

# Clean Eating — a Concept, Not a Diet



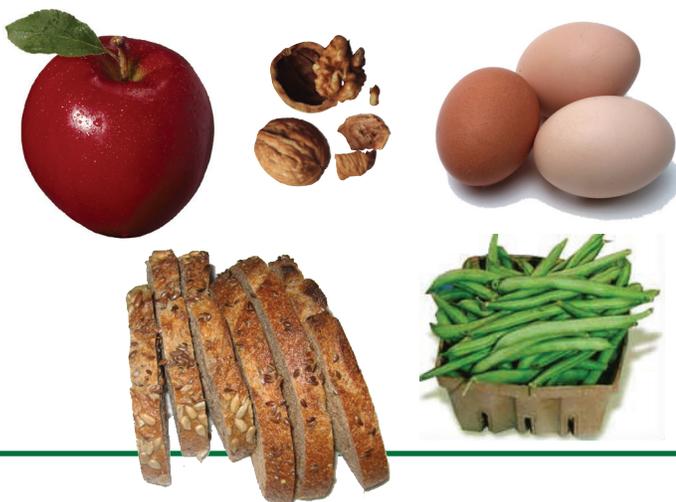
## What is clean eating?

Clean eating is more of a concept than a diet. It has become a global movement with a range of practices.

The essence of clean eating is eating whole, minimally processed foods — foods that are as close as possible to their natural state. This means a diet rich in fresh vegetables and fruits, whole (unrefined) grains, legumes, nuts and seeds, and most fish. A person who practices clean eating tends to avoid processed foods, most preservatives, artificial ingredients and other additives, including sugar or salt.

Variations of clean eating might emphasize seasonal, locally sourced or organic foods or animal products from animals that have been raised humanely and without antibiotics and growth hormones. Clean eating could mean well-balanced meals consumed slowly and deliberately. For some clean eaters, foods must be raw, water must be filtered, and caffeine and alcohol must be avoided. For others, clean eating could refer to consuming foods that are gluten free, dairy free or non-GMO (genetically modified organism).

The terms “natural” or “authentic” are frequently used to describe clean foods, while clean food products could be described as those that list only real, simple, recognizable, and easy to pronounce ingredients on their labels. Regardless of how it’s defined, clean eating is associated with a healthy lifestyle.



## How do you eat clean?

At its core, clean eating aligns with four basic principles of a plant-based healthy diet.

1. Meals and snacks primarily include:
  - Vegetables and fruits.
  - Whole grains, breads, cereals.
  - Legumes (beans, peas, lentils), nuts and seeds with some fish and seafood, lean meats and poultry, eggs and low-fat dairy.
  - Olive oil, vegetable oil.
  - Herbs and spices.
  - Water as the recommended beverage.
2. Foods are cooked using low-fat methods:
  - Grilling or broiling.
  - Roasting or baking.
  - Steaming or poaching.
  - Sautéing or stir-frying.
  - Stewing, microwaving or pressure cooking.
3. Portion sizes are tailored to individual energy needs.
4. Time is taken to appreciate and enjoy the meal.

What differentiates clean eating from conventional healthy eating is the process of food selection.

- Clean eaters will preferentially select fresh, unprocessed, organic, local and sustainable foods.
- They will make a greater effort to prepare their foods at home.
- They will try to learn the source of their food products (plant, animal, or seafood) and base their buying decisions on ethical and climate-friendly practices of the producer as well as overall quality.

## Why eat clean?

Following the principles of healthy eating, either clean or conventional, provides a variety of health benefits:

- Achieving and maintaining a healthy weight.
- Reducing risk to chronic diseases.
- Managing chronic diseases.
- Strengthening bones and teeth.
- Optimizing gut health.
- Improving mood and mental health.

In addition, clean eating is good for the environment. As a social good, the process of obtaining clean foods can be empowering and can enhance life satisfaction.



## Caution: Extreme clean can be a health risk

On the other hand, when the search for clean food becomes an obsession; when entire food groups are judged to be insufficiently clean or acceptable and are, therefore, excluded from the diet; or when clean food practices interfere with social interactions, clean eating becomes a problem. At its most extreme, clean eating is disordered eating with risks to physical and mental health.

## Bringing it home

Healthy eating is good for you and your family. Clean eating **can** be good for you, your family and the environment. But, depending on your level of commitment, clean eating could be resource intense, entailing a great deal of time, effort and expense. It might be more realistic to start with a few small steps:

- Try packing your own snacks of nuts and dried fruits instead of purchasing prepackaged snack bars.
- Try shopping for produce, breads, cheese or seafood at a local farmers market once a month.
- Try purchasing at least one whole grain (oats, popcorn, rice) in bulk and preparing it as part of a weekly meal.
- Start using a refillable water container in place of a single-use bottle.

Over time, these **small steps** could make a **big difference** in your health and in the health of our planet.



Elizabeth Gollub, Ph.D., M.P.H., R.D., Nutrition Specialist  
Daniela Quan, intern  
School of Nutrition and Food Sciences

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William B. Richardson, LSU Vice President for Agriculture, Louisiana State University Agricultural Center, Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station  
Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, LSU College of Agriculture  
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