

## Go Further With Food

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics celebrates National Nutrition Month® each year in March, to promote healthy eating and physical activity. This year's theme is "Go Further With Food." The foods that we choose to put on our plates can have a lasting impact on both the health of our bodies and the health of our environment. In this issue, we will explore ways to "Go Further with Food" and eat more sustainably. Essentially, sustainable eating means choosing foods that are grown with respect for our environment and our health, choosing products and methods that are both healthy and maintainable for an indefinite period of time.

### Eat more plant-based foods



Everything we eat uses resources and has an environmental footprint but animal-sourced foods, especially meat, use vastly more water and carbon to produce than plant-based foods. Beef production

requires 20 times more land and emits 20 times more greenhouse gas emissions than plant-based protein sources such as beans, peas and lentils. Ounce-for-ounce, the amount of protein that you get from plant-sources is closely on par with that of meat, plus full of other healthful nutrients including fiber, vitamins and minerals. Planning more of our meals around plants can also be part of a heart healthy lifestyle. Try scaling back on the meat portion in a dish by adding beans or lentils in tacos, barley to stews, oatmeal in burgers, or shredded vegetables into meatloaf. You don't have to add much, but it allows you to reduce the amount of meat you're eating without sacrificing taste.

You may also try not eating meat for one day a week by participating in Meatless Monday, a global movement to reduce meat consumption one day per week.

### Choose organic foods more often

Certified organic foods are grown without the use of synthetic pesticides and are kinder to the environment than conventionally farmed food. It can be expensive to buy all of your food organic, so if you are looking to maximize your dollars, check the Environmental Working Group's Dirty Dozen and Clean Fifteen lists. These lists indicate which plant foods are the highest and lowest in pesticides, which can help you decide which of them to buy organic or not. By making a handful of specific decisions while you're in the produce aisle, you can leave a significant mark in the world of food consumption.

### Shop Locally, Eat Seasonally



Eating locally grown foods is one of the best ways to reduce the environmental impact of your food. It not only minimizes the use of resources to

transport the food but supports the community around you. In addition, foods grown locally will be fresher – and therefore taste better and retain more nutrients – than food shipped across the country or world. Get fresh produce from a local farm and you get it at its best. Check out your local farmer's markets this spring to find out what the region's farmers have to offer.

## Grow Something

Join a community garden, start a small plot in your yard, or enjoy a small container garden.

Understanding the multitude of factors involved in helping plants to thrive and create food can give you a tremendous appreciation for what you eat. If you're not wild about the idea of getting your hands dirty and growing your own food, consider joining a CSA (community supported agriculture).

Participation in CSA's allows you to reap the benefits of locally grown produce without the extra time and effort of growing it yourself.

## Select seafood wisely



Although fish is a healthy option, some species are overfished and produced in ways that harm the marine environment. Wild

caught doesn't necessarily mean environmentally friendly, while some farmed fish are. Researching your favorite types of fish to ensure their production is safe or trying out new types of fish you find to be sustainable are easy practices to try out. Check out the Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch website or app to help you make the most ocean-friendly choices.

## Minimize packaging

Plastic packaging is everywhere these days, but there are many alternatives and options if you look beyond convenience and shop wisely. Purchasing more items in the bulk section reduces packaging and saves money. Many stores will even allow you to bring your own container to minimize waste even further. You can purchase beans, grains, pasta, nuts, dried fruit, spices and more in the bulk bins. This way of shopping also lets you purchase just what you need, to help cut back on food waste. You may also look for products with minimal packaging like unwrapped produce and meat from the butcher or deli counter. Additionally, instead of single-use water bottles, use a refillable bottle and fill it with

water from the tap or filter. Liquids are heavy to ship around the country and lots of fossil fuel is needed to transport them.

## Bring reusable bags to the store

It's no secret that reusable bags are better for the environment. The United States alone uses about 100 billion new plastic bags each year, with the average person using 350-500. Plastic bags don't biodegrade and often end up in the ocean or elsewhere in the environment. Paper bags aren't much better. Each year, 14 million trees are cut down to make paper shopping bags via a process requiring more energy than the making of plastic bags. Reusable bags often hold more items, are easier to carry, and can easily be washed to keep them clean. Many stores sell reusable bags, and will offer a discount or money-back for using them.

## Bottom Line

Sustainable eating doesn't have to be difficult, and it doesn't have to be all-or-nothing. Lifestyle adjustments take time, and a single change can make a difference. Do what you can afford, what you believe in, and what is easiest for you.

Below are some websites to help you make more sustainable food choices.

### Environmental Working Group

(Dirty Dozen and Clean Fifteen Lists)

[www.ewg.org](http://www.ewg.org)

### Seafood Watch

[www.seafoodwatch.org](http://www.seafoodwatch.org)

### Meatless Monday

[www.meatlessmonday.com](http://www.meatlessmonday.com)

### Eat Well Guide

[www.eatwellguide.org](http://www.eatwellguide.org)

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### Need a Dietitian?

Registered Dietitians are here to help you with your nutrition questions. To make an appointment call 412.692.4497 (Oakland location) or 412.623.2421 (Shadyside location).