AMERICAN COLLEGE OF Lifestyle Medicine



Plant-Forward Staples: The Foundation of Your Kitchen

Plant-forward eating is not about complicated recipes or expensive substitutes; it is a simple way of eating that puts plants at the center of your plate. Vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, legumes, nuts and seeds become the main part of your meals. By stocking your kitchen with a few simple, low-cost staples, you can make plant-forward eating simple and delicious.

Proteins

Many people wonder if they can get enough protein without eating meat. The good news is that it is easy to get all the protein your body needs from a plant-forward diet. Plant-forward proteins like lentils, chickpeas, or tempeh, help make meals filling and flavorful.

- **Lentils & Beans:** Brown lentils or black beans work well for tacos and chili, while chickpeas add substance to salads and sandwiches. They are also very affordable.
- **Tofu/Tempeh:** These are a mild base that takes on the flavors you add. Extra-firm tofu can be seared for a meaty bite, while silken tofu blends into creamy sauces or smoothies. Tempeh has a nutty texture that holds up well on the grill or in stir-fries.
- **Whole Grains:** Barley, oats, quinoa, and farro contain protein and can serve as a base for any plant-forward meal.

Fats and Seeds

Healthy fats help you feel full. Focus on portions: a serving of nuts/seeds should fit into the palm of your hand. Nuts are also a good source of fiber and protein.

- **Nuts:** Walnuts, almonds, and cashews add crunch and essential minerals.
- **Seeds:** Chia, flax, sunflower, and hemp seeds are easy to sprinkle onto oatmeal or yogurt for extra nutrition. Pumpkin seeds (pepitas) add protein and crunch to salads.
- **Avocados:** These provide fiber and healthy fats to help you stay full longer.



Grains & Produce



These foods are the foundation of a plant-forward diet. Many are high in fiber, which adds bulk to meals, helping you feel full, and also contain protein.

- **Whole Grains:** Barley, oats, quinoa, farro, and brown rice take longer to digest than white breads, sugary cereals, pastries or white pastas grains, providing steady energy.
- **Hardy Produce:** Cabbage, broccoli, carrots, and cauliflower are budget-friendly and last a long time in the fridge.
- **Satiety Fruits:** Pears, berries, and apples have more fiber than many other fruits and make for easy, on-the-go snacks.

Budget-Smart Meat Swaps

You can recreate the savory taste of meat by using whole-foods and the right seasonings. These plant-based foods are flexible and often cost less than meat, ready-to-eat or plant-based meat alternatives.

Instead of	Use These Whole Food Staples	Why it Works
Ground Beef/Turkey	Textured Vegetable Protein (TVP), Brown Lentils, or Beans	These have a similar chewy texture in tacos, chili, or pasta sauce.
Chicken Pieces	Extra Firm Tofu	Pressed and seared tofu gives a firm, high-protein bite that works well in wraps or bowls.
"Meaty" Texture	Mushrooms & Spices	When chopped and sautéed with savory spices, they add a rich flavor and texture. Use spices like cumin, smoked paprika, or soy sauce to build deep flavor.

Why These Staples Win

- **Flexible:** They can be used in bowls, wraps, soups, or simple side dishes.
- **Affordable:** Dried beans, TVP, and grains cost very little per serving.
- **Prepped & Ready:** Many of these ingredients last a long time in the pantry or cook in less than 20 minutes.
- **Culturally Adaptable:** Whether you cook Mexican, Indian, Mediterranean, or classic American dishes, these foods take on the flavors you love.

DO THIS NOW (5-MINUTE RESET)

- ☐ Check your pantry, fridge, freezer, spice rack. Make a list of the plant-based staples to add to your next shopping trip.

nudge to nourish

Developed through a collaborative effort by the American College of Lifestyle Medicine (ACLM) and Nudge to Nourish, in partnership with Greener by Default.