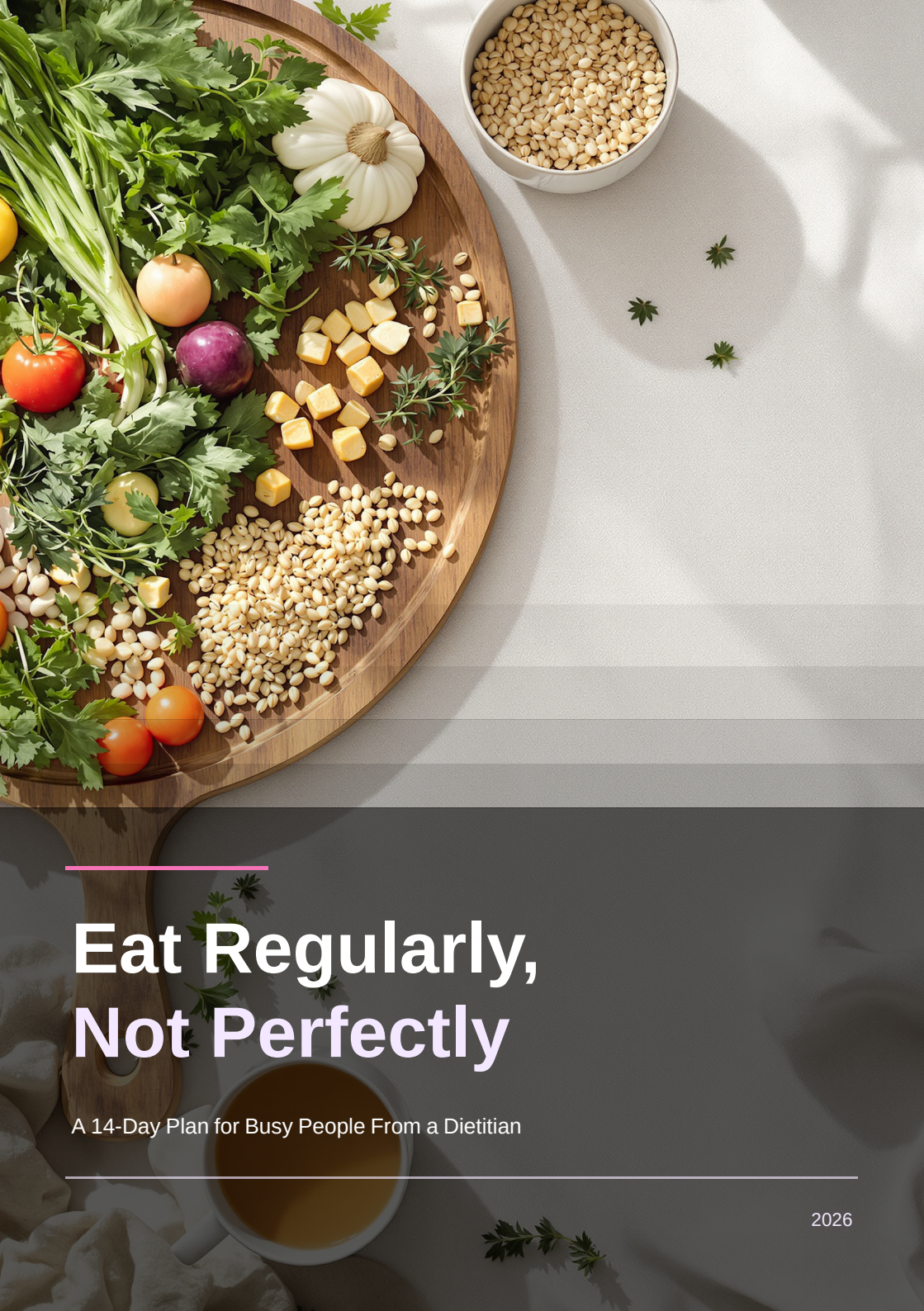




Eat Regularly, Not Perfectly

A 14-Day Plan for Busy People From a Dietitian

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Who this plan is for, and what it does not promise

It is eleven at night, the only light in the kitchen comes from the lamp over the stove, and you are standing in front of an open cupboard eating your third cookie, wondering when exactly you had dinner. The answer: you did not, because between your morning coffee and this moment there was only one rushed bite of a sandwich eaten over the keyboard. Your body does not ask whether you have time for a meal, it simply sends the bill eventually.

This plan is for people who do not have an hour a day to cook, do not want to weigh their food in grams, and are tired of diets that work beautifully in theory and fall apart at the first hard day at work. You will not find calorie counting here, no macronutrient tables, no promise that in fourteen days you will drop a clothing size. What you will find is a simple way to eat regularly, satisfyingly, and without guilt, even when the day falls apart.

The premise is simple: a meal eaten at a reasonable hour, put together well seventy percent of the time, beats a perfect

plan that stays on paper because real life leaves no room for it. Regularity and good sense beat perfectionism, which tends to end at eleven at night in front of an open fridge.

 Who this plan is not enough for

If you are being treated for diabetes, insulin resistance, a thyroid condition, have a diagnosed eating disorder, or are pregnant or breastfeeding, treat this plan as inspiration, not as ready-made medical advice. Discuss any changes to your eating with a doctor or dietitian who knows your health situation. The guidance below is general and addressed to healthy adults.

The plan has four parts. In this chapter you will learn the plate principle, which replaces calorie counting. In the next one you get fourteen days of meals and the recipes that fill them. After that we tackle the two moments where regularity most often falls apart: work and the evening. At the end, shopping lists wait, so you do not end up back at the store three times a week.

The plate, with no calorie counting

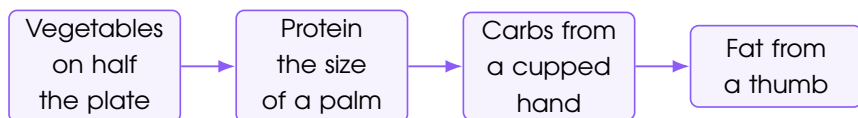
Instead of a kitchen scale and a calorie-counting app, use a plate and your own hand. This is the method behind the healthy-plate model promoted in American dietary guidelines: half the plate is vegetables, one quarter is protein foods, and the last quarter is complex carbohydrates, such as groats, rice, or whole-grain pasta. None of it needs to be weighed.

The plate method

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way of composing a meal entirely by eye, following the proportions: half the plate vegetables, one quarter protein, one quarter complex carbohydrates, plus a bit of fat. It replaces calorie counting with a simple division of space.

When the proportions on the plate are hard to judge by eye, look at your own hand instead. A protein portion is roughly the size of your open palm (chicken, fish, tofu, eggs). A portion of complex carbohydrates is about what a cupped hand holds. Fat, meaning olive oil, butter, or peanut butter, is measured by the thumb. Vegetables need no measuring at all, the more the better.



💡 What to keep in the freezer for a hard day

Frozen vegetables (no peeling or chopping needed), a ready-cooked chicken fillet, eggs, and instant groats mean a plate following this method can come together in ten minutes, even when the fridge is empty.

The thing that most often breaks meal regularity is skipping protein at the first meal of the day. Cereal with milk or a roll with jam gives you an hour of energy, then hunger comes back with interest. A meal with a palm-sized portion of protein keeps you full longer and genuinely reduces the urge to snack later, even in the evening, which we will come back to in the third chapter.

 Breakfast with no protein

Coffee and something sweet is not breakfast, it is a commercial break before the hunger that hits before noon. Add eggs, plain yogurt, cottage cheese, or yesterday's leftover chicken to it, instead of another coffee at eleven.

The plate rule works outside the home too. At a canteen, a bar, or a family gathering, you can mentally split whatever is on your plate into the same three parts and fill in the rest accordingly. You do not need to ask about the ingredients of every dish, or turn down dessert once in a while, what matters is what most plates in your week look like, not any single meal.

 The rule that replaces counting

A well-composed plate, repeated regularly several times a day, does more for your energy and appetite than the most precise calorie count, which will not survive the first busy week.

Why regularity beats restriction

A body used to fixed mealtimes starts signalling hunger on its own at the right moments, instead of waiting until it is easiest to reach for the first available thing, whether that is fruit or a whole pack of cookies. Three to four hours between meals is a reasonable starting point for most people, though the exact rhythm is worth adjusting to your own day rather than copying someone else's plan unchanged.

You do not need a perfect eating plan, you need a plan you come back to after every bad day.

The first week with a new routine is usually the hardest, because the body is learning a new hunger rhythm and the mind reaches for old shortcuts. If on day three you eat something off-plan, that is not a reason to start over on Monday. You simply go back to the next planned meal, the way you get back on the road after one careless turn, without driving back to the start.

☒ Before you start the plan

- ☐ Check the freezer and the pantry, fill the gaps using the shopping list from the fourth chapter
- ☐ Set three fixed mealtimes that realistically fit your day
- ☐ Get food containers ready if you eat away from home

- ☐ Read the third chapter first if evening snacking is your biggest problem

02

Your 14-Day Meal Plan

How to use this plan

You do not have to invent something new every day. That is the secret that sets this plan apart from most cookbooks: the twelve recipes below are enough for the full fourteen days, because the same meals simply come back around. A brain that has to decide what to eat every day gives up faster than one that shops once a week and cooks from an already familiar pattern.

The plan is modular. You have three breakfasts, four lunch or dinner dishes, three evening meals, and two snacks, and the table below shows how to spread them across two weeks. If a day falls apart, just move the meal to the next one, nothing breaks. This is a plan for real life, not for hitting a hundred percent.

💡 Cook for two servings

Every recipe below can easily be doubled. Cook a two-day portion at once, eat one, and pack the other into the fridge or freezer for a day when there truly will be no time to cook.

Table 2.1: Week 1: meal schedule

Day	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner	Snack
1	Oatmeal	Chicken with groats	Omelette	Yogurt with nuts
2	Scrambled eggs	Tuna salad	Salmon with broccoli	Hummus
3	Chickpea sandwich	Pumpkin soup	Greek salad	Yogurt with nuts
4	Oatmeal	Pesto pasta	Omelette	Hummus
5	Scrambled eggs	Chicken with groats	Salmon with broccoli	Yogurt with nuts
6	Chickpea sandwich	Tuna salad	Greek salad	Hummus
7	Oatmeal	Pumpkin soup	Omelette	Yogurt with nuts

If you do not like one of the ingredients, just swap it, the plate method from the first chapter stays exactly the same. Do not eat fish? The salmon from the second chapter becomes chicken or tofu in the same amount. No pumpkin for the cream soup? The same recipe works with any frozen vegetable you happen to have. The recipes below are a skeleton, not a rigid prescription.

Table 2.2: Week 2: meal schedule

Day	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner	Snack
8	Scrambled eggs	Pesto pasta	Salmon with broccoli	Hummus
9	Chickpea sandwich	Chicken with groats	Greek salad	Yogurt with nuts
10	Oatmeal	Tuna salad	Omelette	Hummus
11	Scrambled eggs	Pumpkin soup	Salmon with broccoli	Yogurt with nuts
12	Chickpea sandwich	Pesto pasta	Greek salad	Hummus
13	Oatmeal	Chicken with groats	Omelette	Yogurt with nuts
14	Scrambled eggs	Tuna salad	Salmon with broccoli	Hummus

When the plan stops being a plan

If you try to follow the list a hundred percent and treat every deviation from it as a failure, it is easier to simply give up after the first hard day. Flexibility in choosing ingredients is part of the plan, not an exception to it.

Treat weekends differently from weekdays. If Saturday or Sunday means a family dinner, going out for pizza, or cooking something more time-consuming, let it be, the list from this chapter comes back on Monday. The plan is meant to take the load off on days when you genuinely have no time to cook,

not to take the pleasure out of eating on days when you have more time.

RECIPE 1

Protein Oatmeal with Fruit

Ingredients (1 serving, 10 minutes):

- half a cup of rolled oats
- a cup of milk or plant-based milk
- a tablespoon of peanut butter or a handful of nuts
- half a banana or a handful of seasonal fruit
- a teaspoon of ground flaxseed (optional)

Pour the milk over the oats and heat gently, stirring, until they thicken, about five minutes. Take off the heat, add the peanut butter, fruit, and flaxseed. The peanut butter brings protein and fat to the breakfast, so the oatmeal keeps you full much longer than one made with plain water.

The take-it-with-you version

Make the oatmeal the evening before in a jar you can pour boiling water into, with a lid, take it to work in the morning, and eat it cold or reheated in the microwave.

RECIPE 2

Scrambled Eggs with Vegetables and Bread

Ingredients (1 serving, 10 minutes):

- 2–3 eggs
- a handful of frozen spinach, or a tomato and a pepper
- a slice of whole-grain bread
- a teaspoon of olive oil or butter

Briefly sauté the vegetables in olive oil until soft, pour in the beaten eggs and stir over low heat until they set but stay moist. Serve with the bread. If you genuinely have no five minutes in the morning, hard-boil eggs the evening before and eat them with bread and a raw tomato.

RECIPE 3

Chickpea Spread Sandwich with Egg

Ingredients (1 serving, 10 minutes):

- half a cup of cooked or canned chickpeas
- a tablespoon of plain yogurt or olive oil
- a hard-boiled egg
- 2 slices of whole-grain bread, a handful of arugula or lettuce

Mash the chickpeas with a fork together with the yogurt and a pinch of salt, add a little lemon juice if you have some.

Spread on the bread, add slices of egg and the greens. You can make the spread two or three days ahead, it keeps well in a sealed container in the fridge.

RECIPE 4

Baked Chicken with Groats and Vegetables

Ingredients (1 serving, 20 minutes):

- a chicken breast fillet
- half a cup of buckwheat or barley groats
- two handfuls of frozen vegetables (broccoli, pepper, zucchini)
- a tablespoon of olive oil, seasoning to taste

Start cooking the groats according to the package instructions. Slice the fillet, season it, and fry for three minutes on each side in olive oil, then remove from the pan and set aside. In the same pan, sauté the vegetables until soft. Put everything on the plate following the plate method from the first chapter.

RECIPE 5

Tuna, Bean and Egg Salad

Ingredients (1 serving, 10 minutes, no cooking):

- a can of tuna in water
- half a cup of canned beans, drained
- a hard-boiled egg, a tomato, a cucumber

- a tablespoon of olive oil, lemon juice

Chop the vegetables, add the drained beans and tuna, toss with olive oil and lemon juice, top with sliced egg. This is a salad you can pack into a container in two minutes in the morning and eat at work without reheating.

RECIPE 6

Cream of Pumpkin Soup with Croutons

Ingredients (2 servings, 20 minutes):

- half a kilogram of pumpkin, peeled and diced (fresh or frozen)
- a small onion, a clove of garlic
- two cups of vegetable stock
- a tablespoon of olive oil, a slice of bread for croutons

Sauté the onion and garlic in olive oil, add the pumpkin and stock, cook covered for about fifteen minutes, until the pumpkin is soft. Blend until smooth. Dice the bread and toast it in a dry pan for croutons. The soup freezes well, so it is worth cooking a double batch at once.

RECIPE 7

Pesto Pasta with Chicken and Tomatoes

Ingredients (1 serving, 15 minutes):

- a serving of whole-grain pasta

- leftover roast chicken, or a quickly pan-fried fillet
- two tablespoons of pesto, a handful of cherry tomatoes
- a handful of arugula

Cook the pasta according to the package instructions. Drain it and toss with the pesto, halved cherry tomatoes, chicken, and arugula. The dish reheats well the next day, if you make two servings at once.

RECIPE 8

Vegetable and Cheese Omelette

Ingredients (1 serving, 10 minutes):

- 2–3 eggs
- a handful of vegetables (zucchini, pepper, mushrooms)
- a piece of yellow cheese or feta
- a teaspoon of olive oil

Sauté the vegetables in olive oil until soft, pour in the beaten eggs, cover and cook over low heat until the omelette sets. Add the cheese at the end, take off the heat covered for a minute so it melts. As dinner, this is a lighter version of the scrambled eggs from the breakfast chapter, without the bread.

RECIPE 9

Baked Salmon with Broccoli and Potatoes

Ingredients (1 serving, 20 minutes):

- a piece of salmon
- a handful of broccoli florets
- two or three small potatoes
- a tablespoon of olive oil, lemon, seasoning

Cut the potatoes into quarters, toss with olive oil and seasoning, bake at 200 degrees for fifteen minutes. Add the salmon and broccoli, bake for another twelve to fifteen minutes, until the fish is done. Squeeze lemon over it before serving.

RECIPE 10

Greek Salad with Feta and Olives

Ingredients (1 serving, 10 minutes, no cooking):

- a tomato, a cucumber, a red onion
- a piece of feta, a handful of olives
- a tablespoon of olive oil, oregano

Cut the vegetables into large chunks, add the diced feta and olives, drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle with oregano. If this is dinner after a hard day, add a slice of bread or a handful of chickpeas to make the meal more filling.

RECIPE 11

Plain Yogurt with Nuts and Fruit

Ingredients (1 serving, 5 minutes, no cooking):

- a cup of plain or Greek yogurt
- a handful of nuts or almonds
- a seasonal fruit, a teaspoon of honey (optional)

Mix everything in a bowl or a container to take with you. Greek yogurt has more protein than regular plain yogurt, so it keeps you full longer as a snack between meals, not just as a breakfast topping.

RECIPE 12

Hummus with Vegetables and Bread

Ingredients (2–3 servings, 10 minutes, no cooking):

- a cup of cooked or canned chickpeas
- two tablespoons of tahini or peanut butter
- lemon juice, a clove of garlic, a tablespoon of olive oil
- crunchy vegetables (pepper, celery, cucumber)

Blend the chickpeas with the tahini, lemon juice, garlic, and olive oil into a smooth paste, adding a little water if it is too thick. Serve with vegetables cut into sticks. Hummus keeps for several days in the fridge, so one batch covers a whole week of snacks.

Eating at Work and Evening Snacking

How to organize eating at work

The most common reason regular eating falls apart on work-days is not a lack of willpower, it is the lack of prepared food at the moment hunger shows up. The calendar does not wait, and a hungry brain does not make its best decisions in front of the vending machine in the hallway.

The solution does not require cooking every day. Most of the recipes from the second chapter, especially the tuna salad, the pesto pasta, or the chickpea sandwich, survive transport and a few hours in the office fridge without any loss of quality. One evening a week spent cooking two or three servings at once, groats, chicken, roasted vegetables, means ready dinners for several days in a row.

A minimal desk-drawer kit

Keep an emergency kit in your desk drawer: nuts, a cereal bar without too much added sugar, tea, and coffee. It will not replace a proper meal, but it saves the day when the plan genuinely did not work out.

It is worth packing your food container in the evening, not in the morning. Decisions are harder in the morning, because there is less time and more pressure. Five minutes before bed, when the kitchen is already clean after dinner anyway, is a natural moment to move tomorrow's lunch into its container.

 The company-canteen trap

A ready-made canteen menu rarely follows the plate method, vegetables tend to be scarce and carbohydrates plentiful. If you have to eat on site, add an extra side salad or vegetables to the main dish, instead of piling on more potatoes or rice.

Evening snacking: where it comes from and what to do about it

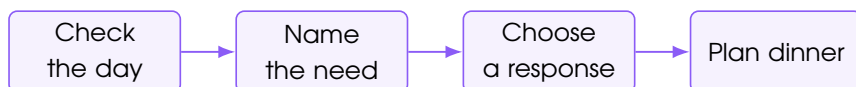
Evening snacking rarely comes from a lack of willpower, and most often from what happened earlier that day. A skipped breakfast, a meal without protein somewhere in the day, too little sleep the night before, or simply the plain fact that this is the only moment of the day when you finally sit down and have a moment to yourself. Body and mind go looking for a reward then, and food is the closest thing at hand.

Evening hunger

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strong urge to eat after dinner, which more often comes from a deficit of energy and protein built up over the day, or from tiredness and stress, than from a real caloric need of the body.

The first step is checking whether you actually ate regularly and with protein throughout the day, following the plan from the second chapter. If you did, and evening hunger still shows up, it is worth asking whether this is truly hunger, or boredom, tiredness, or the habit of watching a show with a bowl of something sweet on your lap. The answer to that question changes the strategy.



💬 A typical day that ends in snacking

Picture a day with no breakfast, coffee instead of lunch grabbed between meetings, and a light salad for dinner at six, because “you are supposed to eat less in the evening”. By nine, hunger comes back in full force, and the easiest thing within reach in the fridge is cookies, not broccoli. That is not weak will, it is the simple result of four hours with no real meal and a dinner too light to cover a whole day of work.

If it is hunger, a light but filling dinner with protein, say an omelette or the Greek salad from the second chapter, eaten

two to three hours before bed, solves the problem for most people. If it is boredom or tiredness, what helps is swapping the ritual, not removing it entirely: tea in your favourite mug, a short conversation, a shower, anything that gives the brain a different signal of rest than eating does.

💡 When you truly want to eat something in the evening

Instead of banning everything, keep one filling option ready from the snack list in the second chapter, yogurt with nuts or hummus with vegetables. Eaten calmly at the table, rather than in a rush in front of the fridge, it rarely leads to further snacking.

Lack of sleep deserves its own mention, because it works unnoticed. Too little sleep increases the next day's appetite and makes it harder to stick to the plan, even if the day's eating was laid out perfectly. If evening snacking keeps coming back despite regular, filling meals, the first question worth asking is not about the plate, but about what time you go to bed.

📖 Snacking is information, not failure

Every episode of evening snacking says something about the day that caused it. Instead of blaming yourself for it, check what came before, and fix one thing at a time, instead of rebuilding the whole day from scratch.

✓ Keeping work and evenings under control

- ☐ Pack tomorrow's lunch in the evening, not in the morning
- ☐ Keep an emergency kit at work: nuts, tea, a simple bar
- ☐ When evening hunger hits, ask whether it is hunger, boredom, or tiredness
- ☐ If it is hunger, eat a light, filling meal with protein, not a whole spread of snacks
- ☐ Check how much you are sleeping if snacking keeps coming back despite regular meals

04

Shopping Lists and Your Start

Shopping list — week 1

It is worth doing the shopping once, at the start of the week, ideally on a day when you have a calm moment to walk through the store, not on the way home from work on an empty stomach. The list below covers every recipe from days 1–7 in the second chapter. Pantry staples, like groats or olive oil, you buy once for longer, not fresh every week.

Vegetables, fruit and herbs

Protein and dairy

Grains, legumes and other staples

Shopping list — week 2

The second week uses the same product categories in similar amounts, because the recipes repeat in a different order. That means some of the pantry staples from week one, like groats, olive oil, or pesto, may still be left, so it is worth checking the cupboard first before buying everything again from scratch.

Table 4.1: Week 1 — vegetables, fruit and herbs

Item	Amount
Pumpkin	half a kilogram
Broccoli	one portion, frozen or fresh
Zucchini, pepper, mushrooms	one each, for the omelette
Tomatoes, cucumbers, red onion	several, for salads
Lemon	two
Banana and seasonal fruit	a handful for oatmeal and yogurt
Arugula or lettuce	one bag

Table 4.2: Week 1 — protein and dairy

Item	Amount
Eggs	a dozen
Chicken breast fillet	two portions
Salmon	one portion
Canned tuna	one can
Feta and yellow cheese	one piece each
Plain or Greek yogurt	a large tub
Milk or plant-based milk	one carton

Table 4.3: Week 1 — grains, legumes and other staples

Item	Amount
Rolled oats	one package
Buckwheat or barley groats	one package
Whole-grain pasta	one portion
Whole-grain bread	one loaf
Chickpeas (canned)	two cans
Beans (canned)	one can
Pesto, tahini, peanut butter, nuts	one package each
Olive oil, seasoning, oregano	if you are out at home

 One list, two weeks

Take a photo of both tables on your phone and bring it to the store, instead of copying the list out again. Tick off items you already have at home before you walk in, not while standing in the checkout line.

Closing: your first two weeks

Do not start by emptying out the whole fridge and calendar. Start with one change: a protein breakfast for the next three days, or one evening spent doing the shopping from the list

Table 4.4: Week 2 — top-up list

Item	Amount
Fresh or frozen vegetables (as in week 1)	top up as needed
Seasonal fruit	a handful for a few days
Eggs	a dozen
Chicken breast fillet	two portions
Salmon	one portion
Canned tuna	one can
Plain or Greek yogurt	a large tub
Chickpeas (canned)	two cans
Whole-grain pasta and bread	one portion each
Nuts, hummus or hummus ingredients	if you have run out

in this chapter. The rest of the plan will wait and is not going anywhere if the first week only gets you to seventy percent.

Do not judge yourself after fourteen days by a number on a scale, judge it by whether you stood in front of an open cupboard in the evening less often, wondering what just happened to your day. If the answer is “less often”, the plan is working, no matter how many times in those two weeks you ate something off-plan.

After two weeks it is worth doing a short review, rather than immediately drawing up a more ambitious plan. Which recipes from the second chapter came back most often, because they were easiest to make after work? Which day of the week most often broke the plan, and why? The answers to those two questions are more valuable than a ready-made plan for the next month, because they show what genuinely works in your life, not just what looked good on paper. Keep what worked, and swap out the rest, instead of starting everything over from zero.

 The single most important idea in this book

A regular, well-composed meal eaten seventy percent according to plan works better and lasts longer than a perfect diet you cannot keep up for more than a week. Eat regularly, not perfectly, and come back to the plan without feeling like a failure when a day falls apart.

 Before you close this book

- ☐ Pick one change for the next three days, not ten at once
- ☐ Do the week-one shopping before Monday starts
- ☐ Pack your first container for work in the evening, not in the morning
- ☐ Go back to the third chapter if evening snacking comes back despite the plan
- ☐ After two weeks, read the plan again and keep what worked