

How to gain weight healthfully on a Plant Based Diet



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Gaining weight can be a struggle that isn't often discussed.

Being underweight is linked with negative health outcomes, especially at certain times such as during pregnancy or in older age.

Unintended weight loss may cause distress and can be an issue for certain people when they initially transition to a plant-based diet.

One can gain and maintain a healthy weight by eating a variety of plant foods. However, **it is important to rule out any underlying medical conditions** and if you have a history of disordered eating, please **always consult a qualified health professional**. The psychological aspect of restrictive eating must be addressed as well as other lifestyle factors such as over-exercising which can hinder efforts.

Pace yourself

Unless you have been otherwise advised, slow and steady weight gain is best. This makes the process less overwhelming and allows you to adjust to the increased food intake.

Eat a greater quantity of food and opt for generous portions

Whole plant foods are generally less calorie dense and bulkier than animal foods/ultra-processed foods due to a higher fibre content. Aim for a greater serving of foods at mealtimes particularly starchy foods (such as pasta or potatoes) and protein rich foods (such as beans and tofu) and enjoy a couple of snacks.

Snack ideas

Fruit and vegetable smoothie with fortified plant milk



1/2 cup of nuts (or seeds) with 1/4 cup dried fruit



Fortified soya yoghurt with fresh fruit and seeds



Rice cakes with smashed avocado



Sliced banana with peanut butter



Hummus sandwich



Energy balls



Fruit and nut bar

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Enjoy energy-dense plant foods

- especially helpful for those with smaller appetites

Nuts, seeds, avocados, soya, olives, beans, grains and starchy vegetables such as sweet potatoes.



Stimulate your appetite

"You eat with your eyes first"

Fill your social media feed with mouth-watering pictures of plant-based food and check out online blogs or order a vegan recipe book.

Make eating an enjoyable activity by choosing colourful vegetables and using herbs and spices in your meals.

Drink smoothies made with plant milk

Smoothies are an excellent vehicle for getting in extra calories.

Try a smoothie with fortified soya milk, frozen berries, banana, ground flaxseed, a Brazil nut, handful of kale, dates and a couple of tablespoons of peanut butter.



You don't need to eat 100% whole plant foods to be healthy

Base meals around nutritious plant foods but remember that some processed foods can make it easier to meet nutritional needs e.g. tofu, soya milk and certain meat alternatives. And if you crave the occasional dessert, **enjoy it!**

What plant foods are good sources of energy?

Nuts and seeds & nut butter, sunflower butter and tahini



Nuts and seeds are energy-dense foods that also provide healthy fats, protein and micronutrients. Nuts and seeds can be blended into sauces (e.g. creamy cashew sauces), smoothies or as a topping for porridge or plant-based yoghurt. Two tablespoons of ground flaxseeds and chia seeds are a fantastic source of omega-3 fats (alpha-linolenic acid). For those with smaller appetites, almond butter, sunflower butter and tahini (sesame seed paste) are tasty energy-dense spreads/ ingredients.

Soya

Enjoy a couple of portions of soya daily especially fortified soya milk, yoghurt and calcium-set tofu, tempeh and edamame beans.

If you don't eat soya, choose pea milk, oat milk or coconut milk rather than almond milk which is low in calories.



Choose extra virgin olive oil

Good quality extra virgin olive oil or rapeseed oil is a great choice. Flaxseed oil, hemp seed oil or walnut oil are also good omega-3 rich options for drizzling onto raw or cooked dishes. Choose oil with a higher smoke point for cooking such as rapeseed oil or avocado oil. If it's your preference to avoid oil, do include healthful whole plant food sources of fats (e.g. nuts/ seeds) with your meals as this helps with the absorption of fat soluble nutrients such as vitamins A,D, E and K."

Starchy vegetables and grains



Choose generous servings of starchy vegetables such as potatoes, sweet potatoes and plantain. Enjoy oats, rice, quinoa, bread and pasta and if you find whole grains too filling, opt for regular versions or a combination that suits you.

Avocados

Avocados are rich in heart-healthy fats and fibre. Add them to salads, creamy smoothies, sandwiches, in guacamole or blended with cacao and maple syrup for a quick pudding.



Olives

As olives tend to be high in salt due to processing methods, enjoy a small amount in salads or as a spread.

