

Canada's *new* Food Guide – Load up on cauliflower, lighten up on carbs

I must confess. Even as nutrition enthusiast, reading Canada's Food Guide is like dining on tree bark – it's a little dry and not very satisfying. As busy people, all we want to know is what to eat, how much to eat, and how guilty should we feel about cheating once in a while.

Admittedly, the task of making nutrition guidelines specific enough to benefit the individual, yet general enough to apply to all ages and lifestyles is a difficult one. One look at Vancouver's diverse and bustling restaurant scene will tell you how unique our tastes and lifestyles are. You can order rice in broth, rolled into sushi, baked in a muffin, formed into burgers, or rice cakes, rice pasta, rice pudding, (r)ice-cream and even a frothy rice shake – and that's in one Vancouver city block.

Can one guide really serve everyone? Yes! By gnawing through the bark, the new Canada Food Guide delivers one key message that everyone can bite into.

The new Food Guide has made a bold change to how we think of a traditional meal. You may be surprised to learn that past Guides have recommended that we consume more grain products than any other food group. This year, fruits and vegetables have taken over top spot. That's right folks, we need to eat more fruits and veggies than we eat bread, cereal, rice and pasta... combined!

At the risk of sounding melodramatic, this single recommendation should affect how we shop for our groceries, cook our meals and serve our plates. When we grocery shop, we need to fill our cart with more fruits and vegetables than bread, cereal, rice and pasta. When we cook, we need to put more vegetables in the pot, than rice. The finale - when we serve our plates, half the plate should be brimming with brightly colored vegetables or fruit. This is how simple habits can provide the right balance of foods that will make you look and feel better.

Let me clear: I am no fan of the stylish low carb diets, but I do think that most of us do overeat on carbs – in their many forms.

This means real but simple changes when dining out. Consider the pasta dish that you order on your night out. A typical restaurant dish of pasta has about 1000 Calories and contains 7 cups of pasta - roughly double your grain allotment for an entire day. How much of your plate is occupied by pasta, compared to the two lonely broccoli florets adorning the plate? I am not saying that dining out needs to feature a plate of broccoli with a couple of noodles on the side, but even with my love of Greek food, do I really need bread, rice and potatoes all in one meal?

And... about that lunch. One bagel packs the carbs of 4 slices of bread - half of our daily carb quota. Panini bread and muffins have even more. I understand that carbs fly at us from all directions, but don't despair, a few carefully planned choices can bring balance back. For instance, when I order my beloved lamb souvlaki, I ask for double salad instead of rice, since the potatoes and bread are more than enough. When I order pasta, I ask for a side salad and take ½ the pasta home in a doggy bag.

Get the message? Half the plate should always be veggies and fruits. So next time you reach for a cracker, grab a carrot too.

Each one of us can benefit from a personal diet makeover and Canada's Food Guide offers us an important step in the right direction. So, yes! The new Canada Food Guide's bark is worth the bite for everyone. To view or order your copy of the food guide, go to www.canadasfoodguide.org.

Eating right can be easy and may add years to your life. Cristina Sutter is a Registered Dietitian with a Masters degree in Nutrition. She is available for personal or group nutrition counselling (served with personality!). Reach her today at Satori Integrative Health Centre by calling 604.274.7224 or by email at cristina.sutter@gmail.com. For more information, visit www.satoriintegrativehealth.com.