

# 28 easy and healthy meals for breakfast, lunch, and dinner

Meal planning can be very helpful when trying to eat healthy. Having a list of go-to meals that are both nutritious and easy to make can save you time and money, especially when the recipes use pantry staples or long-lasting ingredients that you likely have on hand.

Here's are 28 easy and healthy breakfasts, lunches, and dinners, including some kid-friendly and low budget options.

## Breakfast

**1. Overnight oats** Overnight oats are an easy breakfast option that requires no prep time in the morning. Plus, they're made with basic ingredients that won't break the bank.

Oats are also a good source of beta glucan fiber, which may help lower your cholesterol levels and reduce your risk of heart disease (1 Trusted Source). There are tons of overnight oat recipes on the internet, but I especially like these basic banana overnight oats.

**2. Loaded avocado toast:** Avocado toast can be a nutritious breakfast, as avocados are a good source of healthy fats and very filling. Start with a toasted slice of 100% whole grain, rye, or sourdough bread. In a small bowl, smash together half of an avocado with some lime or lemon juice. Spread this on top of the toast. For a protein boost, add one or two eggs, or smash white beans into the avocado for a vegan option. Top with crumbled cheese, chopped nuts, seeds, baby greens, or cherry tomatoes.

**3. Broccoli and cheese egg bake:** Eggs are an excellent source of protein, as well as



several vitamins and minerals that are important for health. Make this 12-serving egg bake in advance, and enjoy nutritious leftovers all week long for hassle-free mornings. It's a reader favorite on my recipe blog and highly customizable. Feel free to add sliced bell peppers, chopped spinach, or mushrooms, and sub any type of cheese or milk you have on hand.

Get the full recipe for my easy broccoli and cheese egg bake here.

**4. Yogurt and fruit parfaits:** Yogurt provides calcium, an important mineral for strong bones, making it a great addition to your breakfast (2). Yogurt parfaits are enjoyable for both kids and adults, and you don't even need a specific recipe to make them. If you have some time in the morning,

set out Greek yogurt, fresh fruit, granola, nuts, and seeds for your family to make their own parfaits. To keep the added sugar content low, use plain yogurt and granola that doesn't contain a lot of sweeteners.

You can also prep the parfaits in advance. Put them together in individual jars and keep them in the fridge.

**5. Chocolate cherry chia pudding:** With only a handful of ingredients, chia pudding is a simple but filling option for breakfast. The best part is that you can put the recipe together at night and wake up to a creamy and delicious pudding the next morning.

What's more, chia seeds are loaded with antioxidant compounds. Antioxidants help fight reactive molecules called free radicals, which damage cells and may lead to disease



(3 Trusted Source). Chia pudding can be made in many variations, but this chocolate cherry chia pudding is one of my favorites.

**6. Bell pepper egg cups:** For a simple, veggie-loaded breakfast, slice bell peppers in half lengthwise and remove the stems and seeds. Place them into a greased baking dish and cook them for 15 minutes at 350°F (175°C). Remove the dish from the oven and carefully crack an egg into each pepper. Bake them for an additional 15 minutes or until the eggs are cooked to your liking. Garnish with herbs, red pepper flakes, or cheese before eating.

Two pepper halves, each filled with an egg, comprise one serving. Not only will you get protein from the eggs, but bell peppers are a great source of nutrients that sup-

port immunity, such as vitamins A and C (4 Trusted Source). Note that cooking can destroy vitamin C. Therefore, a shorter cooking time is preferable when trying to preserve vitamin C content.

**7. Peanut butter granola bars:** Instead of settling for a store-bought option that might be loaded with added sugar, give homemade granola bars a try. Making them at home can save you money, too. This recipe for peanut butter granola bars is easy to make and kid-friendly. Plus, it includes tips on making them vegan. Studies suggest that the compounds found in peanuts can block the absorption of cholesterol from the diet, which may benefit those with high cholesterol levels that put them at an increased risk of heart disease —Health Line

## Brazil health service in 'worst crisis in its history'

Brazil is experiencing a historic collapse of its health service as intensive care units in hospitals run out of capacity, its leading health institute, Fiocruz, has warned.

Covid-19 units in all but two of Brazil's 27 states are at or above 80% capacity, according to Fiocruz. In Rio Grande do Sul state there are no intensive care beds available at all.

The warning came as the country registered its highest daily death toll yet with 2,841 dying within 24 hours. That figure constitutes a large jump from the previous high of 2,286 on 10 March. In a statement [in Portuguese], Fiocruz said that the situation was "extremely critical in the entire country".

"The analysis by our researchers suggests it's the biggest collapse of the hospital and health service in Brazil's history."

Health officials in Brazil's most populous state, São Paulo, which on Tuesday also registered a record daily death toll, have called on the new health minister to consider imposing a national lockdown. Marcelo Queiroga - who will be formally appointed as health minister later on Wednesday - is the fourth person to hold the office since the pandemic began.

He was given the job on Monday by President Jair Bolsonaro, who has faced widespread criticism over his handling of the pandemic. President Bolsonaro has consistently opposed quarantine measures introduced by state governors, arguing that the collateral damage to the economy would be worse than the effects of the virus itself.



Lockdown ahead? In remarks to the media on Tuesday, Mr Queiroga urged Brazilians to wear masks and wash their hands but stopped short of endorsing a lockdown or even social distancing measures. The cardiologist told CNN Brasil that while "lockdowns were used in extreme situations, they could not be government policy". That drew a strong response from João Gabbardo, the head of Sao Paulo's Covid-19 emergency body.

Posting on Twitter, Mr Gabbardo said private hospitals had been requesting space in the public health system because of the demand for intensive care beds. "When he [Queiroga] takes over, he will face the worst numbers in the pandemic," Mr Gabbardo tweeted, adding: "Suggestion: do not take a

stand against a national lockdown." President Bolsonaro has consistently played down the dangers of the pandemic - last week telling people to "stop whining" about Covid-19. Brazil has the second highest number of infections and deaths in the world, behind the US. In total, the country has registered more than 11.6 million infections and 282,000 deaths since the pandemic began. The latest surge in cases has been attributed to the spread of highly contagious variants of the virus. The government has also faced criticism for the slow rollout of vaccines. It is currently distributing the Oxford-AstraZeneca and Chinese-developed CoronaVac jabs and has placed orders for the Pfizer-BioNTech, Johnson & Johnson and Russian Sputnik V

## China's first local COVID-19 case since February was vaccinated: State media

SHANGHAI: China's first local coronavirus case since February was a staff worker at a hospital and had received two shots of a vaccine between end-January and early February, state media reported on Saturday.

The patient, identified by her surname Liu, had been working in the quarantine area of a hospital in Xian city since Mar 4, and was mainly responsible for collecting samples of quarantined people for coronavirus testing, reported the Health Times.

The Health Times is listed as a newspaper published under the People's Daily, the official newspaper of China's ruling Communist Party.

China had reported the case on Thursday, making it the country's first locally transmitted case since Feb 14. The Health Times, citing a joint expert group of Shaanxi province where Xian city is located, said Liu was infected after being accidentally exposed while in the hospital's quarantine area.

The publication quoted Zeng Guang, former chief epidemiologist of China's Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, as saying that the protection rate of the vaccine is "not 100 per cent", and

that it is "relatively safe" rather than "absolutely safe", but the public should not doubt domestic vaccines due to this case. Backed by science, Lancome's Clarifique Dual Essence is a gentle formula suited for Asian skin that promotes exfoliation from within. "The efficacy rate of domestic vaccines in preventing severe cases in China is more than 90 per cent, and the overall protection rate is more than 70 per cent," said Zeng, adding that coronavirus treatment hospitals are high-risk areas where vaccinated medical staff cannot rule out the possibility of infection. Thirty-three staff working in the quarantine area with Liu had negative nucleic acid test results, and have undergone centralised medical isolation and observation.

The Health Times did not specify which vaccine Liu had received.

They join a vaccine from Sinovac Biotech, also approved last month, and another from Sinopharm's Beijing unit approved last year. A fifth vaccine, developed by the Institute of Microbiology of Chinese Academy of Sciences, was also approved for emergency use in China, the institute announced on Mar 15. —Reuters

## Why the pandemic is becoming a wake-up call for your personal health



The pandemic has shed a blinding light on too many Americans' failure to follow the well-established scientific principles of personal health and well-being. There are several reasons this country, one of the world's richest and most highly developed, has suffered much higher rates of Covid-19 infections and deaths than many poorer and less well-equipped populations.

Older Americans have been particularly hard hit by this novel coronavirus. When cases surged at the end of last year, Covid-19 became the nation's leading cause of death, deadlier than heart disease and cancer.

But while there's nothing anyone can do to stop the march of time, several leading risk factors for Covid-19 infections and deaths stem from how many Americans

conduct their lives from childhood on and their misguided reliance on medicine to patch up their self-inflicted wounds.

After old age, obesity is the second leading risk factor for death among those who become infected and critically ill with Covid-19. Seventy per cent of Americans adults are now overweight, and more than a third are obese. Two other major risks for Covid, Type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure, are most often the result of excess weight, which in turn reflects unhealthy dietary and exercise habits. These conditions may be particularly prevalent in communities of colour, who are likewise disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

Several people I know packed on quite a few pounds of health-robbing body fat this past year, and not because they lacked the ability to purchase and consume a more nu-

tritious plant-based diet or to exercise regularly within or outside their homes. One male friend in his 50s unexpectedly qualified for the Covid vaccine by having an underlying health condition when his doctor found he'd become obese since the pandemic began.

A Harris Poll, conducted for the American Psychological Association in late February, revealed that 42 per cent of respondents had gained an average of 29 "pandemic pounds," increasing their Covid risk.

So what can we learn from these trends? Tom Vilsack, the new Secretary of Agriculture, put it bluntly a week ago in Politico Pro's Morning Agriculture newsletter: "We cannot have the level of obesity. We cannot have the level of diabetes we have. We cannot have the level of chronic disease ... It will literally cripple our country." Of course, in recent decades many of the policies of the department Vilsack now heads have contributed mightily to Americans' access to inexpensive foods that flesh out their bones with unwholesome calories and undermine their health. Two telling examples: The government subsidises the production of both soybeans and corn, most of which is used to feed livestock.

Not only does livestock production make a major contribution to global warming, much of its output ends up as inexpensive, often highly processed fast foods that can prompt people to overeat and raise their risk of developing heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and kidney disease. But there are no subsidies for the kinds of fruits and vegetables that can counter the disorders that render people more vulnerable to the coronavirus.

Early in the pandemic, when most businesses and entertainment venues were forced to close, toilet paper was not the only commodity stripped from market shelves. The country was suddenly faced with a shortage of flour and yeast as millions of Americans "stuck" at home went on a baking frenzy. While I understood their need to relieve stress, feel productive and perhaps help others less able or so inclined, bread, muffins and cookies were not the most wholesome products that might have emerged from pandemic kitchens.

When calorie-rich foods and snacks are

in the home, they can be hard to resist when there's little else to prompt the release of pleasure-enhancing brain chemicals. To no one's great surprise, smoking rates also rose during the pandemic, introducing yet another risk to Covid susceptibility.

And there's been a run on alcoholic beverages. National sales of alcohol during one week in March 2020 were 54 per cent higher than the comparable week the year before. The Harris Poll corroborated that nearly one adult in four drank more alcohol than usual to cope with pandemic-related stress. Not only is alcohol a source of nutritionally empty calories, its wanton consumption can result in reckless behaviour that further raises susceptibility to Covid.

Well before the pandemic prompted a rise in calorie consumption, Americans were eating significantly more calories each day than they realised, thanks in large part to the ready availability of ultra-processed foods, especially those that tease, "you can't eat just one." (Example: Corn on the cob is unprocessed, canned corn is minimally processed, but Doritos are ultra-processed).

In a brief but carefully designed diet study, Kevin D Hall and colleagues at the National Institutes of Health surreptitiously gave 20 adults diets that were rich in either ultra-processed foods or unprocessed foods matched for calorie, sugar, fat, sodium,



fiber and protein content. Told to eat as much as they wanted, the unsuspecting participants consumed 500 calories a day more on the ultra-processed diet.

If you've been reading my column for years, you already know that I'm not a fanatic when it comes to food. I have many containers of ice cream in my freezer; cookies, crackers and even chips in my cupboard; and I enjoy a burger now and then. But my daily diet is based primarily on vegetables, with fish, beans and nonfat milk my main sources of protein. My consumption of snacks and ice cream is portion-controlled and, along with daily exercise, has enabled me to remain weight-stable despite yearlong pandemic stress and occasional

