summer and a mealy red beefsteak from your grocery store in December. These foods taste wildly different because of how they were grown, so doesn't it stand to reason that they may have different nutrient levels as well?

In fact, there is a tremendous difference in nutritional quality of foods grown in the correct season and in good soil. Seasonal organic produce is substantially better for you than the conventional produce at Safeway, and this difference is reflected in how your food tastes.

For these reasons, shopping in season can do wonders for how you think about vegetables.

A salad may sound boring to you, but how about miner's lettuce tossed with arugula, Tokyo turnips, Mediterranean cucumbers, ruby grapefruit and sliced almonds? If you are more excited to eat vegetables because they look, sound, smell and taste delicious, then you will lose weight and become healthier by default. Your daily greens will be a joy, not a chore.

Seasonal produce is also more affordable than out of season produce that was grown in a greenhouse or shipped halfway around the world.

How To Shop Seasonally

Farmers Markets

As I mentioned above, my preferred place to shop for vegetables is my local [farmers market](#) on Saturday. Farmers markets are wonderful because you have access to the freshest local and seasonal vegetables available, usually just picked the day before. This means that not only are you guaranteed vegetables at the peak of their season, you can even go from stand to stand and find the batch you like best.

Farmers markets also allow you to discover interesting and unique foods (like the [chocolate persimmon](#)), and build relationships with local farmers. If you are lucky enough to have a weekly farmers market in your area, it is certainly worth it to commit yourself to go every week.



Read [Summer Tomato](#) on Sundays to keep up with local finds in the Bay Area and California in general. I recently started featuring a farmers market in another city around the world once per month.

To find a local farmers market near you visit <http://localharvest.com>

CSAs

Unfortunately, farmers markets are not practical for everyone. Some people have time constraints that prevent them from attending a weekly market. Luckily there are some alternatives available.

One option is the CSA, or [Community-Supported Agriculture](#). When you subscribe to a CSA you pledge support to a particular farm (or sometimes a group of farms), and in exchange receive a box of seasonal produce each week or on an agreed schedule.

The biggest convenience of joining a CSA is that the times arranged for delivery or pick up are much more flexible than the weekly market. There are CSAs for vegetables, as well as meat and dairy. I've even seen a [CSA that is exclusive for summer tomatoes!](#)

From what I understand, individual CSAs can vary substantially in how they are run and what they provide. If you are interested in finding a CSA in your area, I recommend spending some time researching your options and deciding what works best for you.

I have personally never belonged to a CSA, but have heard encouraging things from many Summer Tomato readers.

If you have great CSA stories, please [share them with me!](#)

You can use the CSA finder at Local Harvest to search for a CSA near you <http://www.localharvest.org/csa/>

Local Produce Markets

Even without a farmers market or CSA, it possible to shop in season. Most cities and suburban areas have local produce markets and/or health food stores that focus on fresh vegetables. While not everything in these markets will be seasonal and local, they usually provide a nice alternative to large chain grocery stores to at least supplement your produce shopping. For more information you can read my article about [how to find local produce markets in your area](#).



Grocery Stores

Even if none of these options are available in your neighborhood, it is still likely that the most affordable and best tasting food at your regular grocery store is whatever happens to be in season. Thus it is still worth it to keep up on local and seasonal produce trends in your area.

Shopping Conclusions

Eating your vegetables is the most important thing you can do for your health, and neither nutritional supplements nor regular workouts can substitute for a healthy diet.

Whether you have access to farmers markets or not, you are better off eating any vegetables than no vegetables at all. The same is true if you are considering [conventional vs. organic](#) produce. When just getting started eating healthy, your number one goal should be to eat more vegetables period.

If farmers markets are not available to you year-round there are many ways to get seasonal vegetables and fruits. But the first step is committing to your health and your future by making sure fresh vegetables are a part of your personal healthstyle.

5. Stock Your Freezer

When you're feeling lazy or are too busy to cook a fresh meal, the freezer is the place you should turn. As long as you have some basics in your freezer, even the taqueria downstairs cannot whip up something as quickly as you can. The taqueria is more expensive too.

Your freezer is an invaluable resource for storing foods you have made in large batches. Frozen fruits and vegetables from the grocery store can also come in handy when you are in a pinch. Below is my personal list of freezer essentials, but this is just to get you started. Be creative!

- **Frozen rice balls**

The single most essential item in my freezer is my giant bag of frozen brown rice balls. When I first explained the [best way to make rice](#), I mentioned that I prefer to make a large batch and freeze it in individual servings. This is a trick I learned from a former housemate that always cooked traditional Japanese food (thanks Kiyoshi!). He used white rice, but I think this method is even more valuable for whole, intact grains since they are not particularly easy to integrate into your meals unless you make them yourself.



Whole grains take quite a while to cook, but if you make a lot and freeze them you only need to cook them occasionally. And don't stop with brown rice. You can also freeze other grains like barley and steel cut oatmeal.

- **Cooked legumes**

To know me is to know that I love beans and lentils. Legumes are some of the healthiest foods you can eat, and are among the best sources of protein and iron on the planet. The only problem is they can take a long time to cook.

[Lentils](#) cook pretty quickly (~20 minutes), but beans take at least an hour on the stovetop. Instead I like to make beans in large batches in the [pressure cooker](#) and freeze the rest in 1-2 tupperware containers that I thaw at my leisure. Lentils can be frozen as well.

I recommend freezing the beans in their own cooking liquid; they keep a little better this way. However, you should drain lentils before storing them.

- **Green legumes**

In addition to beans I have cooked myself, I also keep a stock of shelled, frozen soy beans and petite green peas in the freezer. These cook in just a few minutes and are delicious sautéed with nuts, garlic and fresh herbs. My photo needs some serious updating, but if you want an example of what I mean check out my [Edamame and Peas Quick Fix](#).

- **Frozen fruit**

I always have a few bags of frozen wild organic blueberries for the days I run out of fresh fruit for my yogurt and muesli. They thaw pretty fast (sometimes I put them in the microwave for 15 seconds) and are pretty tasty. Frozen berries are great in oatmeal and other hot cereals.

- **Walnuts**

I keep my walnuts in the freezer to prevent the unstable omega-3 fatty acids from going rancid. Other nuts likely store well in the freezer too but tend to be more stable at room temperature than walnuts, which are particularly high in omega-3s.

I use walnuts almost exclusively for cooking. They are great in stir fries, roasts, oatmeal or as a garnish.



- **Soups**

I love soup and cook it often. If you have ever browsed through James Peterson's book [Splendid Soups](#), you know why. The problem with soup is that my stomach has limited capacity and the recipes tend to serve at least 4 people. Unless you want to eat the same thing all week, freezing your leftovers is your best bet. An added bonus is that you end up with a freezer filled with your favorite creations that can be eaten on lazy days.

- **Bread**

I do not eat bread often, but love to have it in the house just in case (eggs come to mind). But I [never buy](#) regular, sliced grocery store bread that is full of preservatives, dough conditioners and other bizarre ingredients that belong in the lab. Instead, I like to go to my local bakery (Acme or Tartine), get a fresh loaf, cut it up into single servings and freeze it in gallon freezer bags. You would be shocked at how nicely frozen bread reheats in an oven set to 325. Alternatively you can take it out a day early and thaw it in the fridge.

- **Meat**

Most of you already know that meat stores well in the freezer, but you can also store scraps and bones to make your own stock. Conveniently, you can also freeze your homemade stock.

- **Sauces**

During the summertime my local markets are practically giving away basil. It is such a wonderful herb, I cannot help making big batches of pesto all season. Leftover sauces can be frozen and taken out in winter when your favorite flavors are harder to find.

One trick is to store your pesto and concentrated sauces in single servings using ice trays.

- **Spices**

I have recently started [grinding my own spices](#), but like many things it is easier to do it in large batches. Extra spices store well in sealed containers in the freezer.

Your freezer is a great resource and I encourage you to be creative. It can make healthy eating much easier by giving you quick access to healthy foods, and also spares you from monotony when you cook in large batches.



6. Balanced Meals

Once you have everything you need to cook healthy meals, you are well on your way to a better healthstyle. But first let's stop and make sure we know what a healthy meal looks like.

My goal here at Summer Tomato is to help you *permanently* adopt healthy eating patterns. Why? Because short-term weight loss diets, “cleansing” diets and ignoring your health completely will never do you any good. In contrast, healthy eating habits can add years and in some cases *decades* of high-quality time to your life.

I am not being sensationalist. The data is very convincing that your eating habits are the most important factor in your long-term health.

For many people the first big step in getting healthy is losing weight, and this means eating better and eating less. But my advice is generally the same (with a few exceptions) if you are not overweight. Healthy eating is the same for everyone—*eating for fat loss and eating for health and longevity are the same thing*.

How can you permanently eat better?

You cannot expect to let yourself go hungry and stick to that eating plan forever. It is therefore critical that you get the most out of your meals by making sure they have enough nutrients and flavor to keep you satisfied.

I would go so far as to say you should *love* the food you eat and should walk away from it not wanting another bite. With balanced meals and wonderful ingredients, you can feel this way about the foods you eat.

Your body needs many things to function properly. It runs on complex carbohydrates, vitamins, fats, fibers, minerals, proteins and probably many more things we have not yet discovered. If you follow some trendy diet that encourages you to eliminate one or more of these, your body will feel deprived and ultimately find a way to get what it wants (usually in binge form).

So let's forget the starvation option and instead choose foods that give us all the nutrients we need. What we will reduce (not eliminate) are foods with fewer nutrients, the ones your body can be happy without. These foods will be addressed shortly.

The best strategy is to give yourself a steady supply of what your body needs throughout the day. Every day. And because scientists have been unable to replicate a healthy diet with a pill, we need to focus on eating food. Real food. The kind that comes from the earth, not from a drive-thru.



The following is a guide to creating a perfect, healthy meal from food. It is only meant to be a blueprint, not a rigid plan. But I feel it is important to spell this out at the beginning because it is so different from how most people eat. I can assure you that it is very doable and more than satisfying. I eat this way, and I can say without hesitation that food is my favorite part of my day.

Note: These recommendations are roughly based on Dr. Walter Willett's healthy eating pyramid outlined in his book [Eat, Drink and Be Healthy](#), still the most straightforward book on health and diet I have read.

Other reading recommendations:

1. [In Defense of Food](#) by Michael Pollan
2. [Good Calories, Bad Calories](#) by Gary Taubes
3. [Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think](#) by Brian Wansink
4. [The End of Overeating](#) by David Kessler

Eat Your Vegetables

Size Matters

As I alluded to in the section on seasonal shopping, the **bulk of your diet should be vegetables** if you hope to permanently lose weight and avoid heart disease, diabetes, cancer and dementia. If you do not like vegetables, you should make an effort to learn.

Here are some tips on [Learning To Love Foods You Don't Like](#).

If you do not like a certain vegetable, there's a good chance that the first time you had it was not the high-quality you can expect from your local farmers market. It probably wasn't prepared well either. Keep trying! Explore different recipes. Try different vegetables at good restaurants. Go out of your way to find vegetables cooked a way you like.

I recommend finding a friend who loves to cook and inviting him or her to explore your local market together—the enthusiasm of a chef at a farmers market can be contagious. You could even volunteer to help make a meal afterward with the fresh ingredients you found. It is amazing how quickly a kitchen becomes demystified when you spend a little time in one.

Start with simple recipes. Delicious food does not have to be complicated if you cook with wonderful ingredients.

To reiterate, your first task is to increase your vegetable intake. **Aim for about half of your (medium-sized) plate to be covered in vegetables.** This should be your goal for both lunch and dinner.



If for whatever reason this is impossible, try to get at least something green on your plate each meal. Adding kale or spinach to whatever you're making (or ordering) is usually pretty easy.

Diversify

You should also try to **get as much diversity as you can in the types of vegetables you eat**. If you have seen those obnoxious lists of “superfoods,” you have probably guessed that pretty much *any fruit or vegetable* can be considered super.

All vegetables have some unique benefit that makes them better than anything else in the world. Therefore you maximize your health by eating many different kinds, not by eating a lot of one kind.

I try to mix up my weekly shopping cart to reflect the diversity of the farmers market, and I usually buy something I have never eaten before. This is one of the wonderful things about seasonal shopping at your local farmers market: vegetables and fruits come and go pretty quickly, so diversity comes with the territory.

Smart Protein

I mentioned above that it is important to feel satisfied by your meals, and protein can go a long way in helping you achieve this. However, there are many misconceptions about protein, particularly regarding how much and what kinds you should eat.

I'll start by saying that virtually no one in the Western world is protein deficient. It is relatively easy to get the protein your body needs to maintain its muscle mass. I do not recommend counting protein grams unless you are a professional body builder, in which case this probably isn't the best website for you anyway.

Despite what some people may say, many vegetables and grains contain protein. For instance, a [cup of brown rice](#) has 5 grams of protein. A [cup of black beans](#) has 15 grams of protein (and 20% of your daily iron). Some will argue that these are not “quality” sources of protein because they are not “complete proteins,” meaning that they are lacking in some essential amino acid. However, this argument is irrelevant if you follow my advice above and enjoy diversity in your diet.

Yes, if all your protein comes from brown rice then you may be deficient in lysine, but presumably you are eating more than just brown rice and the rest of your food will easily make up the difference.

Getting all your protein is important, but since it is relatively easy to get I find the biggest value of protein is helping you feel satisfied after a meal. Protein digests more slowly than carbohydrates and can help you feel full longer. It is also good for keeping blood sugar and

insulin levels steady, which leads to less hunger pangs. From this perspective, it matters very little where your protein comes from.

If you choose to get your protein from animal sources like fish, eggs, poultry or red meat, your portions should be on the smaller side or your calorie consumption will begin to increase substantially. 4-6 oz of meat, or about one quarter of the space on your plate should be from protein.

Personally I try to get my protein from beans, eggs or fish, because they offer more than just protein. Beans are a great source of fiber and iron. Eggs are a perfect size and are rich in vitamins. Fish has wonderful oils that have been shown to protect your heart and brain.

I'm fairly neutral on poultry and red meat in small quantities. Too much meat, however, might be a problem and is associated with osteoporosis and a few kinds of cancer (these points are still debated, but it seems unlikely that lots of meat is particularly good for you). It is also very expensive. I do not recommend milk, since it is associated with prostate cancer and other scary diseases. A little bit is fine if you enjoy it.

One single food will rarely have a large impact on your health. It is your overall eating pattern that is important.

Intact Grains

Despite what low-carb disciples say about carbohydrates (a lot of which I agree with), intact whole grains are very valuable in a healthy diet. Unfortunately, real whole grains are not very easy to come by in our culture.

I have explained before that there is a tremendous difference between an [intact whole grains](#) that still looks like grain and the “whole grains” in Lucky Charms that have been mutilated then reassembled. Real, intact grains digest slowly and are an excellent source of fiber, vitamins, minerals and other wonderful things.

Like protein, whole grains should comprise about a quarter of your plate. However, since whole grains are rather difficult to get, I usually choose to make intact grains the bulk of my [breakfast](#), and then might incorporate other grains such as [brown rice](#) or [quinoa](#) into either lunch or dinner (double the veggies or substitute legumes in meals without grains). Grains also go a long way to increase the satisfaction you feel from a meal.

Healthy Fats

One of the reasons the low-fat diet from the 20th century failed so miserably is that it did not account for the necessity of healthy fats. Oils from plants and fish are critical for protecting against disease. And, like protein and grains, they contribute greatly to how satisfying your meal is.



Because fats have a high caloric density, a little really goes a long way and there is no definitive space on your plate that I allot to them. However, generally I recommend dressing or cooking all your vegetables in olive oil. I also recommend cooking with nuts (many different kinds, of course) regularly and enjoying avocado and other oily plants frequently.

Fish provide a different kind of oil than plants, and both are important. But if you are eating substantial amounts of fish you should be aware of the [advantages and disadvantages of certain kinds of seafood](#).

Saturated fats found in animal products are more difficult to assess. Though they have been demonized for decades, surprisingly little of the data is convincing. My best guess is that saturated fats are not as bad as they have been made out to be, but since vegetarians and vegans can be perfectly healthy they are not essential.

Personally I use meat as a delicious and satisfying supplement to my diet of vegetables, legumes, fruit and intact grains. I often cook with coconut oil, a healthy vegetarian source of saturated fat.

Conclusions on balanced meals

The bottom line is you should eat fresh whole foods and not processed foods.

Strive to eat a diverse array of fresh vegetables, healthy proteins, intact grains, and plant and fish oils as a part of your daily healthstyle, particularly in the meals you have control over. However, this is not something you should approach as all-or-none. Any meal can be made healthier by adding these ingredients, and it is worth it to work them in if possible.

But most important, be sure that whatever you eat you enjoy. None of this is “diet food” and all of it should make you happy.

What truly liberated me from worrying about food all the time was shifting my thoughts and fears away from things I couldn't or shouldn't eat and instead focusing on delicious foods—foods I love—that also make me healthy. Changing my relationship with food in this way turned it from something that caused me anxiety to something that brought me pleasure.

One unexpected benefit of choosing healthy, tasty foods over bland diet foods was that many of my old cravings for sugary, unhealthy fare disappeared. While I have not found a clear scientific explanation for this, it stands to reason that a nourished body would be less prone to strong feelings of need toward certain foods. I was amazed how powerful it can be to focus on health instead of dieting. These days, really unhealthy foods barely even tempt me.



7. Foods To Avoid

Upgrading your healthstyle will go far in helping you overcome your cravings, but as much as I would love to tell you that you can eat any foods you want in any quantities you want, we all know this is not true.

Though my first recommendation is eating more of the healthy foods you love, there are also foods that are generally worth avoiding as part as your daily healthstyle.

There is room for anything in a healthy life, but here are some foods that **DO NOT** promote health and can lead to weight gain:

- **Sugar**

In any form, sugar wreaks havoc on your health and metabolism. Two keys to protecting yourself from sugar damage are quantity and timing. Do not eat too much sugar at once (stick to small desserts) and do not eat sugar very frequently. I try to **limit real desserts to once per week (max)** and satisfy all other sweets cravings with fruit. Eating whole grains is particularly effective at reducing sugar cravings.

- **Refined flour**

Processed grains (flour in any form) are almost as bad as sugar in their impact on your metabolism. In fact, your body processes them exactly the same way. Generally look for alternatives to breads, pastas and other foods made with flour. Instead focus on getting carbohydrates from intact whole grains and legumes. Try to limit refined flour foods to less than once per day, **the less the better**. If you are actively trying to lose weight, I would make an effort to cut these out completely.

- **Trans fat**

Twenty years ago scientists believed they had solved the “problem” of saturated fat by replacing it with an artificial solid fat made from plants. It turned out these processed fats, *trans-fats*, are one of the [most dangerous foods](#) you can put into your body. Not only do they raise your LDL cholesterol, they also contribute to lowering your “good” HDL cholesterol—a double whammy for your health. **No amount of trans-fat is considered safe** in the diet (the data is striking), and you should avoid these processed fats completely. Better to eat foods made with real butter. Better yet, choose healthy fats from vegetable sources like coconut oil and olive oil.

- **Anything processed**

It is worth emphasizing that nothing processed has ever proven to be healthier for you than real whole foods—even foods with fantastic health claims on the package. In



fact, as Michael Pollan points out in his book [In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto](#), **a health claim on a package is a pretty good sign that a food is bad for you.** There are no stickers for “Whole Grain” or “Low Carb” on your vegetables, and those are what you should be eating.

- **Red meat**

As I [discussed](#) previously, red meat is probably not good for you. Some people argue that it is [really bad for you](#), and some people think it is [not so bad](#). It appears to not be quite as bad as processed foods, but there are plenty of compelling reasons to keep tabs on how much red meat you eat. I recommend **less than one (4-6 oz) serving of red meat per week.**

I do not recommend completely eliminating foods you love—even if they are bad for you—because this is not something you can maintain forever and it strips some of the joy from life. Instead I suggest trying a few customizable strategies to be sure that the less healthy foods you love bring you happiness, but do not damage your body:

- **Reduce, Don't Eliminate**

Simply being aware of how often you eat these foods and trying to stick to the guidelines above can drastically improve your healthstyle. If you currently eat a lot of sugar, processed foods or red meat, do not attempt to completely overhaul your diet overnight. Make changes gradually or it will be very difficult to make them permanent.

- **Be Picky**

When you first start to upgrade your healthstyle, identify foods you can do without and those you can't live without. Some changes will be easier for some people, while others are nearly impossible. Focus on the easier changes and do not beat yourself up over things that are difficult for you. Every little change you make will add up to a healthier you.

- **Set Up Simple Rules**

It is often hard to keep track of everything you do or do not eat. A food journal can help with this, but the simpler your healthstyle the better. Setting up simple, easy-to-remember rules for yourself can help you make healthy changes.

The guidelines above are a great place to start. For example, if you decide in advance you can only have one dessert per week, you will be sure that the one you choose is well worth the wait. Use simple rules to both increase your good habits and decrease your bad ones.



Experiment to find simple rules that work for you. For example, if you love to eat pizza make a deal with yourself that if you have it you must have a big pile greens on the side. This has the advantage of helping you eat less processed food, increases your vegetable intake and blunts the impact of the flour on your blood sugar.

Conclusions

To make meaningful improvement in your health you have to adjust your eating habits to a diet of whole, natural foods. But if this is very different from how you currently eat, there is no reason to worry.

You can get started eating healthy with just a few simple changes each month, and gradually these new habits will become part of your life.

Take it slow and healthy will become who you are.

For most people these changes are not very difficult and are often welcome. Summer Tomato readers who have made healthstyle upgrades have overwhelmingly expressed their joy and gratitude at discovering the treasures at their local farmers markets and the pleasures of cooking at home.

Every day I marvel at how much happiness in my life now comes through food and how it connects me with friends, family and my community. At moments like these I can't help but wonder if the vast sense of gratitude and love that comes from experiencing real food is even more important than the health benefits.

One thing is certain: upgrading your healthstyle is a lot more fun and effective than being on a restrictive diet.

Thank you for reading *How To Get Started Eating Healthy: The 7 essential Steps To Getting Healthy and Losing Weight*. Feel free to share this report with anyone you think may benefit from it.

For more tips to upgrade your healthstyle, be sure to come visit me at [Summer Tomato](#).

If you have any questions, suggestions or feedback on this report please [email me](#) and I'll get back to you as soon as I can.

Cheers,

Darya



About Darya Pino

My name is Darya Pino and I am the creator of [Summer Tomato](#). I'm a scientist, foodie and lover of local, seasonal foods. At my core, however, I am someone who believes I can be healthy, happy and in fantastic shape no matter how busy my life is.

Currently I am working on my PhD in neuroscience at UC San Francisco, hoping to finish up this year. I also blog full time at Summer Tomato and occasionally at [The Huffington Post](#). I am a columnist and nutrition editor for the UCSF newspaper, *Synapse*, where I spent several years as science editor as well. I received my undergraduate degree in Molecular and Cell Biology from Berkeley, and was [recognized](#) as one of the top students in my graduating class of 2003.



For the past 8 years I have studied basic science in labs at UC Berkeley and UCSF. I have worked extensively with both human subjects and experimental animals, using a wide range of scientific techniques to explore the basic biological functions of the brain.

Originally my plan was to go into medicine (well, after I switched majors from English literature to biology in my 4th year of college—I graduated in 6 yrs) because I wanted to help people with diseases of the mind. However after a little digging I learned that there were no cures and very few effective treatments for the kinds of diseases I was interested in. I then questioned how satisfied I would be in medicine and opted instead to go into research.

Thus I began my career believing science would be the answer to curing disease and keeping us healthy.

But although many brilliant people are making key discoveries in health every year, ultimately I realized science wasn't the answer I was looking for either—at least not in the way I had envisioned. This is because in large part the questions I hoped to answer have already been solved.

Over the past 3 years I've used my training in biology to discover a rich body of scientific literature on how to prevent and cure almost all of the major diseases that plague our modern society, including some neurodegenerative diseases.

It turns out the answer is simple. [The answer is food](#).

But to understand how I got to this answer, you need to know a little about my past.

Click here to read my [dieting history](#). (It's long!)



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