

DIET

The Clean Eating Craze

What's old is new

by Abbey N. Folsom

Clean eating is the practice of eating whole foods that are as fresh as possible and with minimal processing. The less processed and less refined, the better for you. People often choose to clean up their diet to improve overall health and perhaps lose weight.

For the most part, eating clean can be done anywhere, anytime. The key is to plan ahead for the week and then go grocery shopping. Meal preparation – before you get “hangry,” or hungry-angry – is important.

Cleaning up your diet means letting go of pre-seasoned, prepared food products, dressings and sauces. The premade salad dressings and sauces that go into our refrigerators and pantries are usually not the healthiest options. Frozen food, take-out and even eating out at nicer restaurants does not always equate to eating clean because of the processing, preservatives and excess calories.

FOCUS ON MACRONUTRIENTS

The goal is to eat more fruits and/or vegetables with every meal. Produce in a variety of colors, such as root vegetables, cruciferous vegetables and leafy vegetables, ensures a range of vitamins and antioxidants. Many people assume that juicing is the healthiest way to consume fruits and vegetables. However, eating whole fruits and vegetables is the healthier option because of the fiber intake. Eating fiber delays insulin response. Drinking juice causes a spike in blood sugar, thus a spike in insulin, which is not good for those who are diabetic or pre-diabetic.

The most important thing is to limit processed or highly refined foods and food products. If your food budget permits, the following organic produce is recommended: apples, bananas, bell peppers, celery, cherry tomatoes, cucumbers, grapes, lettuce, nectarines, peaches, potatoes, snap peas, spinach and strawberries.

Healthful complex carbohydrates include grains such as whole grain brown rice, the kind that takes an hour to cook; oatmeal, whether rolled or steel cut, is mostly fiber and helps you feel full longer; and quinoa, which also doubles as a complete protein.

Choose plant-based fats instead of animal-based fats, and avoid trans fats altogether. Essential fatty acids that come from plants have nutritional benefits; whereas, animal-based or highly saturated fatty acids can cause heart disease by increasing cholesterol. Trans fats, hydrogenated oil or partially hydrogenated oils are the worst for you, because they have been chemically altered for shelf life and can cause high cholesterol and exacerbate heart disease.

Clean and lean protein choices include legumes or beans, nuts, seeds, tempeh, tofu, poultry and seafood. Limit saturated fats when choosing meats. Lean chicken or fish is a good option. Beans and lentils are the leanest options, are higher in protein and actually reduce cholesterol.

ADDING FLAVOR TO A CLEAN MEAL

Use a variety of plant-based oils, such as coconut oil, olive oil and sesame oil, when preparing and seasoning clean whole foods. Nothing beats fresh garlic, ginger, onions, peppers and turmeric. Also, salt and black, red or white peppercorns are options. Citrus or a few different vinegars, such as apple cider, red and white balsamic, and Dijon mustard can add diversity to foods. Low-sodium soy or tamari sauce with sesame oil and nutritional yeast creates a very savory flavor. Hot sauce or capers are a quick trick to any dish, and maple syrup does a good job of taking the edge off of bitter foods.

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THE CLEAN EATING TAKE HOME MESSAGE

The clean eating craze is a fitness phenomenon that has been made popular by the internet. Have you ever noticed #eatclean?

Eating clean is a throwback concept to the 1970s, when society began to resist corporate food production. Coming out of the Great Depression in the 1940s led to an innovative decade for food science in the 1950s. Unfortunately, it took years for us to realize the detrimental consequences of food preservation technology on nutrition science and health. Soon, people were becoming aware of the value of a diet consisting of natural or organically produced whole foods and eating from the source.

Think about meeting your macronutrient needs. Fresh produce is high in fiber and low in calories. A healthful, clean diet also includes lean proteins and plant-based oils from a variety of nuts, seeds and legumes. Embrace complex carbohydrates, which include fiber and essential nutrients. Let the eat-clean craze inspire your healthful choices.

