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Simple Side Rotation

Vegetables, fruits, healthy fats, and whole grains that build the rest of the plate — aligned with the 2025–2030 Dietary Guidelines

Once the protein is decided, the rest of the plate gets easier. The new federal guidelines put vegetables and fruits at the wide top of the inverted pyramid alongside protein and dairy, which means they aren't a side note anymore. They're meant to fill at least half the plate at most meals, and the family that pulls this off is the family that decided what the rotation looks like before Tuesday at five o'clock.

The trick is to choose two or three vegetables for the week and reuse them across meals. This is the part that prevents over-shopping and food waste, and it's the part most planning systems leave out. Buy what's in season, buy it in volume, and let it carry the week.



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The Five-a-Day Reality The guidelines call for around five servings of fruits and vegetables a day for most adults. Spread that across breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks and the math gets manageable. Skip vegetables at breakfast and you're already behind by mid-morning.

Meal	A realistic vegetable and fruit serving
Breakfast	Berries with yogurt, sautéed greens with eggs, or a handful of fruit alongside bacon and eggs
Mid-morning snack	An apple with cheese, raw vegetables with a real-food dip, or a small handful of nuts and fruit
Lunch	A salad as the base, or roasted vegetables alongside leftover protein
Afternoon snack	Carrots and almond butter, an orange, full-fat cottage cheese with cucumber
Dinner	Half the plate vegetables — roasted, sautéed, raw, or a combination



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The Vegetable Rotation

Pick two or three vegetables for the week and use them across multiple meals. Cooked one way Monday, raw on Tuesday, blended into soup on Wednesday. The repetition is the point — it's how you avoid the third trip to the grocery store and the bag of forgotten kale.

Category	Options to rotate	How to stretch them across the week
Cruciferous (the heavy hitters)	Broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, kale	Roast a sheet-pan on Sunday for two dinners; massage raw kale for salads; shred cabbage for slaw and tacos
Leafy greens	Spinach, romaine, arugula, chard, mixed greens	A salad bowl prepped Sunday lasts three days; sauté tougher greens with garlic; wilt into soups and eggs
Root vegetables	Carrots, beets, sweet potatoes, parsnips, turnips	Roast a tray on Sunday; raw carrots for snacks; mashed sweet potatoes as a side



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Alliums (the flavor base)	Onions, garlic, leeks, scallions	Caramelize a batch on Sunday; raw scallions on top of bowls and tacos; garlic in everything
Squash and gourds	Zucchini, yellow squash, butternut, acorn, spaghetti squash	Spiralize for a pasta swap; roast in chunks; cube into soups
Tomatoes and peppers	Tomatoes, bell peppers, cucumbers (technically a fruit, used as a vegetable)	Raw on plates, in salads, sliced as snacks; roasted into sauces
Mushrooms	Button, cremini, portobello, shiitake	Sauté for breakfast eggs, dinner toppings, soup bases



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The Fruit Rotation

Whole fruit, eaten in its real form rather than juiced or processed, is what the guidelines have in mind. Eat vegetables and fruits throughout the day, focusing on whole foods. [Healthline](#)

Category	Options to rotate	When they shine
Berries	Blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, blackberries	Breakfast yogurt, snacks, frozen for smoothies and oatmeal
Stone fruit (in season)	Peaches, plums, cherries, apricots, nectarines	Summer snacks, sliced over yogurt, grilled with savory dinners
Apples and pears	Whatever's local and in season	Daily snacks, sliced with cheese, baked with cinnamon for dessert



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Citrus	Oranges, grapefruit, lemons, limes	Winter rotation when other fruit is expensive; lemons and limes for cooking year-round
Tropical (occasional)	Bananas, mangoes, pineapple	Smoothies, snacks, frozen for hot weather
Melons (in season)	Watermelon, cantaloupe, honeydew	Summer hydration, snack platters, breakfast



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Healthy Fats — The Middle of the Pyramid

The new guidelines name healthy fats explicitly and give a short list of what to use. When adding fats to meals, to “prioritize oils with essential fatty acids, such as olive oil. Other options can include butter or beef tallow,” Fat is what keeps everyone full between meals, makes vegetables taste like something worth eating, and helps the body absorb the fat-soluble vitamins in the produce you just bought. [CNN](#)

Fat	Best use	Why it earns its place
Olive oil (extra virgin)	Salads, dressings, low-to-medium heat cooking, finishing	Named in the guidelines for its essential fatty acids
Butter (real, ideally grass-fed)	Cooking eggs, finishing vegetables, baking, spreading on sourdough	Named in the guidelines as a healthy added fat
Beef tallow	High-heat cooking, roasting potatoes, frying eggs	Named in the guidelines; stable at high heat



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Ghee	Same uses as butter; better for those sensitive to dairy proteins	Stable at high heat, long shelf life
Coconut oil	Medium-to-high heat cooking, baking	Stable at heat; useful in rotation
Avocado oil	High-heat cooking, dressings	Mild flavor, high smoke point
Whole-food fats	Avocado, nuts, seeds, olives, full-fat dairy, fatty fish	The guidelines explicitly name these as fat-rich whole foods

The guidelines also point clearly toward what to avoid. Beef tallow—a favorite ingredient of the MAHA movement, which Secretary Kennedy touts as a healthy alternative to seed oils. Industrial seed oils — soybean, corn, canola, vegetable oil blends — are what the new framing moves away from. [Food Safety](#)

Choose	Skip or limit
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Olive oil, butter, beef tallow, ghee, coconut oil, avocado oil	Soybean oil, corn oil, canola oil, vegetable oil, margarine, shortening
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Whole Grains — The Narrow Middle

The guidelines call for two to four servings of whole grains per day, with refined grains pushed to the narrow bottom of the pyramid. The shift is from grain as the foundation of the plate to grain as a supporting player in a smaller portion.

Whole grain	Use it for	Quality cues
Sourdough bread	Toast with eggs and avocado, alongside soup	Real sourdough from a bakery, made with simple ingredients; long fermentation
Oats (steel-cut or rolled)	Breakfast with full-fat milk, butter, and berries	Plain rolled or steel-cut, not the flavored packets



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Brown rice or wild rice	Side to roasted protein, base for grain bowls	Sourced simply, cooked in bone broth for added flavor
Real corn	On the cob in season, in soups, ground into polenta	Whole or stone-ground, not the highly processed corn-based snacks
Quinoa (technically a seed)	Side dishes, salads, breakfast bowls	Rinsed before cooking; works for those avoiding wheat
White rice (used in moderation)	Cooked in bone broth as a side	Easier to digest than brown rice for some bodies; the guidelines focus on whole grains, but real white rice prepared traditionally has a place



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Fermented Foods — A Small, Important Category

The 2026 guidelines mentioned gut health for the first time. For the first time, the DGAs mention gut health and microbiome, again warning against highly processed foods and encouraging fruits and vegetables, fermented foods, and high-fiber foods to promote balanced and robust gut flora. A spoonful of something fermented at most meals is a small habit with a big payoff. [Food Safety](#)

Fermented food	How to use it
Sauerkraut	A forkful alongside eggs, sausage, or any rich meal
Kimchi	Topping for grain bowls, eggs, and rice
Real pickles (lacto-fermented, refrigerated)	Snacks, alongside sandwiches
Plain full-fat yogurt	Breakfast base, dressing base, snacks



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Kefir	Drunk straight, blended into smoothies, used in baking
Real cheese (aged, traditionally made)	Snacks, melted on vegetables, alongside fruit



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This Week's Side Plan

Before you shop, fill in what you're choosing for the week. The blanks are the system — the more concrete you are here, the less you're deciding later.

Category	This week's choices
Vegetables (two or three to repeat)	
Fruits (two or three to keep on hand)	
Cooking fats	
Finishing fats	



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Whole grains	
Fermented add-ons	



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The Stretch Strategy

The same vegetables can carry three or four meals if you cook them in different ways. This is how a head of cauliflower becomes Monday's roasted side, Wednesday's cauliflower rice, and Saturday's soup.

Vegetable	Three ways to use it across the week
Cauliflower	Roasted as a side, riced as a grain swap, blended into soup
Cabbage	Shredded into slaw, sautéed with butter and salt, fermented into kraut
Sweet potatoes	Roasted in chunks, mashed as a side, sliced into a hash with eggs
Broccoli	Roasted with olive oil, raw in salads, blended into soup



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Carrots	Raw with dip, roasted with herbs, grated into salads
Zucchini	Sautéed, spiralized, baked into a frittata



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Common Mistakes Worth Naming

Mistake	What to do instead
Buying ten different vegetables and using none of them	Pick two or three for the week and commit to them
Skipping vegetables at breakfast	Sautéed greens with eggs, or fruit alongside; aim for color at every meal
Treating vegetables as a side, not a centerpiece	Half the plate, every meal, per the new pyramid
Cooking everything in industrial seed oils	Switch the cooking fats to olive oil, butter, tallow, ghee, or avocado oil
Defaulting to refined grains as the base of meals	Whole grains in smaller portions; protein and vegetables as the base
Ignoring fermented foods	A forkful of kraut or a spoonful of yogurt at most meals



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AI Prompt: The Side Rotation Planner

Help me plan vegetables, fruits, healthy fats, and whole grains for my family's week, aligned with the 2025–2030 U.S. Dietary Guidelines and the inverted food pyramid.

Family details:

- Number of adults and children:
- Local growing season (or what's in season at the store):
- Any allergies, sensitivities, or dietary considerations:

Goals:

- Vegetables fill at least half the plate at most meals
- Five servings of fruits and vegetables per day across the family



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- Two or three vegetables chosen for the week and reused across meals
- Healthy fats from whole foods and traditional cooking fats — olive oil, butter, beef tallow, ghee, avocado, nuts
- No industrial seed oils (soybean, corn, canola, vegetable oil)
- Two to four servings of whole grains per day
- One or two fermented foods incorporated daily for gut health
- Avoid highly processed foods and added sugars

Please:

- 1) Suggest two or three vegetables to anchor the week, with three ways to use each across different meals
- 2) Suggest two or three fruits to keep on hand
- 3) Recommend cooking fats and finishing fats for the week



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- 4) Suggest whole grain options that fit the protein plan
- 5) Recommend a fermented food rotation
- 6) Flag any items I should buy in volume to save money

Keep it practical, budget-aware, and seasonal. Prioritize whole foods.

