

Canada's food guide encourages eating a variety of foods each day including vegetables, fruit, whole grains, and protein foods. Eating protein foods from plant-based sources more often is recommended. These include legumes (chickpeas, split peas, beans or lentils), nuts, seeds, tofu, and fortified soy beverages.

Including plant-based proteins more often can:

- have a positive effect on our health.
- have many environmental benefits.
- help to reduce food costs, manage budgets and save time.
- increase the variety of foods young children eat and help them develop a positive relationship with these foods.

Choosing and preparing chickpeas, split peas, beans, and lentils:

- Choose canned legumes with **no added sodium** (salt) when possible.
- Canned legumes are already cooked. Drain, rinse and add to your favourite meal or recipe.
- Dried legumes must be cooked. Refer to [Unlockfood.ca](https://unlockfood.ca) for washing, soaking and cooking instructions.
- Prepare large batches of legumes and freeze these in smaller amounts for an easy addition to recipes.



Easy ways to start adding more plant-based proteins to your menu:

Plant-based protein	Ways to add to your menu
Beans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add to any salad, soup or stew. • Dark-coloured beans (i.e., black beans, red kidney beans) can be added whole or mashed to tacos and burgers or pureed and used in baking. • Light-coloured beans (i.e., Navy beans, white kidney beans and chickpeas) blend well with ground chicken, turkey, or tuna. They can also be mashed into potatoes, pureed into dips or used to thicken soups or sauces. • Try Bean and Cheese Quesadillas or Sweet Potato Black Bean Stew.
Lentils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use green or brown lentils when making meatloaf, burgers, meatballs, and tacos. • Make red lentil tomato-based sauces to increase the fibre and protein content. • Prepare lentil bars for a higher fibre snack.
Tofu	<p>Tofu is made from soybeans. It can take on tastes of seasonings and other foods.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try marinating tofu with low sodium soy sauce, garlic and ginger or your favourite marinade. • A variety of tofu textures are available and can be used in different ways: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soft or silken can be used for smoothies, dips, sauces, salad dressings and baking. • Firm can be scrambled or crumbled into eggs or ground meat dishes like lasagna, sloppy joes, tacos, pasta sauce or used on its own. • Extra firm can be used for stir-fry dishes, grilled or shredded. • When using firm or extra firm tofu, press the water out before using. Drain and place the tofu between sheets of paper towels or clean cloths, and press out as much liquid as possible.

Plant-based protein	Ways to add to your menu
Textured Vegetable Protein (TVP)	<p>TVP is made from soybeans. It is available dried and takes on flavours well.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To rehydrate dried TVP, pour boiling water or low-sodium broth over the desired amount of TVP using a 1-to-1 ratio. Let mixture soak for 5-10 minutes or until it has reached the desired texture.• TVP texture closely resembles ground meat and can be used in similar ways. It makes an excellent substitute or meat extender by replacing half or all the ground meat in spaghetti sauce, stews, casseroles, burgers, tacos, and chili.• It is inexpensive and in its dehydrated form can be stored at room temperature.

For more recipe ideas:

- [Healthy Eating](#) (Ottawa Public Health)
- [Paint Your Plate](#) (Ontario Dietitians in Public Health)
- [Recipes - Early Learning and Child Care](#) (Alberta Health Services)
- [Tried and True Recipes - A Resource for Schools and Child Care](#) (Unlock Food)
- [Plant-Based Proteins: Recipes Made Easy-Peasy](#) (Guelph Family Health Study)



Refer to [Child Care Menu Planning - Practical Guide](#) to ensure that recipes meet the guidance provided.