



***SOUTH CAROLINA FAMILY AND COMMUNITY LEADERS***  
Affiliated with National Volunteer Outreach Network, Country Women's Council, U.S.A., Associated  
Country Women of the World and in partnership with Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service  
SCFCL website: <http://www.scfcl.com>

## **Leader Training Guide**

### **Plant-Based Picnic**

#### **Objectives:**

Upon completion of the lesson, participants will be able to:

- Identify plant-based foods
- Understand key nutritional benefits of eating whole, nutrient-dense foods
- Incorporate simple changes for a plant-centered approach to daily meals

#### **Lesson Overview/Introduction:**

I'm going on a picnic and I'm taking...In this lesson, participants will learn the benefits of incorporating more whole plant-based foods into their diet whether at home, on the go, or even on a picnic. Taking a plant-centered approach to snacks and meals can be a simple and beneficial way to ensure our bodies receive a variety of nutrients while also reducing risk of disease. Throughout the lesson, we will explore the five food groups, identifying plant-based food sources and how to incorporate them into our daily lives.

#### **Lesson:**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has developed the Dietary Guidelines for Americans to serve as a model for creating well-balanced and healthy meals that provide the nutrients and nourishment our bodies need. Based on current research surrounding nutrition, it is suggested that adults and older adults eat nutrient-dense foods from each of the five food groups: vegetables, fruits, grains, dairy, and protein. The most recent guidelines for 2020 through 2025 divide the recommendations by age group, noting that our nutritional needs differ at each stage of life. With that, the amount from each food group needed differs for each individual based on age, sex, height, weight, and physical activity level. To determine your food group recommendations, complete the action below.

**Action 1:** Find out your MyPlate Plan and food group recommendations by visiting the following website: <https://www.myplate.gov/myplate-plan>.

Below, we will take a closer look at each of the five food groups:

## Vegetables

When considering a plant-based approach, vegetables are first on the list, providing a variety of key vitamins and minerals, such as vitamin A, vitamin C, potassium, and fiber. This food group is divided into 5 subgroups, each providing unique nutritional benefits, signifying the importance of not only quantity but variety when choosing our vegetables. The five vegetable subgroups are listed below along with examples of each:

1. **Dark-Green Vegetables:** Leafy lettuce, collard/turnip/mustard greens, broccoli, kale, and spinach
2. **Red and Orange Vegetables:** Bell peppers, tomatoes, carrots, and sweet potatoes
3. **Beans, Peas, and Lentils:** Chickpeas, lentils, lima beans, pinto beans, and kidney beans (this subgroup can also be included in the protein food group)
4. **Starchy Vegetables:** Potatoes, water chestnuts, corn, green peas, and parsnips
5. **Other Vegetables:** Okra, cucumbers, cauliflower, cabbage, beets, and rutabaga

Remember, when filling your plates or choosing your snacks, try to have a variety of vegetables from the different subgroups, and most importantly, choose vegetables that YOU enjoy in a way that you enjoy them, whether that be fresh, frozen, canned, raw, or cooked. However, be sure to keep a watch on the sodium content of canned vegetables, and choose low-sodium when possible.

**Action 2:** Using the provided handout, make a list of vegetables that YOU enjoy (bonus points if you can list one from each subgroup!)

## Fruit

Similar to vegetables, fruits bring a variety of vitamins and minerals to our diet that are beneficial to our health. For example, bananas and dried apricots are both good sources of potassium, which is an important mineral for bone, kidney, and heart health, and particularly blood pressure levels. When choosing fruit, at least half of your daily intake should be whole fruits, fresh or frozen, as opposed to fruit juice. Eating whole fruits provides fiber, which can help lower blood cholesterol levels and aid bowel health. Good fruit sources of fiber include apples and oranges.

**Action 3:** Can you have a picnic without fruit salad? Take a moment to make a rainbow fruit salad with honey lime dressing to enjoy as a group during the remainder of the lesson using the following recipe:

<https://www.cookingclassy.com/honey-lime-rainbow-fruit-salad/>

## Grains

The third food group is grains, and just like vegetables and fruit, grains can also be a good source of fiber when whole grains are selected. Whole grains, as the name suggests, includes all parts of the grain kernel, consisting of the endosperm, bran, and germ. However, in refined grains, like white bread and white rice, the germ and bran have been removed, taking with it fiber and important B vitamins. Examples of whole grains include oats, whole grain crackers, and brown rice. Whole grains are sources of complex carbohydrates and can be incorporated into a well-balanced diet.

**Action 4:** Identify 3 sources of refined grains that you can swap for whole grain products (Example: Enriched crackers to whole grain crackers).

## Dairy

Dairy products, such as yogurt and milk, can provide our bodies with nutrients like calcium, vitamin D, potassium, and vitamin B12. Calcium and vitamin D work hand in hand as vitamin D aids in calcium absorption, helping our bodies retain the needed nutrients for bone health and strength. While dairy products are not plant-based foods, they can still be incorporated into a plant-centered diet while providing us with these important nutrients. If you choose not to consume dairy, many dairy alternatives like soy and almond milk are fortified with calcium. It is also found in leafy greens. When choosing your dairy products, focus on non-fat or low-fat options to reduce the amount of unhealthy fats consumed.

**Action 5:** Discuss among the group how dairy plays a role in your diet. Do you feel you meet your recommended calcium intake? What healthy swaps can you make?

## Protein

The last, but certainly not least, food group is the protein group. This group is important as it provides our bodies with not only dietary protein important for our bones, muscles, and blood, it also provides vitamins and minerals like essential B vitamins. There are many plant-based protein options to consider that can be added into a variety of dishes. For example, incorporate beans into a black bean and corn salad for a summer side, roast chickpeas until crisp for a crunchy snack, or enjoy a lentil soup or veggie chili during the cool fall and winter months. One important consideration to note is that when limiting or excluding animal products from your diet, it can be difficult to get vitamin B12 as it is only found naturally in animal products like poultry, eggs, and seafood. As we age, our ability to absorb vitamin B12 from animal products may also decline. Therefore, your doctor may suggest a B12 supplement or foods that have been fortified with B12 like cereal. Be sure to check with them at your next appointment!

Below are lists of both healthy sources of animal and plant-based protein.

### Healthy Sources of Protein (Animal):

- Seafood (example: salmon, trout)
- Lean chicken (example: skinless chicken breasts)
- Lean beef (93% ground beef)

### Healthy Sources of Protein (Plant-Based)

- Black beans
- Chickpeas
- Lentils

**Action 6:** Consider ways to take a favorite recipe and make it plant-based. For example, replace ground beef with lentils in tacos for a meatless yet flavorful dish.

### Lesson Summary:

Throughout the lesson, each of the five food groups were explored in detail, important nutrients were noted, and sources of each were identified through a plant-based perspective. All five food groups can be incorporated into a healthy plant-based diet. Lastly, making small yet intentional changes to include a variety of fruits and vegetables in our meals and snacks provides our bodies with needed nutrients for overall health.

### Suggested Activities:

#### Before Meeting (if possible):

Have participants sign up to bring a bowl of their favorite fruit (chopped if needed) to use during Action Break 3 to create a rainbow fruit salad.

#### Icebreaker:

To kick-off the lesson, play “I’m going on a picnic.” Have participants go around the room stating, “I’m going on a picnic and I’m taking (fill-in-the-blank).” However, there’s a twist! Since the lesson is focused on plant-based foods, the item they are taking must be a fruit or vegetable. To make it a bit more challenging, ask participants to try to use a fruit or vegetable that also starts with the first letter of their first name!

#### Action Breaks 1-6:

Action Breaks are highlighted in yellow throughout the lesson and correspond with the provided Action Sheet for each participant.

#### Recipe Sharing:

If time allows, have participants share their favorite plant-based recipes.

## **Suggested Materials:**

- Action sheets for each participant
- Recipe ingredients and supplies:
  - Large bowl (fruit)
  - Small bowl (dressing)
  - Zester/Grater
  - Measuring spoons and cups
  - Serving spoon
  - Individual-size cups or bowls
  - Fruit (following recipe or of choice)
  - Dressing ingredients (honey, lime)

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## **Lesson Review by:**

## **Sources/References:**

Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. (n.d.) *The nutrition source: whole grains*. <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/what-should-you-eat/whole-grains/>

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# PLANT-BASED PICNIC

## ACTION SHEET

1

Find out your MyPlate Plan and food group recommendations by visiting the following website: <https://www.myplate.gov/myplate-plan>.



Make a list of vegetables that YOU enjoy:

2

3

**SNACK TIME!**  
Make a rainbow fruit salad.



4

Refined Grains

Whole Grains



5

Discuss  
and share healthy swaps  
for dairy products.

6

Brainstorm ways to make your favorite meals plant-based:

