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Eating Well in a World of Diet Noise

In today’s world of superfoods, viral diets, calorie trackers, and endless nutrition advice, eating well can feel complicated. One day carbohydrates are the villain; the next day fats are. Some say avoid processed food entirely; others promote convenience

By **Sanjiv Das** | April 24, 2026



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In today's world of superfoods, viral diets, calorie trackers, and endless nutrition advice, eating well can feel complicated. One day carbohydrates are the villain; the next day fats are. Some say avoid processed food entirely; others promote convenience and fortification. In the middle of all this noise, I often return to a simple question: What does a healthy diet actually look like for me?

***Dr Seema Puri, Prof (Retd.) Institute of Home Economics, University of Delhi, Independent Nutrition Consultant and Nutrition Advisor IFBA**, gives an insight*

A few decades ago, the focus was on a balanced diet. In developing countries like India, there was a high prevalence of undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies. The priority was simple: eat enough to meet nutritional needs. However, with changing lifestyles and increasing urbanisation, a new challenge emerged. Alongside undernutrition, overweight, diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease began to rise that creates a "double burden" of malnutrition.

This shift required a change in thinking. The concept of a balanced diet evolved into that of a healthy diet, focusing not only on quantity but also on quality that ensures metabolic health while maintaining nutrient adequacy. A healthy diet today is about preventing both deficiency and excess.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) defines a healthy diet as one that is adequate, diverse, balanced, and moderate. It supports active lives, promotes overall health, and reduces the risk of noncommunicable diseases. It also incorporates food safety and sustainability, encouraging higher consumption of fruits, vegetables, and legumes while limiting processed foods, salt, sugar, and unhealthy fats.

Determining my daily healthy diet, therefore, is not about strict rules or deprivation. It is about adequacy, balance, diversity, moderation, and sustainability. It is about nourishing my body while allowing space for enjoyment.

The ICMR-NIN Dietary Guidelines 2024 provide practical direction tailored to Indian populations. Their My Plate approach emphasizes proportion and diversity rather than elimination. It

suggests limiting cereals and millets to not more than 45 per cent of total energy, allocating up to 15 per cent to pulses, beans, dairy, or lean meats, and deriving the remaining calories from nuts, vegetables, and fruits. This translates broadly into 50–55 per cent carbohydrates, 10–15 per cent protein, and 20–30 per cent fats.

Fats, oils, sugar, and salt are not eliminated but consumed in small, measured amounts. Hydration and physical activity complement this approach, making it practical for everyday life. Balance, however, does not mean eating perfectly at every meal. It means that over days and weeks, the overall pattern supports health. One festive meal does not undo good habits, just as one healthy meal does not compensate for consistent excess. The key is consistency.

So, when I plan my daily diet, I think in proportions rather than extremes. Instead of labelling foods as allowed or forbidden, I aim to ensure that most of what I eat nourishes me, while a small portion satisfies taste and social enjoyment. A sustainable diet includes mostly “good for me” foods with controlled portions of fun for me foods.

A diet that feels restrictive rarely lasts. Food is not just nutrition but also culture, celebration, and pleasure. Eliminating enjoyable foods often leads to frustration and overeating, while overindulgence undermines health. The balance lies in mindful choices. If I enjoy pizza, I can opt for a smaller portion, add more vegetables, reduce cheese, and avoid sugary drinks. If I like sweets, I can limit them to occasional treats instead of daily habits.

Portion control is where balance becomes real. Even nutritious foods can lead to excess if consumed in large quantities. Nuts are healthy, but a handful is enough. Oils are essential, but they should be measured, not poured freely.

Simple habits can make a meaningful difference. Using smaller plates, serving food in the kitchen rather than at the table, and eating slowly all help regulate intake and improve awareness of fullness cues.

Moderation is not deprivation but awareness. Gradually reducing sugar and salt allows taste preferences to adjust naturally over time. Ultimately, the principle Eat to Live, Not Live to Eat captures the essence of a healthy diet. Food should fuel my body, not control my life. It means planning meals, respecting hunger and fullness, and making choices that support long-

term well-being. Occasional indulgence is part of life but daily excess is not.

Balance is not rigid; it evolves with age, activity, and circumstances. Yet its foundation remains constant which is proportion, diversity, moderation, and mindfulness. It is a lifelong approach that nourishes, energizes, and sustains.

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