



How to Make a Healthy Kitchen

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Table of Contents

How to Make a Healthy Kitchen.....3

Start with a Clean Slate	4
Get the Right Cookware & Dishes.....	4
How to Set Up the Kitchen.....	4
Stock Up on Healthy, Whole Foods	4
What to Buy & How to Store It.....	5
Stay Hydrated	5
Keep the Freezer Stocked	5
Other Hacks for a Healthy Kitchen.....	6

Healthy Grocery Shopping Made Easy.....7

Make a Grocery List & Stick to It.....	7
Don't Go to the Grocery Store Hungry	8
Avoid Highly Processed Food	8
Understand the Food Industry Lingo.....	8

Tips for Meal Prep Success..... 9

Time-Saving Tips to Reduce Prep Time.....	9
Healthy Hacks for Meal Prepping	11
How to Get Started.....	12

Healthy Eating on the Go13

Start with the Most Important Meal of the Day: Breakfast.....	13
Fast & Healthy Food Choices On the Road.....	14
Develop Healthy Eating Habits	15

How to Make a Healthy Kitchen

A well-balanced fitness program should include a nutritional strategy to support activity and recovery. Most clients cite “lack of time” as an obstacle to reaching fitness goals. The goal of a kitchen makeover is to make healthy food, fast food by getting rid of what is

unhealthy, organizing the kitchen, and stocking up on healthier ingredients. In this article, we discuss how to support better eating habits by creating a healthy kitchen environment that includes nutritious foods that are also convenient.



Start with a Clean Slate

The most successful kitchen makeovers begin with getting rid of unhealthy foods; namely, those calorie-dense, nutrient-deficient, high-fat snack foods that only serve to calm emotions, not improve health. Food that comes from the middle of the store, with a few exceptions, should take up very little space in the pantry.

Use these red light, yellow light, and green light guidelines to clear the pantry, refrigerator, and freezer shelves:

- **RED LIGHT:** Potato chips, dips, crackers, candies, boxed meals, colorful cereal, fruit cups, soda, fruit juice, salad dressing
- **YELLOW LIGHT:** Whole grain crackers, whole grain bread, canned beans, canned vegetables, dried fruit
- **GREEN LIGHT:** Olive oil, coconut oil, avocado oil, seasoning blends and spices, whole grains (quinoa, brown rice, oats), whole grain flour, vinegar, dried beans, lentils, nuts, nut butter (natural, unsweetened)

Look for expiration dates and throw out old food and condiments.

Next, clean and organize the fridge, freezer, and pantry.

Get the Right Cookware & Dishes

Support healthy eating habits by making meal prep easier. Although a gourmet kitchen is not necessary, certain cookware, dishes, and utensils make it more convenient and less time-consuming. Again, dinner won't be drive-thru if there are fast, healthy options waiting at home.

First, declutter the drawers and cabinets and take an inventory. Compare with the list below:

- Large and small mixing bowls
- Glass casserole dishes
- Baking sheets

- Roasting pans
- Large skillet
- Saucepots
- Dutch oven
- Peeler
- Grater
- Sharp knives
- Cutting boards – use separate boards for meat, fish, fruits and vegetables, and cheese
- Spatulas

How to Set Up the Kitchen

Keep mixing bowls, spoons, and measuring cups together. Organize baking sheets, roasting pans, and casserole dishes together. Keep pots, pans, and lids in a cupboard near the stove.

Keep cutting boards and knives close to the prep area. Organize food storage containers here too, to make meal prep faster.

Use canisters for bulk grains like rice, oats, and flour. Store dried herbs and spices away from the stovetop and out of direct sunlight. A tiered spice shelf will keep dried herbs and spices organized and in clear view.

Now that the kitchen is clean and organized, it's time to stock up on the good stuff.

Stock Up on Healthy, Whole Foods

In our article, *Healthy Grocery Shopping Made Easy*, we suggest choosing whole foods, rather than processed. As we mentioned, food from the center aisles of the store is modified with chemical preservatives, fillers, and colors to have a long shelf life.

Junk food generally has more than five ingredients and includes ingredients only scientists can pronounce. Healthy food typically has one ingredient—the food itself.

What to Buy & How to Store It

When it comes to fresh fruits and vegetables, experts recommend eating 5 – 13 servings per day. The best part? Whole foods, like fruits and vegetables, are the ultimate fast food—just pick it up and take a bite.

Fresh produce won't last as long as a jar of processed queso dip, but some fresh foods can hang out in the refrigerator for quite a while. Check out our downloadable handout at the end of this article for a chart of fresh produce storage recommendations.

Nuts add healthy fat into the diet and can be stored at room temperature for about one month. After that, place them in an airtight container and store in the refrigerator. They'll keep in the fridge for up to six months and in the freezer for up to one year.

When it comes to spices and seasoning blends, here are a couple of general storage guidelines:

- Whole spices like cinnamon sticks, cloves, star anise, and peppercorns have a longer shelf-life than ground spices.
- Use ground spices and seasoning mixes within 6 months of opening.

Stay Hydrated

Dry skin, constipation, headaches, fatigue, and irritability are [signs of chronic dehydration](#). In addition, living in a state of dehydration may impact blood pressure, cause respiratory issues, and increase blood cholesterol.

To inspire better drinking habits, keep a pitcher of fruit water nearby. Fruit-infused water has fewer calories than soda or fruit juice. Delicious flavorings include:

- Lemon
- Grapefruit
- Cucumber and strawberry
- Orange and raspberry

- Watermelon and mint
- Pineapple, mint, and ginger

Keep the Freezer Stocked

Rather than stocking the freezer with unhealthy snack foods, leave room for nutritious foods that support a healthy diet. Purchase fresh cuts of lean meat and fatty fish. Divide them into individual portion sizes, place into freezer bags, and label each bag with the date of purchase and type of meat or fish before placing in the freezer.

Store-bought frozen fruits and vegetables are a healthier alternative to canned varieties as they are picked at the peak of ripeness and flash-frozen to maintain flavor.

A better option is to head to the farmer's market when fruits and veggies are in season and stock up. Wash, dry, and trim the fresh produce, then slice, dice, or chop the ingredients.

Vegetables should be blanched (cooked in boiling water for 1-2 minutes) before being frozen. Fruits should be ripe and the core or pit removed before freezing. Freeze using either of these methods:

- Solid pack: once fresh produce is prepared, place it in the freezer bag, label the bag, and place in the freezer.
- Loose pack: freeze fresh produce in a single layer on baking sheets. Once frozen, transfer to a freezer bag, label, and place in the freezer.

Smoothie recipes can be packaged into individual portion sizes and frozen for a quick breakfast or light dinner option. When labeling the smoothie packs, include blending instructions like what liquids, spices, or powders to add and in what amount.

Add healthy fat and a rich creamy texture to smoothies by adding an avocado to the freezer-pack.

Other Hacks for a Healthy Kitchen

A healthy kitchen isn't just about what's in it, but what's not. Removing junk food will reduce the chance of indulging. But what other items should be removed? Cell phones.

The kitchen should be a phone-free zone. In a previous article, [How does Mindfulness Achieve Weight Loss](#), we cited research showing that people tend to eat more calories while distracted—especially while messaging friends. Keep phones in another room and instead, engage in conversation with those around the table.

Finally, keeping the kitchen clean reduces the risk of contaminating food and the chance of inviting unwanted guests—like cockroaches, ants, and rodents. After meal prep is done, wipe down kitchen surfaces with warm, soapy water. Keep the sink clean and disinfected and sweep the floor regularly.

If you're ready to dig deeper into nutrition and help clients build healthy eating habits, be sure to explore the ISSA's [Fitness Nutrition](#) course.

Healthy Grocery Shopping Made Easy

We have never enjoyed more choices and varieties of products at the grocery store than we do today. Whether it's pre-cooked, fat-free, organic, gluten-free, or low calorie, it's there on the shelf, tucked inside the freezer, and stacked high and wide in the produce section. But with continually new offerings and specialization aplenty comes the need to be able to make sense of which foods are best for our health, for our own knowledge and to help clients make the right choices.

Unhealthy eating can lead to [serious health issues](#). And while clients are not intentionally eating food that can do them harm, they may lack the information needed to choose food that is healthy while also tasting good. We all need to be aware of what we are putting into our bodies, and when it comes to healthy grocery shopping there are a few key tips we should encourage clients

to keep in mind before pushing that cart through the aisles.

Make a Grocery List & Stick to It

Planning meals out for as much as a week makes sense in a lot of ways, including when looking to [make healthy choices for a balanced diet](#). Each meal plan should include a lean protein as well as an appropriate mix of fruits, vegetables, and grains. Failure to do so can lead to a shortage of necessary nutrients and, in some cases, poor decisions. For example, grilled salmon, whole-grain rice, and fresh green beans make for a delicious and healthy option. Without proper planning, the meal could end up being grilled salmon and french fries—a missed opportunity for healthy grains and vegetables.



Plan snacks as well. Pick up fresh fruits and vegetables on a regular basis to use as a healthy snack option. When shopping for others in the household, check with them to see what kind of fruits or vegetables they would like you to bring home. That helps ensure that everyone is on board with the idea of eating healthy and food won't end up being tossed out when no one eats it. And don't make the mistake in thinking that drinking apple juice is always the same as eating an apple. Many fruit juices contain a high amount of sugar. Making those types of mistakes can be minimized by planning ahead.

Don't Go to the Grocery Store Hungry

Support your healthy grocery shopping by having something to eat before you go to the store. Impulse buying can add to the waistline and unnecessarily help thin the wallet. You are less likely to reach for a tempting item that's not on your grocery list if you aren't hungry and subconsciously thinking about tearing into something that tastes good. Another bit of advice: Keep those eyes straight ahead at the checkout line because candy bars and beef jerky are not just rewards for a job well done or to take the edge off your hunger. Wait until you get home to make something healthy to eat.

Avoid Highly Processed Food

Food loaded with preservatives to provide a long shelf life, such as packaged cookies, canned foods, frozen dinners, and fruit snacks, usually are high in calories and low in essential nutrients. While they offer a quick option for a meal or snack, they have a negative impact on your healthy eating.

Recommend to your clients the following choices:

- Canned tuna can be a healthy choice, but opt for tuna packed in water rather than oil
- Select canned fruit packed in natural juices and not syrup.

- Choose bread, pasta, cereal, and rice made with whole grains

Bottom line: Make sure you read the list of ingredients before making a purchase.

Understand the Food Industry Lingo

Do not underestimate the lengths food companies will go to market their products. They are in the business to make money, of course, so when they identify a hot trend, they won't hesitate to try to use it to their advantage. Healthy food doesn't always have a clear label, so know that:

- Natural products can still contain a lot of fat and calories
- Low-fat items can be loaded with sugar
- Light (or lite) catches the consumer's eye, but doesn't automatically equate to healthy food

The best advice in this instance is to educate yourself and your clients so you can read the label to make sure that what you are buying meets your needs and expectations.

So, with a bit of meal planning, making a list, prioritizing your time at the store, and knowing the right lingo, you can make healthy grocery shopping a breeze.

If you're looking to educate yourself more in the area of nutrition, ISSA offers a comprehensive course to become a [Nutrition Specialist](#). Support a healthy lifestyle for you and your clients with advanced nutrition information.

Tips for Meal Prep Success



When clients are ready to commit to a healthier diet, but face barriers to healthy eating like time, convenience, and temptations, meal prepping might be a good option. Although the grocery store is full of frozen and ready-to-make meal options, they aren't the healthiest or the tastiest. This article shares all the best tricks and tips for meal prep to help get your clients started creating their own healthy weekly meals.

Time-Saving Tips to Reduce Prep Time

The practice of meal-prepping saves time and supports healthy diet changes. But it is difficult for most people to understand that spending a few hours at the

beginning of the week to prepare healthy dishes will save them time during the week. Your clients will want all the short-cuts, so here are a few tips for meal prep to share when they ask you, "What are the top five food prep tips to save time?"

1. Plan Ahead

First things first, set up a routine. Pick a day and time to plan a menu, another day to do the shopping, and another to do the meal prep. Put it in the calendar and set a reminder.

Next, gather the recipes together. If your client is following a specific diet, they can find recipes online or purchase a cookbook.

There are meal-planning services, such as eMeals, they can subscribe to and receive a weekly menu and grocery list via email.

Pro tip: Match ingredients between recipes to save money and reduce prep time.

From the menu, create a grocery list. Save time by categorizing this list by department. For example, deli, dairy, produce, meat/seafood, frozen foods, etc.

Staples are ingredients used in multiple recipes. These carbohydrates and fats have a good shelf-life, so keep them on hand for cooking:

- Olive oil, coconut oil, or avocado oil
- Oats
- Rice
- Beans
- Lentils
- Nuts
- Broth or stock
- Spices and flavorings

When it comes time to shop, get as many ingredients as possible in bulk. The local farmers market is a low-cost alternative to bigger chain grocers. Wholesalers like Costco, Sams, and BJ's are the next best option.

Keep the fridge stocked with eggs, too. Hard-boiled eggs make great protein-rich snacks and baked egg muffins are a healthy on-the-go breakfast.

Finally, stock up on frozen foods like vegetables, chicken breasts, fish, and grains.

2. Organize Your Kitchen

If the kitchen is disorganized, it could easily take another hour to get things ready. Here are some things to consider:

- In addition to the dining table and counter-tops, consider getting a folding table for extra space.
- Gather the meal storage containers. All the rage

right now are Mason jars for everything from overnight oats to salads and soups! If purchasing new containers, purchase the same brand. Don't mix and match or it'll be extra work searching for the right lids and trying to get everything to stack in the fridge. Zip-lock bags are versatile and have varying capacities for cooking large or small meals. Or consider using more earth-conscious products. New to the market and voted most innovative product is the Zip Toppie.

- Gather measuring cups and spoons, knives, and cutting boards. When cooking several different dishes, use a separate cutting board and knives for meat and fresh produce.
- Store pantry staples in easy-to-dispense containers. Pouring rice from a bag is more difficult and messier than scooping from a canister. Purchasing containers to store staples also keeps the pantry more organized.
- Lastly, stock up on baking sheets.

3. Purchase Pre-Cut Produce

This tip doesn't save money, but when it comes to eating a balanced diet, the more color the better and if a client doesn't have to chop, dice, slice, or grate the ingredients, they'll be more likely to include them in meals.

Pre-cut fruits and vegetables also come in pre-packaged individual serving sizes for extra convenience.

4. Batch Cooking

Rice, quinoa, lentils, and oats cool well in large batches and frozen in individual serving sizes to pair with meals. Bone broth, soups and stews, sauces, and marinades can also be cooked in large batches and frozen in ice cube trays. This makes it convenient to use whatever broth, sauce, or marinade sounds good as a quick flavoring option for a fresh-cooked meal.

Fresh vegetables can be roasted in batches for make-ahead meals. Vegetables that roast well include: carrots, asparagus, onions, potatoes, beets, winter squash, and other root vegetables. Bonus: roasted veggies generally reheat well and maintain great flavor.

Rather than purchasing pre-cooked chicken; boil, grill, or bake fresh chicken. This tip saves money and helps to control what's inside the chicken breast.

And don't forget about the go-to high-protein snack, hard-boiled eggs. Cook a dozen at a time to last through the week.

5. Shop Online

A top time-saving tip is to shop online. With new technology like ClickList and Instacart, it is easy to shop online and pick-up groceries at the store or have them delivered. Shop from the grocery list online, double-checking the pantry to make sure not to purchase ingredients that are already stocked.

This is a convenient option if it's available locally and helps avoid temptations in the check-out line (well, hello there, York Peppermint patty).

Healthy Hacks for Meal Prepping

Clients may have objections and questions about meal planning and prepping.

"Do you eat the same thing every day?"

"Why should I meal prep?"

It's easy to overcome these objections and help clients get on track to getting dinner on the table in record time.

Spice it up

If clients are afraid, they'll have to eat the same bland lunch every day, introduce them to the world of spice! As we mentioned in our recent article, "8 Simple Ways to Eat a Balanced Diet", the more satisfying a meal is, the more likely your client is to stick with their new healthier diet.

- Use Caribbean Jerk seasoning to spice up fish and rice. Add some pineapple and cilantro for extra flavor and color. Suddenly, the boring lunchroom transforms into a tropical beach.
- Craving pasta? Cook quinoa with Italian seasoning and top with a pre-cooked chicken breast to curb cravings and increase healthy, lean protein intake.
- Roasted veggies sprinkled with Southwest seasoning are a great topping for grilled chicken breast. Add half an avocado with a sprinkle of lime juice for a well-balanced, nutritious, satisfying meal.

In addition, some spices have documented health benefits! [Ginger, turmeric, and cinnamon](#) have been found (in some cases) to reduce post-exercise muscle soreness and garlic has been found to reduce blood pressure and oxidative radicals (1).

Track Macros for Faster Results

If a client's goals are to improve body composition or performance, then [tracking macros](#) is a must.

- To build muscle: 30-40% carbs, 25-35% protein, 15-25% fats
- For fat loss: 10-30% carbs, 40-50% protein, 30-40% fats
- To maintain body composition: 30-50% carbs, 25-35% protein, 25-35% fats

There are several apps available to partner meal prep with [food logging](#) for even greater success. When a client finds a favorite meal, they simply input the ingredients and hit "save". Next time they food prep, they can go back to the saved meals and create their grocery list.

Whole Foods are the Best Snacks

If time is an issue, stick with whole foods for quick snacks. Fresh fruits and vegetables combined with nuts and seeds are healthier than dried fruit "trail" mixes and will keep clients fuller longer.

How to Get Started

The toughest obstacle for most people to overcome is mindset. Help client's see this as a "get to" opportunity for improved health and increased energy, rather than a "have to" chore for weight loss. Remind them that two hours spent prepping will free them up during the week and prepare them for when life gets in the way of their goals. Like when the meeting runs over and dinner gets pushed back to 8:00pm. It will be much healthier and satisfying to pull out a frozen meal and reheat it than to pull through the fast food lane.

Let clients start small by prepping just one meal for the week. Maybe they run to the vending machine every day for a snack. They can make a meal plan for healthy snacks. If breakfast is usually a donut and coffee, then prepping some healthy egg muffins or frozen smoothie ingredients could be their first step.

There are several methods of food prep for clients to try out. Encourage them to try them all and see which one fits better into their lifestyle.

Make-Ahead

The make-ahead method includes batch cooking healthy dishes and portioning them out into containers or Zip-lock bags. These meals are cooked in one day and ready to reheat and eat for the rest of the week. If your client isn't a fan of leftovers, they probably won't like this method of meal planning.

Freezer Meals

As in the make-ahead method, all the chopping, cooking, and pre-portioning of meals takes just a couple hours. The added step is freezing them. This is a nice option for big families or people who enjoy a lot of variety in their menu. These meals last longer, but be careful to choose the right recipes. Some meals just don't freeze well.

Ready-to-Cook

This method is a good option for clients who enjoy cooking but would rather not spend 20-30 minutes prepping for each meal. On meal prep day they chop all the produce, pre-portion the raw meats and uncooked grains, package them and stick it all in the fridge. The bummer with this option is that fresh produce can go bad if it sits for too long.

If your clients want a template for meal plan success, this is it. Be encouraging and supportive of clients who are just getting started. It might even help to have a salad-in-a-jar party for your clients to learn more and have fun.

If you want to learn more about nutrition and how to coach clients, check out the ISSA's comprehensive course on [Fitness Nutrition](#).

References:

1. Adams, Casey. "Hearty nutraceuticals: a comprehensive review of the research behind scores of nutraceutical ingredients that help keep a heart healthy and happy." *Nutraceuticals World*, Apr. 2008, p. 36+. General OneFile, <https://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A178616868/ITOF?u=lirn86548&sid=ITOF&xid=27335658>. Accessed 9 Jan. 2019.

Healthy Eating On The Go



A healthy diet takes focus and intention but can be maintained even when on the road. In this article, we share tips for staying on track when travel plans arise including: starting the day right, choosing healthy meals while on-the-road, and establishing healthy eating habits.

Start with the Most Important Meal of the Day: Breakfast

Whatever goals you or your clients have; weight loss, fat loss, or lean mass gains, breakfast sets the metabolic rate for the day and fuels the body for whatever is to come. It should be balanced and nutrient-dense.

As part of a [healthy diet](#), breakfast should include a lean protein, a whole fruit or a whole grain carbohydrate option, and very little sugar.

Healthy Breakfast Options That Are Quick and Convenient

Bagels are a quick, carb-heavy pick, but can be made into a balanced meal:

- Add a lean protein source—egg whites, grilled chicken, or tofu.
- Skip the cream cheese.
- Add vegetables.

Smoothies are an easy first step when creating healthy eating habits. They are loaded with vitamins and nutrients and are low-calorie. Here are some healthy options for your breakfast smoothie:

- Leafy greens make a great base and add lots of nutrition—including iron and protein.
- Whole vegetables like carrots, celery, and zucchini add vitamins, fiber, and flavor.
- Fresh, whole fruits add more nutrients and sweeten the mix—think apples, pears, bananas, strawberries, pineapple, and melon.
- Don't be afraid to add healthy fats. Fats are necessary for good health, as discussed in our article, [Explaining Fats' Function to Clients](#), and make smoothies nice and creamy. Simply add ½ an avocado or a tablespoon of nut butter.
- Oats add fiber as do chia seeds and flaxseed, which also include healthy fats.
- Add protein powder to boost calories and protein intake.

When hitting the drive-thru is the only option, there are always healthier options:

- Instead of a biscuit sandwich, choose an English muffin or flatbread.
- Order a yogurt parfait. Ask for the granola on the side.
- Choose whole grains like oatmeal or whole wheat bread.
- Skip the cheese (too much saturated fat) and ask for sauce on the side.
- A breakfast burrito with black beans, scrambled eggs, and salsa is another tasty option.

Fast & Healthy Food Choices On-the-Road

When travel is in the plans, the best option to support healthy eating habits is always to pack a cooler or travel bag with healthy snacks, lean proteins, homemade trail

mix, almonds or walnuts, or whole fruits and vegetables. But if that doesn't happen, don't despair. There are decent food choices available while traveling.

Keep Your Eyes Peeled at Pit Stops

Road trips often include quick stops at gas stations to refuel—the car *and* the people traveling. There are some things to watch for while strolling the aisles for healthy snacks.

First, look for the whole foods—fruits and vegetables in the deli section of some stores. If whole foods aren't available, be sure to look at the nutrition label of packaged food and check the serving size. Many packages include more than one serving size so check the number of calories per serving.

Finally, avoid anything that has added sugar, including store-bought trail mix.

Dining Out

Restaurants have plenty of healthy meals to choose from. Always look at the calories per serving and stick to meals that support goals—low-calorie meals for weight loss and high-calorie meals for gains. Here are some other suggestions:

- Order water instead of soda or sugar-sweetened beverages.
- Ask for a to-go box and before taking a bite, put half the plate away for later.
- Choose baked, broiled, or grilled protein instead of fried.
- Choose seasonal sides instead of French fries.

Fast Food Drive-Thru

It happens to the best of us...when life happens, sometimes the drive-thru is the only option. Though it may be tempting to say, "this only happens once in a while, I'll just get whatever I want", remember those goals and make better choices.

- Order sandwiches without cheese or sauce. Condiments like ketchup and mustard don't add many calories and are better options than "secret" sauces or mayo.
- Most fast food restaurants have salads on the menu. Order dressing on the side. Add lean protein but ask for it to be grilled, not fried. Fried foods are loaded with saturated and trans fats. Having too much of either of these fats in the diet is a recipe for heart disease.
- Choose a fruit cup or apple slices instead of French fries or chips.
- Black beans are a healthy side option—choose brown rice instead of white.
- Skip dessert—including milkshakes.

Develop Healthy Eating Habits

A healthy diet becomes second nature when it is supported by healthy habits. Food choices become easier when they contribute to well-being, energy, recovery, and better health.

Breakfast

As previously mentioned, breakfast is the most important meal of the day. To break the night-long fast, choose healthy foods. The psychology of eating says that starting with a healthy meal inspires healthy eating throughout the day. Who wants to start off with a win then sabotage that success later? Very few people will make that choice.

Eat Slowly

Sit, don't stand for meals, chew food slowly, focus on the colors, textures, smells, and flavors of the food. Too often, we inhale meals and feel bloated afterward. Mindful eating, as discussed in our article, [How Does Mindfulness Achieve Weight Loss?](#), reduces the possibility of making poor food choices or eating too many calories.

Eat Every 2 Hours

A regular feeding schedule provides multiple opportunities to eat balanced, nutritious meals with fewer calories. This means that more nutrition is added to the diet, the body is properly fueled and energized, and cravings go away. Keep added sugar low by choosing whole grains, fresh fruits, almonds. Avoid deli meats.

Make Half the Plate Fruits & Vegetables

"Eat a rainbow." Different colored foods have different vitamin and mineral profiles, so have fun and make half the plate as colorful as possible. Keep nutrients intact by eating raw or very lightly cooked fruits and vegetables.

What do the colors mean?

- Red and Orange: Contains vitamin C and carotenoids
- Blue and Purple: Packs lots of flavonoids and antioxidants
- Cream or White: Contains glucosinolates, polyphenols, B-vitamins, potassium, and iron
- Green and Dark Green: Chlorophyll and iron

Don't Keep Unhealthy Food Around

It's a simple rule, don't stock unhealthy food in the house. Avoid temptation, emotional eating, and over-indulging by avoiding junk food altogether. This habit also helps avoid trans fats which are found in most processed foods.

Sticking to your healthy eating goals can take a bit more planning and careful consideration, but it is worth the extra effort for your long-term health.

If you're ready to take your nutrition knowledge to the next level, [check the ISSA's Fitness Nutrition course online](#).