



FIRE FIGHTER  
**nutrition**

Eat for Health.  
Eat for Life.  
Eat for Real.

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# Fire Fighter Nutrition Guide

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Quality nutrition can help your body reach its full potential. By using food in conjunction with a comprehensive approach to wellness, you can find balance and sustainability, decrease your job-related health risks and improve quality of life. **It all starts with food.**

## WHAT DO I EAT?

Let's be honest – it can be confusing to know what to eat. This guide focuses on basic principles to live and eat well as a fire fighter.

## EAT FOR HEALTH

You need real solutions that protect your long-term health and prevent disease.

## EAT FOR LIFE

You deserve a program that helps create balance between work and life demands.

## EAT FOR REAL

You want to eat good food. Period.

Through this real-life approach to nutrition, you'll create foundational habits that will serve you well both on-duty and at home. You'll learn how to build a better plate, identify what your body needs and how to adjust along the way. What you won't find is a strict meal plan.

Big Picture: You are in control. By putting yourself in the driver's seat and learning how to eat, you'll decide what, when and how much, according to what's right for you.

This guide gives you the tools you need to be successful.



# Five Steps for Fire Fighter Nutrition

## 1. SET YOUR GOALS

Get clear on what you want to achieve and why. Without a WHY behind your change, you will just fall back to old habits when things get tough. And they will get tough. Ask yourself WHY you are ready to change and don't be afraid to get real about it. Why now?



## 2. START SMALL

It's normal to feel the need to change everything when first starting. But this leads to quick burnout and ultimately, failure. Instead, focus on one small thing you can commit to for two weeks to stay consistent and build momentum. Whatever it is, write it down and call it out. What will you commit to?



## 3. THINK AHEAD

Instead of relying on hunger to dictate your next meal, take a moment at the end of the day and plan what you will eat for the next 24 hours. It doesn't matter what it is, but planning ahead when you're not deep in hunger will automatically influence your food choices for the better. What are you going to eat for the next 24 hours?



## 4. ADD, DON'T SUBTRACT

Focus on what you normally eat and find opportunities to make it healthier. For example, if you know your crew is eating tacos for dinner, offer to add in some vegetables on the side or make a salad to go with spaghetti and meatballs. The key here is not changing or removing everything. Simply ask, "What's something healthy I can add?"



## 5. EAT REAL FOOD

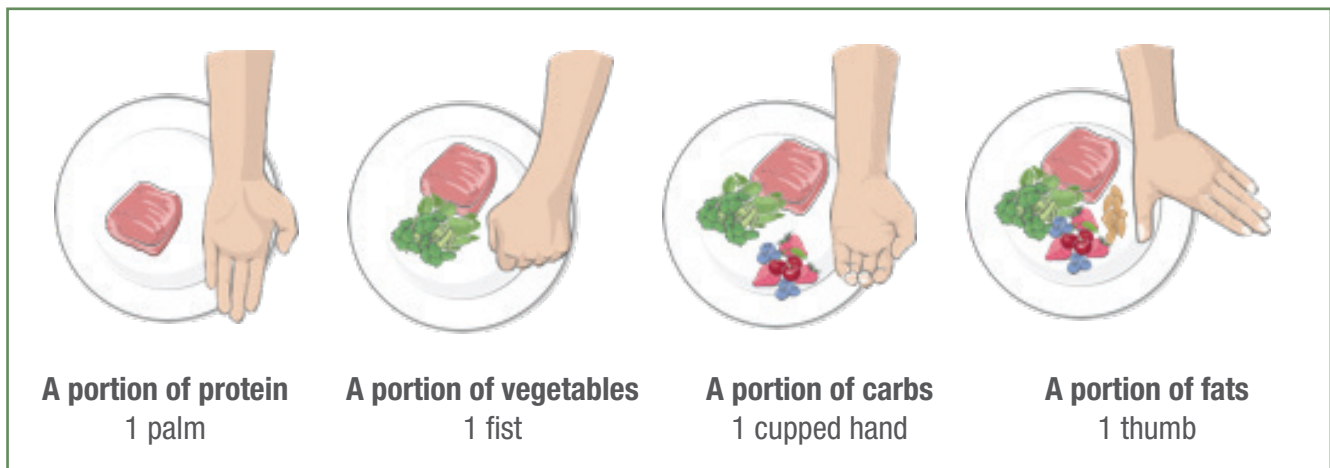
As you move through this program, the goal is to improve your daily habits. The most important is to eat whole, real food. Start swapping highly processed, pre-packaged products for real food that comes from plants and animals. Elevating your game and eating real food found in nature can have the greatest impact on your health. What's one thing you can swap for a real-food version?



# Eat the Right Amount

## THE BASICS OF PORTION SIZING

For long-term health and happiness, you don't need to count calories to get the right portions for your goals. Instead, just use your hand to measure. This makes building a better plate simple – at home, at the firehouse, even while dining out.



**Protein** is the basic building block of cells and tissues that are needed to keep us strong. It is crucial for vital functions, regulation and maintenance of our bodies. Firefighting, training and workouts break down muscles, so it is important to have plenty of protein in your diet to help build them back stronger. Remember, all types of foods contain protein, not just meat and eggs, e.g., vegetables, nuts, beans and grains.

**Carbohydrates** are a major source of fuel and nutrients for our bodies. When choosing carb sources, we want to eat as close to the earth as possible. This means the less processed, the better. Optimal sources of carbs are vegetables, fruits, beans, legumes, potatoes or whole grains. Eat a full spectrum of colors to ensure you get a wide range of nutrients in your diet.

**Dietary fats** give your body energy and support cell growth. Healthy fats are essential for absorbing fat-soluble vitamins, help protect your organs and produce important hormones. Pay close attention to serving sizes since fat is more calorically dense, making it easy to accidentally eat too much. Ideal fat sources are cold water fish, avocados, nuts, seeds, nut and seed butters and extra virgin olive oil.

Recommendations for individuals may vary, but this serves as a starting point when planning your meals. If you notice changes in the wrong direction, alter your portion size slightly and monitor progress.

\*Image credit: Precision Nutrition

# Daily Meal Planning



## PROTEIN

1-2 palm-sized portions per meal (average 4-8 oz.)

**For example:** Beans, pork, chicken, fish, beef



## VEGGIES

1-2 fist-sized portions per meal (average 5-10 oz.)

**For example:** Cucumbers, carrots, squash, cauliflower, spinach



## CARBOHYDRATES

1-2 cupped handfuls per meal (average 0.5-1.5 cup)

**For example:** Sweet potatoes, rice, quinoa, potatoes



## HEALTHY FATS

1-2 thumbs per meal (average 1-3 tbsp.)

**For example:** Almonds, nut butters, olive oil

Adjust your portions up or down depending on your goals, gender, size, body type and training. If performance is lacking or you want to build muscle, eat slightly more. If you want to lose weight, eat slightly less. Most other goals are about consistency and making higher-quality food choices.

\*Image credit: Precision Nutrition

# Make a Plan or Plan to Fail

As you go along, you'll discover what works for you to make healthy eating habits part of your regular routine. Planning, particularly as you prepare for shift, can help you be consistent and set you up for success. It will help you feel confident and in control of your choices and on the path toward success.

Plan meals ahead of time to have the food on hand and ready to go. Ask yourself what you need so you are prepared. Relying on willpower when you're hungry is a sure-fire way to fail.

1. Use the daily meal planner and the grocery shopping template and start by choosing your protein. Then decide what vegetables to add, determine where the portions of fat will come from and, lastly, add a smart carbohydrate. This helps you build a healthy meal, ensuring you have what you need.
2. Next, think about breakfasts, lunches, dinners and snacks in the same manner. What can you buy that will be easy to use, is a quality food choice and that you actually like?
3. It's important to plan for the occasional treat. This is real life. By planning ahead, you are more likely to make a reasonable choice than when dictated by hunger. Think through this and ask yourself what small indulgence will keep you on track for the long run.
4. Check your fridge or pantry. Things like cooking oil, spices, condiments or other add-ins often get overlooked. Put everything you need on the list. KEY: If it's NOT on the list, don't buy it.

## Weekly Meal Planner

### Tips:

- Don't go grocery shopping when you are hungry. Shopping hungry can lead to poor decisions and make it easier to give into cravings. Before you hit the supermarket, drink a glass of water and have a small, healthy snack so you are less tempted to load the cart with caloric-dense foods (e.g., bags of chips, cookies, sodas).
- Stick to your list and spend most of the time shopping the perimeter of the store. This is where the least processed foods are.
- While it's best to eat fresh produce right away, most studies show that fresh and frozen are nutritionally similar. Freezing can preserve some of the nutrients lost in fresh produce while in transit or stored. Bottom line: if you have access to fresh produce, eat it as soon as possible. If frozen is the next best option, just read labels and be mindful of additives or preservatives.



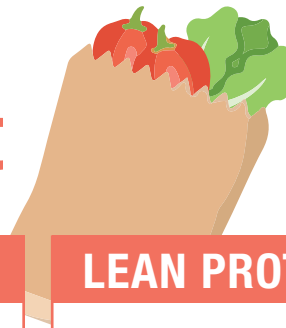
# Weekly Meal Planner

Week of: \_\_\_\_\_

	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner	Snacks/Notes
Mon				
Tues				
Wed				
Thur				
Fri				
Sat				
Sun				

Look at your upcoming week and see how you can plan for success.

# Grocery Shopping List



## SMART CARBOHYDRATES

Look for whole-food carbohydrates that pack lots of nutrition and fiber, such as the options below.

### WHOLE GRAINS

- Oats
- Buckwheat
- Barley
- Brown, red or wild rice
- Amaranth
- Sorghum
- Quinoa
- Spelt
- Kamut
- Teff
- Wheatberries (whole wheat kernels)
- Sprouted grains or breads
- Whole grain pasta



### STARCHY TUBERS

- Purple, red or gold potatoes
- Sweet potatoes/yams
- Yuca/cassava



### LEGUMES

- Lentils and beans
- Bean/lentil pasta



### FRUITS

- Apples
- Apricots
- Banana



## LEAN PROTEIN

### MEAT

- Lean/extra-lean cuts of beef
- Lamb
- Lean pork (e.g., pork tenderloin)
- Wild game (e.g., venison, elk)

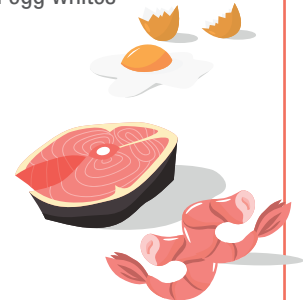
### POULTRY

- Chicken
- Turkey
- Duck
- Eggs and egg whites



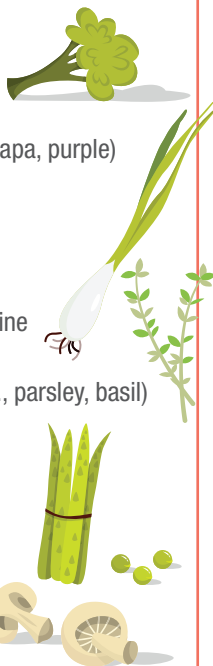
### FISH

- Tuna
- Salmon
- Tilapia
- Cod
- Haddock
- Trout
- Sardines or mackerel



## VEGETABLES

- Beansprouts
- Beets
- Broccoli
- Brussels sprouts
- Cabbage (e.g., Napa, purple)
- Carrots
- Cauliflower
- Celery
- Cucumber
- Eggplant/aubergine
- Fennel/anise
- Fresh herbs (e.g., parsley, basil)
- Garlic
- Green beans
- Green peas
- Green peppers
- Kale
- Lettuce
- Mushrooms
- Okra
- Onions, leeks, shallots



## HEALTHY FATS

Look for less-processed and/or "whole food" fat sources.

### COLD-PRESSED OILS

- Extra-virgin olive oil
- Walnut oil
- Hemp seed oil
- Pumpkin seed oil
- Avocado seed oil
- Flax seed oil
- Extra-virgin coconut oil
- Fish oil or algae oil
- Butter (look for grass-fed/organic if possible)
- Fresh avocado or fresh guacamole



### NUTS AND SEEDS

- Raw, unflavored, unsalted nuts (e.g. almonds, cashews, walnuts, pecans, brazil nuts, hazelnuts)



## OTHER ITEMS

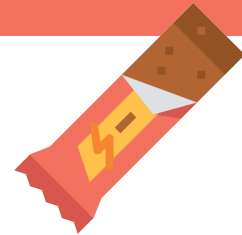
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# Workout Nutrition Guidelines

## BEFORE YOUR WORKOUT

This depends on timing. If you are eating a full meal, it's best to eat two or more hours before a workout. If eating one to two hours before a workout, eat something easily digestible and low in fiber, e.g., an energy bar.



## DURING YOUR WORKOUT

Drink water.

Only consume intra-workout carbs if training or heavy physical labor lasts consistently longer than 60 minutes.



## AFTER YOUR WORKOUT

Eat within 1-2 hours after exercise. Making your post-workout meal your largest meal of the day will fuel quick recovery and help you toward your goals. This is also the ideal time to plug in a carb-dense treat since your body is primed to use it.

If you aren't able to consume a regular meal within this window, consider pre-making a smoothie to help you recover quickly.

### Mixed-Berry Smoothie

Makes a 16 oz smoothie

1 large handful of spinach  
1 cup frozen mixed berries  
1 scoop vanilla whey protein  
¼ avocado or 1 tbsp avocado oil  
8 oz water



Add ingredients in order  
and blend until smooth.

# The Importance of Staying Hydrated

We all know how important water is — after all, it's essential to life and critical for optimal performance! Progressive dehydration from exercise or fireground operations impairs performance, mental capacity and perception of effort — and it can be life threatening. Throughout the chaos of running calls, it is extremely important to pay close attention to how you are hydrating before, during and after.

So now the questions are:

## HOW MUCH TO DRINK?

Making a blanket statement about how much everyone should drink is difficult. That's why recommendations are based on your individual **weight**.

### 0.5 OZ. OF WATER PER LB. OF BODYWEIGHT

Example: A 150-pound person should drink at least 75 ounces daily.

## WHAT TO DRINK?

Water. Always start with water.

In fact, **MOST** of your fluid intake should be water. This doesn't mean you can't enjoy your morning cup of joe. That just means most of that fluid you're drinking should be plain water. Once you reach those upper limits of water consumption, or during times of excessive sweat loss during exercise or fireground operations, it is important to keep electrolytes in balance.

Adding in an electrolyte tab (e.g., Nuun) or even making your own drink ensures the water gets fully absorbed into your body. Hint: Gatorade and other sports drinks are **NOT** the best option, as they often contain the wrong combination of electrolytes and carbs and can cause GI distress. Two easy solutions: 1) Mix up a homemade recipe such as the one below or 2) add 1/8 - 1/4 teaspoon of sea salt to your water bottle and shake to dissolve.



## A QUICK AND EASY RECIPE FOR A SPORTS DRINK:

4 cups water (option to do half with coconut water)

½ tsp. calcium magnesium powder

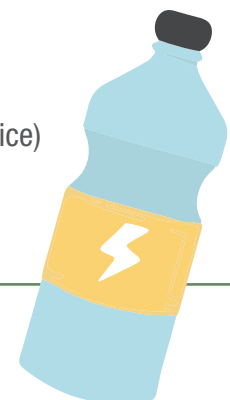
1 tbsp honey

¼ tsp. Himalayan Pink sea salt

½ cup 100% juice (ex: orange juice)

Option: 2 tbsp. lemon juice

**Directions:** Mix all ingredients together in a pitcher and stir until the salt dissolves.



# Stress, Sleep and Recovery

A healthy body isn't just about food and exercise (although they're important). It's also about how you think and feel – and what's important to you.

Stress management, quality sleep and adequate recovery can make the difference in many aspects of your progress. Your job as a fire fighter is hard mentally, physically and emotionally. The best way to recover is to stick to a quality nutrition plan, keep good sleep habits and build in time to de-stress with activities you enjoy. Quiet time on the patio, spending time with friends or a nice evening walk with the dog.

## QUALITY SLEEP IS ESSENTIAL TO YOUR HEALTH — AND YOUR WAISTLINE.

Regardless of whether you are at the station or at home, here are some tips to improve sleep quality:

### On-Shift Strategies:

Sleep in a dark, cold room. Lower the temperature if you can and black out windows.

Use light blankets to prevent overheating.

If you bring your own bedding, opt for natural, breathable fabric, such as cotton.

### At-Home Strategies:

Try to get at least seven hours of sleep each night that you are not on shift.

Take a hot shower before bed, with the last 1-2 minutes using cold water.

Stay off electronic devices 30 minutes before lights out.



## REMEMBER — EVERYTHING COUNTS, NO MATTER HOW LITTLE.

Disclaimer: The information contained in this document is for general education purposes only and is not intended to treat, cure or prevent any disease or medical conditions. Check with your health practitioner before making diet and lifestyle changes.