**The fundamentals of creating a “healthy” meal**

Creating a nutritionally dense meal can feel intimidating and even confusing at times given the amount of misinformation available on the internet.

It’s actually a lot simpler to achieve than what “experts” claim, and should be based around the following fundamentals;

* **A high quality** (contains all of the essential amino acids) **source of protein**. Animal sources would be considered high quality sources universally however plant protein sources would be considered low quality (bar some). Combining multiple sources may be beneficial in this instance and the dish would look slightly different (as presented)
* **A source of wholegrains** (rich in slower digesting carbohydrates to better regulate blood sugar / energy levels and a source of fibre).
* **Fruit and or vegetables** (rich in many vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients, these are critically important to virtually all people’s physical and mental health)
* **Legumes** (which include the likes of lentils, peas, chickpeas, beans, soybeans, and peanuts or any other form of plant seed. Legumes are a great source of fibre, protein and minerals).
* **Mono/ Polyunsaturated fat** (these are the “healthy” fats i.e., those associated with positive health outcomes when replacing “unhealthy” fats (saturated and trans fats), typically found in animal fats and processed foods).

Here’s what an “ideal” breakdown would look like on a plate. Obviously, your dish doesn’t need to be segmented like this in practice (unless you’re into that), but gives a general breakdown of how much of each component you should aim for per meal (if your goal is achieving a “healthy” meal).

The ideal nutritionally dense and balanced dish would however look slightly different for a vegan / vegetarian whereby there would be some increased crossover between these identified components.

Of course, this may vary dependant on your protein source (for example it may look more representative of the previous dish example if you choose to use a meat replacement like tofu or Quorn) but I hope it gives you a basic overview as to what an “ideal” nutritionally dense and balanced dish would look like.

In terms of which actual foods you would consider including in these dishes, here are a few that would be helpful. It would be highly advisable to discover your own which fit under the component group as this is a means of empowering your dietary choices whilst also identifying food sources most practical and relative to you, your lifestyle and your environment (which will help determine long term success and ability to stick to this behaviour change).

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| **Wholegrains** | **Legumes** | **Mono/Polyunsaturated Fats** |
| Brown / wholegrain rice | Chickpeas | Avocado |
| Wholegrain pasta | Lentils | Walnuts |
| Wholegrain baked goods (bread, bagels, pittas etc.) | Beans (kidney, runner, baked, pinto, navy etc.) | Plant oils (olive oil, flax oil, canola oil etc.) |
| Quinoa | Peas | Seeds |
| Spelt | Nuts (peanuts, cashews etc.) | Other nuts |
| Wholegrain cereals (oats, Weetabix, shredded wheat | Fava beans | Nut butters |
| Bulgar wheat, rye, millet | Black eyed peas | Flax and chia seeds |
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You can check out some fantastic protein and fruits / vegetables to include [here](https://www.balanceie.com/proteinandfibre).

Remember the password to access the member’s hub is “eatsmarter”.