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Eating well for sustainable weight loss

A four week food and movement guide for adults

This resource offers meal ideas, satisfying snacks and practical ways to enjoy takeaway and eating out. It is a starting point for generally healthy adults who would benefit from modest weight loss, with portions tailored to individual needs.

A guide only

This is a guide only and must be tailored according to your dietitian's recommendations. Your height, weight, activity, health, medicines, food preferences and blood results affect your needs. Being mildly overweight does not by itself establish an appropriate calorie target or mean that weight loss is necessary.

The plan is built around Australian food-group recommendations and key nutrient targets. It has not undergone a complete nutrient analysis of every recipe and brand, so it cannot guarantee that every nutrient requirement is met. Ask your dietitian to check and adapt it before using it as your individual meal prescription.

Build habits you can keep

- Eat regular, satisfying meals. Include protein, fibre-rich carbohydrate and vegetables rather than skipping meals to save calories.
- Use a modest energy reduction agreed with your dietitian. Persistent hunger, fatigue, dizziness or menstrual changes are reasons to review the plan.
- Keep enjoyable foods in your eating pattern. One meal does not determine your health or progress.
- Track changes in energy, strength and wellbeing as well as weight, if weighing is helpful for you.

Avoid fad diets

Be wary of rapid weight-loss promises, detoxes, fat-burning supplements, rigid food rules and plans that remove whole food groups without a medical reason. Restrictive diets can cause nutrient shortfalls, fatigue, weight regain and an unhealthy relationship with food. Some structured diets have clinical uses under professional supervision. [1]

When you need individual advice first

Do not use this as a weight-loss plan during pregnancy or breastfeeding, or if you have an eating disorder or a history of restrictive eating without support. Diabetes medicines, kidney disease, food allergies, heavy periods and digestive conditions may also require changes.

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Your daily nutrition foundation

The weekly menus on the following pages include these daily foods. They are part of the plan, not optional extras to add only when hungry. Spread them between meals and snacks. Extra snack ideas later in this guide can be used according to hunger and your dietitian's advice.

Daily foundation	How to use it
Breakfast cereal	40 g high-fibre, iron-fortified cereal. Compare labels: iron content varies greatly. Your dietitian may adjust the brand or portion to reach your iron target.
Milk and yoghurt	500 mL reduced-fat milk across the day, plus 200 g plain reduced-fat yoghurt and 20 g reduced-fat cheese. Choose milk with at least 120 mg calcium/100 mL and yoghurt with at least 150 mg/100 g; together with cheese these provide about 1,000 mg calcium.
Fruit	2 serves daily: one at breakfast and one later. A serve is 1 medium apple, orange or pear, 2 small kiwifruit, or 1 cup diced fruit.
Vegetables and legumes	At lunch: 2 cups leafy salad plus ½ cup other vegetables. At dinner: at least 1 cup cooked vegetables. Include ½ cup cooked beans, chickpeas or lentils daily in lunch or dinner, counted once only.
Grains and healthy fats	Lunch: 2 slices wholegrain bread or equivalent. Dinner: 1 cup cooked brown rice, wholegrain pasta or quinoa. Add 15 g unsalted nuts and about 2 teaspoons olive oil daily, including cooking oil.

Make the plan work for you

All meat and fish portions are cooked weights; grains and legumes are cooked unless labelled dry. Use reduced-salt canned foods and rinse beans. A wrap should provide a similar grain amount to 2 bread slices; otherwise add a slice. Portions are examples, not a fixed calorie prescription. Larger or more active adults may need larger meals or extra snacks. Your dietitian can adjust each food group to your needs. [2]

Keep the listed daily foods even when meals are rearranged. If a meal already contains the beans, rice, milk or cheese, do not count it twice. For a potato dinner, swap 1 cup cooked grain for about 200 g potato and discuss your overall grain intake with your dietitian.

Dairy-free: use unsweetened soy milk with at least 120 mg calcium/100 mL. Yoghurt and cheese alternatives are not automatically equivalent; check calcium, protein, B12 and iodine with your dietitian. A vegan version needs a specific B12 plan.

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Week 1 meal plan

Every day: include the daily foundation on page 2. Breakfast uses the 40 g fortified cereal, 250 mL of your daily milk and 1 fruit serve. Add your 200 g yoghurt here or have it later.

Day	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner
Mon	Berry cereal bowl	Chicken sandwich, 75 g chicken	Beef and lentil bolognese, 100 g lean beef
Tue	Banana cereal bowl	Tuna sandwich, 95 g tuna	Baked salmon, 150 g, with brown rice
Wed	Kiwi cereal bowl	Egg sandwich, 2 eggs	Tofu stir-fry, 170 g firm tofu, with brown rice
Thu	Pear cereal bowl	Chicken and chickpea wrap, 75 g chicken	Lean beef strips, 100 g, with quinoa
Fri	Orange and cereal	Tuna and bean sandwich, 95 g tuna	Takeaway grilled fish, about 150 g, rice and salad
Sat	Apple cereal bowl	Chicken salad sandwich, 75 g chicken	Chicken tray bake, 120 g, with potato
Sun	Berry cereal bowl	Egg and cheese sandwich, 2 eggs	Chickpea curry, 1 cup chickpeas, with brown rice

Daily snacks and meal additions

Have your second fruit serve, remaining 250 mL milk, 200 g yoghurt if not eaten at breakfast, 20 g cheese and 15 g nuts across the day. Add the lunch salad and dinner vegetables shown on page 2. Include ½ cup legumes daily unless the meal already provides at least this amount.

The vegetables, beans and wholegrains matter as much as the main protein. Use your daily olive oil allowance for cooking or dressing; flavour meals with herbs, lemon, garlic and spices.

Prepare once and use twice

Cook extra rice, roast a tray of vegetables and portion legumes for lunch. Refrigerate leftovers promptly and use within 2–3 days, or freeze. Reheat until steaming hot.

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Week 2 meal plan

Every day: include the daily foundation on page 2. Breakfast uses the 40 g fortified cereal, 250 mL of your daily milk and 1 fruit serve. Add your 200 g yoghurt here or have it later.

Day	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner
Mon	Banana cereal bowl	Chicken and lentil wrap, 75 g chicken	Salmon, 150 g, with wholegrain pasta
Tue	Kiwi cereal bowl	Tuna sandwich, 95 g tuna	Lean beef chilli, 100 g beef, with brown rice
Wed	Pear cereal bowl	Egg sandwich, 2 eggs	Calcium-set tofu curry, 170 g tofu, with rice
Thu	Berry cereal bowl	Chicken sandwich, 75 g chicken	Chicken fajita bowl, 120 g chicken, brown rice
Fri	Orange and cereal	Tuna and chickpea wrap, 95 g tuna	Dinner out: grilled steak, about 100 g, potato and vegetables
Sat	Apple cereal bowl	Egg salad sandwich, 2 eggs	Baked white fish, 150 g, with quinoa
Sun	Banana cereal bowl	Chicken and bean sandwich, 75 g chicken	Lentil bolognese, 1 cup lentils, wholegrain pasta

Daily snacks and meal additions

Have your second fruit serve, remaining 250 mL milk, 200 g yoghurt if not eaten at breakfast, 20 g cheese and 15 g nuts across the day. Add the lunch salad and dinner vegetables shown on page 2. Include ½ cup legumes daily unless the meal already provides at least this amount.

The vegetables, beans and wholegrains matter as much as the main protein. Use your daily olive oil allowance for cooking or dressing; flavour meals with herbs, lemon, garlic and spices.

Keep meals convenient

Frozen vegetables, canned legumes, microwave brown rice and plain yoghurt help on busy days. Buy the portions you will actually use.

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Week 3 meal plan

Every day: include the daily foundation on page 2. Breakfast uses the 40 g fortified cereal, 250 mL of your daily milk and 1 fruit serve. Add your 200 g yoghurt here or have it later.

Day	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner
Mon	Pear cereal bowl	Tuna and bean sandwich, 95 g tuna	Chicken stir-fry, 120 g, with brown rice
Tue	Berry cereal bowl	Egg sandwich, 2 eggs	Lean beef meatballs, 100 g beef, wholegrain pasta
Wed	Orange and cereal	Chicken and lentil wrap, 75 g chicken	Salmon, 150 g, with quinoa
Thu	Apple cereal bowl	Tuna sandwich, 95 g tuna	Tofu and chickpea bowl, 170 g tofu, brown rice
Fri	Banana cereal bowl	Egg salad sandwich, 2 eggs	Takeaway chicken burrito bowl, beans, rice and vegetables
Sat	Kiwi cereal bowl	Chicken sandwich, 75 g chicken	Lean lamb, 100 g, with potato and vegetables
Sun	Berry cereal bowl	Tuna and bean wrap, 95 g tuna	Lentil and vegetable curry, 1 cup lentils, brown rice

Daily snacks and meal additions

Have your second fruit serve, remaining 250 mL milk, 200 g yoghurt if not eaten at breakfast, 20 g cheese and 15 g nuts across the day. Add the lunch salad and dinner vegetables shown on page 2. Include ½ cup legumes daily unless the meal already provides at least this amount.

The vegetables, beans and wholegrains matter as much as the main protein. Use your daily olive oil allowance for cooking or dressing; flavour meals with herbs, lemon, garlic and spices.

Practise flexible choices

Swap meals between days to suit your schedule. A takeaway meal can replace a home-cooked dinner; retain the daily foundation where practical.

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Week 4 meal plan

Every day: include the daily foundation on page 2. Breakfast uses the 40 g fortified cereal, 250 mL of your daily milk and 1 fruit serve. Add your 200 g yoghurt here or have it later.

Day	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner
Mon	Apple cereal bowl	Egg sandwich, 2 eggs	Baked salmon, 150 g, with brown rice
Tue	Orange and cereal	Chicken and chickpea wrap, 75 g chicken	Lean beef stir-fry, 100 g, with quinoa
Wed	Banana cereal bowl	Tuna and bean sandwich, 95 g tuna	Tofu noodle bowl, 170 g tofu, wholegrain noodles
Thu	Berry cereal bowl	Egg salad sandwich, 2 eggs	Chicken and lentil casserole, 120 g chicken, with rice
Fri	Pear cereal bowl	Chicken sandwich, 75 g chicken	Dinner out: grilled fish, rice or potato, vegetables
Sat	Kiwi cereal bowl	Tuna sandwich, 95 g tuna	Lean beef burger, 100 g beef, wholegrain bun and salad
Sun	Berry cereal bowl	Egg and cheese wrap, 2 eggs	Chickpea and tofu curry, ½ cup chickpeas and 170 g tofu, brown rice

Daily snacks and meal additions

Have your second fruit serve, remaining 250 mL milk, 200 g yoghurt if not eaten at breakfast, 20 g cheese and 15 g nuts across the day. Add the lunch salad and dinner vegetables shown on page 2. Include ½ cup legumes daily unless the meal already provides at least this amount.

The vegetables, beans and wholegrains matter as much as the main protein. Use your daily olive oil allowance for cooking or dressing; flavour meals with herbs, lemon, garlic and spices.

Build your ongoing routine

Repeat the meals you enjoy. At your next dietitian visit, review appetite, energy, iron intake, calcium choices and whether your portions need changing.

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Snacks for hunger and convenience

Choose snacks to suit your hunger and your tailored plan. Start with the daily milk, yoghurt, fruit, cheese and nuts already included in the menu. The options below are alternatives or additional choices, not a requirement to eat more. Calories are approximate; brands and portions vary. 100 calories is about 420 kJ.

Snack and portion	Approximate calories
1 cup strawberries	45–55
1 mandarin	40–50
1 small apple	60–80
2 kiwifruit	80–100
1 cup watermelon	45–50
½ cup frozen mango	45–60
1 small banana	85–100
1 cup grapes	100–110
1 cup carrot sticks	45–55
2 cups cucumber, capsicum and tomato	50–80
1 boiled egg	70–80
170 g plain reduced-fat Greek yoghurt	90–130
½ cup reduced-fat cottage cheese	90–120
75 g shelled edamame	90–110
95 g tuna in springwater, drained	75–110
250 mL skim milk	85–95
15 g unsalted almonds	85–95
3 cups air-popped popcorn, no added oil	90–100
2 tablespoons hummus and 1 cup vegetable sticks	90–130
2 wholegrain crispbreads with tomato	70–110
¼ cup tzatziki with cucumber	60–100
100 g plain low-fat yoghurt and ½ cup berries	80–110
10–15 g chocolate	55–85
1 small fruit-based ice block	40–90

Need more staying power? Combine fruit with yoghurt, an egg with crispbread, or apple with peanut butter. A larger satisfying snack can work better than several tiny snacks. Lowest calorie does not always mean most nutritious.

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Takeaway and dinners out

Restaurant portions and preparation vary, so these are practical ordering ideas rather than calorie guarantees. Aim to include protein, vegetables and a satisfying carbohydrate portion.

Food or venue	An order to consider
Burger shop	Single burger with salad. Choose the extras you enjoy most; have a small or shared chips if wanted.
Fish and chips	Grilled fish, salad and a small portion of chips, or rice if available.
Pizza	Thin-crust vegetable and chicken pizza with a side salad. Serve a portion and reassess hunger before taking more.
Thai or Chinese	Chicken, prawn or tofu stir-fry with vegetables and steamed rice. Ask for less oil and sauce on the side where possible.
Indian	Tandoori chicken or dal with vegetables and rice or roti. Share dishes so you can include variety.
Japanese	Simple sushi or sashimi, rice and edamame. Tempura and mayonnaise-rich rolls can be occasional choices.
Vietnamese	Chicken, prawn or tofu rice-paper rolls, or a noodle salad with dressing on the side.
Mexican	Burrito bowl with grilled protein, beans, rice, vegetables and salsa. Choose portions of cheese, sour cream and guacamole to suit you.
Kebab shop	Chicken or falafel wrap with plenty of salad and a modest amount of sauce.
Pub or restaurant	Grilled fish, chicken, tofu or steak with vegetables and potato or rice. Ask about sides and sauces.
Supermarket	Roast chicken, bagged salad, canned beans and microwave brown rice for a quick meal.

Enjoy the occasion

Eat your normal meals earlier in the day rather than arriving ravenous. Choose food you enjoy, eat at a comfortable pace and pause to notice fullness. Leave food or take leftovers home when appropriate. Dessert can fit; sharing is an option if you want it.

Water and sparkling water are useful everyday drinks. Alcohol and sweetened drinks add energy; choose deliberately. After eating out, return to your usual routine rather than skipping meals or exercising to compensate. [3]

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Movement and resistance training

Exercise supports health even when the scales do not change. Current Australian guidance for adults aged 18–64 recommends being active most days, preferably every day. [4]

- Build towards 30 minutes or more of moderate to vigorous activity on most days. Brisk walking, cycling, swimming and dancing are options. At a moderate pace you can usually talk, but not sing comfortably.
- Include muscle-strengthening activity on at least 2 days a week.
- Include movement for mobility, balance and coordination on at least 3 days a week, and light activity throughout the day. Break up long periods of sitting.
- Aim for 7–9 hours of sleep with consistent bed and wake times.

Why resistance training matters

During weight loss, some of the weight lost can be muscle. Resistance training, alongside enough protein and an appropriate energy intake, helps preserve strength and muscle. It also supports bone health, joint function and everyday tasks such as carrying shopping and climbing stairs. It is useful even if weight loss is slow. [5]

A simple starting session

On two non-consecutive days, warm up with easy walking, then practise sit-to-stand or squats, wall push-ups, a resistance-band row, a hip hinge or bridge, calf raises and a gentle core exercise. Start with one set of 8–12 controlled repetitions where appropriate. Build towards two sets as you become comfortable, and increase resistance gradually with good technique.

Use body weight, bands or weights. An accredited exercise physiologist or physiotherapist can adapt exercises for injuries, pelvic-floor symptoms or health conditions. Stop and seek assessment for chest pain, faintness or unusual breathlessness.

Build up over the four weeks

Wk	Walking or another aerobic activity	Strength and mobility
1	Start with 10–15 minutes on 5 days, or less if needed.	2 short strength sessions; mobility or balance on 3 days.
2	Try 15–20 minutes on 5 days if comfortable.	Continue 2 strength sessions; practise technique.
3	Try 20–30 minutes on 5 days.	Gradually add repetitions or resistance.
4	Work towards 30 minutes or more on most days.	Maintain 2 strength sessions and regular mobility.

This progression is an example, not a deadline. Start at your current ability and build gradually. Ask your clinician or an exercise professional for advice if you are unsure what is safe for you.

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Nutrition checks and your personal plan

These are selected Australian reference values for generally healthy adults aged 19–50. Ranges reflect differing adult needs, not a choice of targets. Needs change with age, body size, activity and life stage. Your dietitian should check your targets, food brands and substitutions; these are not measured menu totals. [6]

Nutrient	Daily reference	Foods and checks
Protein	46–64 g RDI	Milk, yoghurt, eggs, fish, poultry, meat, tofu and legumes provide regular protein. A higher individual target may be appropriate during weight loss and training.
Calcium	1,000 mg RDI	Follow the milk, yoghurt and cheese quantities and calcium label checks on page 2.
Iron	8–18 mg RDI	Fortified cereal, legumes, wholegrains and red meat help. Menstrual losses can increase needs. Check cereal iron and the total plan; meat alone does not guarantee enough iron.
Fibre	25–30 g adequate intake	Wholegrain cereal and bread, legumes, vegetables, fruit and nuts.
Folate	400 micrograms DFE RDI	Legumes, leafy vegetables, wholegrains and fortified foods.
Iodine	150 micrograms RDI	Dairy, fish and bread made with iodised salt. Many plant milks contain little iodine.
Vitamin B12	2.4 micrograms RDI	Dairy, eggs, fish and meat, or a specifically planned fortified-food or supplement approach.

Pair plant iron foods with vitamin C foods such as capsicum, kiwi or citrus. Heavy periods or low iron stores need individual assessment. Vitamin D status also needs consideration; food alone may not be enough. Do not start iron or other supplements without advice.

Complete with your dietitian

My goals: _____
My portion or food changes: _____
Iron and calcium checks or supplements advised: _____
My movement plan: _____
Review date: _____

Sources and further reading

[1] Dietitians Australia — Fad diets https://dietitiansaustralia.org.au/health-advice/fad-diets

[2] Eat for Health — Recommended serves for adults https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/food-essentials/how-much-do-we-need-each-day/recommended-number-serves-adults

[3] Eat for Health — Discretionary choices https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/food-essentials/discretionary-food-and-drink-choices

[4] Australian Government — Adult movement recommendations https://www.health.gov.au/topics/physical-activity/24-hour-movement-guidelines-for-all-australians/recommendations-for-adults-18-to-64-years

[5] Better Health Channel — Resistance training health benefits https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/HealthyLiving/resistance-training-health-benefits

[6] Eat for Health — Nutrient reference values https://www.eatforhealth.gov.au/nutrient-reference-values