

MAKING HEALTHY CHOICES

How to eat in the
workplace and beyond



*Written for Virgin Pulse by P.K. Newby, ScD, MPH, MS
Scientist. Speaker. Author. Food Expert. Cook.
The Nutrition Doctor
Virgin Pulse Science Advisory Board Member*

THE SCIENCE OF HEALTHY EATING

Many people find nutrition confusing and believe that nutritionists are constantly changing their minds. In fact, while our knowledge of what makes people healthy continuously evolves – as it does in any other scientific discipline – nutrition scientists know a tremendous amount about what makes people healthy.

The World Health Organization estimates that approximately 80 percent of chronic diseases like obesity, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes can be prevented through modifiable lifestyle factors such as diet. Yet good health is so much more than simply managing weight and staving off disease, as important as those are. Eating well can keep us energized and focused so that we're always at our best – wherever we are, whatever we're doing.

Unfortunately, most people aren't enjoying the benefits of good nutrition due to unhealthy food choices.

Knowledge is the first step in understanding what to eat, so let's begin with the basics. Harvard's Healthy Eating Plate makes it easy to visualize what a healthy diet should look like.

Forget the latest fad from junk-science food blogs or anti-science celebrities. The dietary recommendations reflected in Harvard's Healthy Eating Plate are based on thousands of studies performed over the years. When you look to evidence-based sources from scientists for dietary advice, you can rest assured that you're getting the right information to put you and your employees on the road to great health.

HEALTHY EATING PLATE

HEALTHY OILS
Use healthy oils (like olive and canola oil) for cooking, on salad, and at the table. Limit butter. Avoid trans fat.

VEGETABLES
The more veggies – and the greater the variety – the better. Potatoes and French fries don't count.

FRUITS
Eat plenty of fruits of all colors.

WHOLE GRAINS
Eat a variety of whole grains (like whole-wheat bread, whole-grain pasta, and brown rice). Limit refined grains (like white rice and white bread).

HEALTHY PROTEIN
Choose fish, poultry, beans, and nuts; limit red meat and cheese; avoid bacon, cold cuts, and other processed meats.

WATER
Drink water, tea, or coffee (with little or no sugar). Limit milk/dairy (1-2 servings/day) and juice (1 small glass/day). Avoid sugary drinks.

STAY ACTIVE!

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CHOOSING HEALTH: HOW TO CREATE A HEALTHY PLATE

If your employees are like most people, knowledge alone doesn't always lead to action. After all, they probably already know that they should be eating more vegetables and fruits and drinking fewer sugary beverages. Much more than simply understanding what they should and shouldn't be eating, to reap the health benefits of good nutrition in life, your employees need to act. In other words, they need to make the right choices to get the best foods onto their plates - and you can help them make it happen.

Focusing on six key behaviors in particular will go a long way toward helping your people translate the principles of Harvard's plate into their diets to help nourish their bodies and mind.

Share the following list with your workforce to support their journey down a healthier, more nutritious path.





1 Fill half your plate with **vegetables and fruits** at each meal.

The first thing you probably noticed is that vegetables and fruit comprise half of Harvard's plate. Seem like a lot? That's because very few people are eating enough.

Selecting whole plants is important, since it's the skin and flesh, root to leaf, that contain all those beneficial vitamins, minerals, and fiber. Plants also contain unique phytochemicals—plant components beneficial to health—that can't be found anywhere else. The bright colors of vegetables and fruits are where many of these phytochemicals reside, so keep on the peels to retain maximum nutritional value (and reduce food waste).

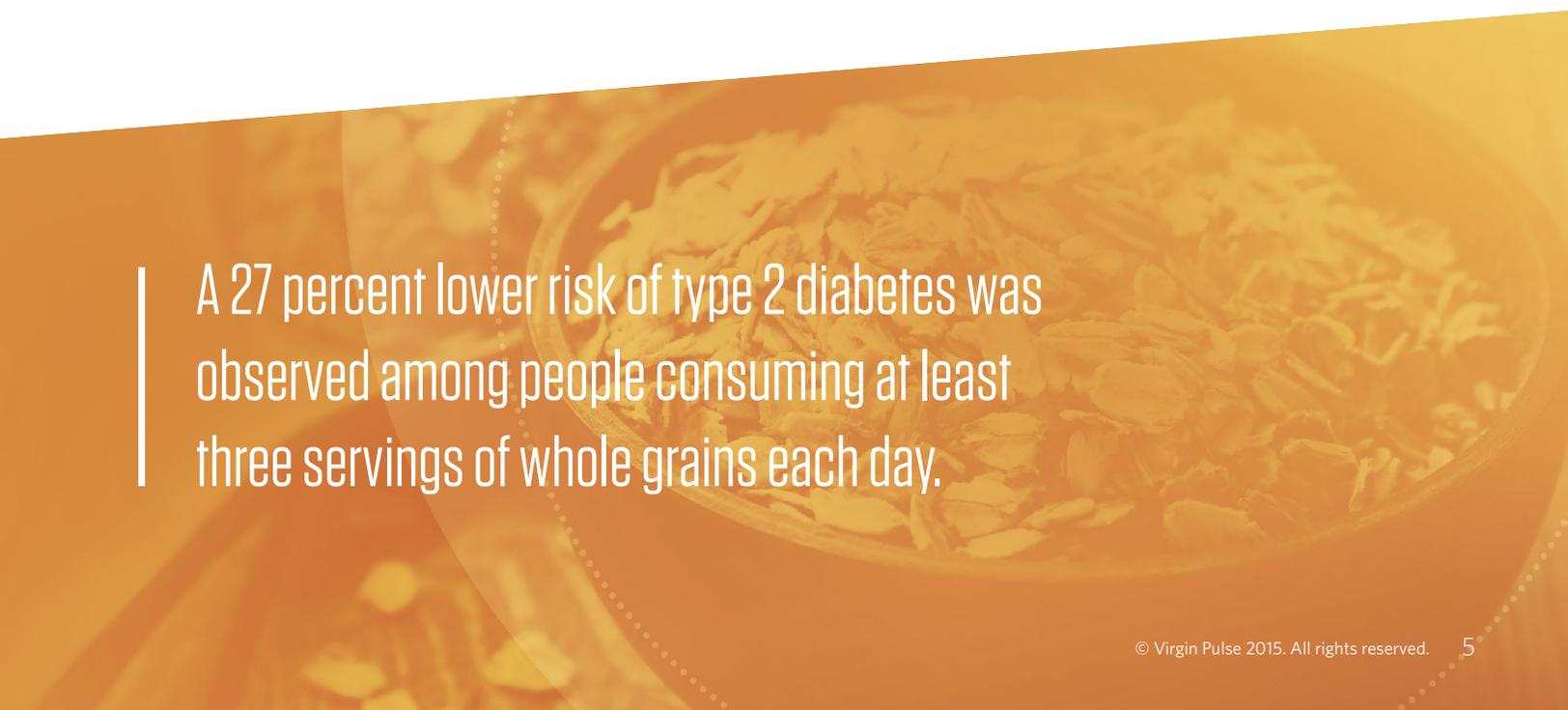
Choose whole fruits and vegetables, since juices tend to deliver a concentrated source of calories and sugar. Taking the time to chew will help your body feel fuller and keep your appetite in check. Fresh veggies and fruits are terrific, but frozen and canned options can be just as healthful. Just make sure to scan the labels for no added sugar and sodium, then enjoy these convenient sources to help you get more fruit and veggies into your diet.

People consuming more than five servings of vegetables and fruit per day have about a 20 percent lower risk of coronary heart disease and stroke.

2 Check your ingredients and choose **whole grain foods** over white flour and rice.

Many people consume a lot of grain-based foods in their diet every day, from bread and pasta to crackers, cereal, and cookies. The majority of these products are made from refined flour or rice in which much of the fiber and nutrients have been removed, leaving only starch. Starch is quickly metabolized by the body into sugar, which can lead to spikes in blood sugar and insulin. What goes up must come down, and this drop in blood sugar can lead to decreased energy.

Next time you're at the grocery store, read the ingredient list before placing an item in your basket. Make sure the first word is "whole" (like "whole wheat," or "whole oats,"), which will prevent unwanted dips in productivity. And don't forget to check out the bulk bins when you're food shopping! There are so many whole grains like oats, quinoa, and brown rice that can add tasty elements to your meals any time of day.



A 27 percent lower risk of type 2 diabetes was observed among people consuming at least three servings of whole grains each day.



3 Select plant proteins and sustainable seafood over animal proteins.

The Scientific Report of the 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee concluded that a plant-based pattern higher in foods like vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, nuts, and seeds, and lower in animal-based foods is more health promoting and has less environmental impact compared to the average U.S. diet.

Decades of research show a plant-based diet is best for health and longevity, as well as the environment. That doesn't mean you need to give up meat altogether, but turning to plants for protein is a step in the right direction—and so is limiting salt-laden processed meats like bacon and deli meats. In fact, it's a myth that you need animal flesh for protein, and most Americans consume more protein than they need.

Foods like nuts, beans, tofu, and even whole grains provide protein. Protein-rich seafood is a great choice, too, since it provides beneficial omega-3 fatty acids critical for heart health. Some studies also suggest that these polyunsaturated fats found in fatty fishes like salmon and tuna (and, to a lesser degree, in shellfish like oysters and mussels) can help keep your brain active and your mood elevated – and that's something we all need.

4 Choose a drink **without added sugar and calories** next time you're thirsty.

Americans consume about 20 percent of their calories through beverages. Proper hydration is critical for health, and much of that comes from what we drink. There's no need to worry about drinking eight glasses of water a day (another myth). Your body usually does a great job of letting you know when you're thirsty. But water, tea, or coffee should be your go-to beverages, not calorie and sugar-sweetened beverages like soda and fruit drinks.

Sparkling water with a splash of 100 percent fruit juice is refreshing and has a sweet taste, with a fraction of the calories and sugar in a full glass of juice. A hot cup of tea in the afternoon is another worthy consideration – and there are tons of varieties and infusions to choose from! It's a practice less familiar to many Americans, but one that's been enjoyed for millennia by many cultures.

People who drink one to two cans or more of sugary drinks per day have a 26 percent greater risk of developing type 2 diabetes.



5 Snack on **vegetables, fruits, and nuts** instead of cookies and chips.

Many people snack throughout the day. The good news is that research shows that it's the what that matters when it comes to what you eat, not the how often. As long as you're balancing your calories, snacking can be part of a healthy diet.

It's a good idea to turn to foods like vegetables, fruits, and nuts rather than cookies, candy or chips – which are fine once in a while but shouldn't be part of an every-day diet. Most cookies and chips are often made with refined grains and added sugar and deliver lots of calories (“energy-dense”) without a lot of nutrients. They're tasty, too, which means you're likely to consume more than you need.

Your favorite fruits and veggies and a small handful of nuts (they're high in calories, too, though it's because they're rich in healthful unsaturated fats) make a super—and nutritious—afternoon snack.

Choosing a small handful of nuts in place of sugary snacks can help lower your blood pressure and risk of obesity and type 2 diabetes.





6 Choose **plant-based oils** rather than butter or margarine.

A comprehensive review of studies found that those consuming the highest amount of monounsaturated fats, like those found in olive and canola oils, had an 11 percent reduction in mortality.

Yes, fat has more than double the calories compared to carbs or protein per gram, yet you usually use small amounts. What's more, delicious fats not only add flavor, but also help your body to absorb fat-soluble nutrients like vitamins A, D, E, and K.

Butter is okay once in a while, but its fats are primarily saturated and don't provide the same benefits to health as plant-based oils. And ditch the decades-old dietary recommendations from the 1980s: while most margarines have removed much of their heart-disease causing trans fats (which you should always avoid), plant-based oils are healthier—and tastier—choices.

For good health, look to fats that are liquid at room temperature, usually called "oils," which are sources of heart-healthy mono- and polyunsaturated fats. Choose oils like olive, canola, grapeseed, safflower, walnut, and peanut—there are so many out there!—rather than solid fats like butter or margarine.

MAKING IT REAL: IT'S UP TO YOU

Now you know where to go for evidence-based dietary advice and what scientists recommend you should eat for health and longevity. And you have a few strategies to help you make nutritious choices that translate the science onto your plate. Whether you're at work or at home, it's up to you to embrace the principles that will help you live your healthiest life. Only you can choose health. Go for it!



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

P.K. Newby has over twenty years' experience researching diet, obesity, and chronic diseases, studying how people eat, and educating students and the public about a wide range of issues in food and nutrition. Weaving together traditional nutrition, behavioral, and environmental sciences, she teaches using a nutrition ecology paradigm highlighting key topics in food production and public health "from farm to fork."



P.K. teaches at Boston University's program in Gastronomy, Culinary Arts, and Wine Studies and Harvard Extension School's program in Sustainability and Environmental Management. Her major research expertise focuses on the role of diet in obesity and chronic diseases such as heart disease and diabetes. (Find a comprehensive list of her academic experience at pknewby.com.) She has held faculty appointments at the Schools of Medicine and Public Health at Boston University and the School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University. P.K. is also a member of the Virgin Pulse Science Advisory Board.

P.K. has a doctoral degree in nutrition (ScD) from Harvard School of Public Health, and completed postdoctoral training at Tufts University. Additional training includes master's degrees in public health (MPH) and human nutrition (MS) from Columbia University.

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