

Free guide

Discover ZOE's 8 science-backed nutrition principles for better health – and easy ways to incorporate them into your everyday life.

How to Eat in 2026

ZOE is a nutrition science company leading the gut health revolution.

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New year. *New way* to eat.

“Our diet is one of the most powerful tools that we have to improve our health, and research quite clearly shows that if you change your diet at any point in your life, you can add lots of healthy years.”

— PROF. SARAH BERRY
ZOE'S CHIEF SCIENTIST & A WORLD-LEADER IN
PERSONALISED NUTRITION

Every January, we repeat the same broken cycle when it comes to our diet: restrict, count, punish — and we end up right back where we started.

Worse still, when we seek practical advice online, we're met with mixed messages from unqualified influencers.

And we wonder why over 80% of diets fail.

We're here to help.

Prof. Tim Spector, ZOE's Scientific Co-founder, and Prof. Sarah Berry, ZOE's Chief Scientist, have distilled decades of nutrition and gut health research into 8 simple, science-backed nutrition principles.

These aren't strict rules, but clear, practical advice, grounded in evidence, designed to help you adopt new healthy eating habits that can transform how you feel this year, and for years to come.



What's *inside*

It's time to break the January restriction cycle. Get 8 simple, science-backed nutrition principles for better health – informed by ZOE's latest research.

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The *people* behind our principles

Science is at the heart of everything we do here at ZOE. We run the world's largest nutrition study and pride ourselves on delivering truly evidence-based advice.

If you caught our [8 Ways to Eat Better in 2026](#) podcast episode, you'll know that behind our 8 new nutrition principles are two of our world-leading scientists:



PROF. TIM SPECTOR
ZOE's Scientific Co-founder

Tim is one of the world's top 100 most-cited scientists. He's a world expert on gut health, a Professor of Epidemiology at King's College London, and ZOE's Scientific Co-founder.



PROF. SARAH BERRY
ZOE's Chief Scientist

Sarah is a world leader in personalized nutrition, having completed over 30 clinical trials on humans. She's also a Professor of Nutrition at King's College London and Chief Scientist at ZOE.

For the past 12 months, Tim and Sarah have been busy working behind the scenes with our science team to develop 8 core nutrition principles for better health — all based on the latest scientific research, not what's shared on Instagram by unqualified nutrition influencers.



ZOE's 8 science-backed nutrition principles

Eating *mindfully*

Our food choices are crucial to our health, but these decisions are often hijacked by unhealthy, heavily processed foods designed to make us overeat, or eat “mindlessly”.

Many of these foods are created to hit that “bliss point” — the irresistible combination of sugar, fat, and salt that makes foods hyper-palatable to override fullness cues, while their soft texture and high energy content make it easy to overeat them quickly.

“Mindful eating” can be a powerful first step to combat mindless eating.

What is mindful eating?

We're not always fully aware of what we're eating, especially when we multitask while eating or snacking.

Mindful eating is the practice of being fully present and aware while you dine — and beforehand, when you're buying, cooking, and serving your food.

“In a way, mindful eating is the antidote to what the food industry, with all its bliss points and all its careful chemistry, is trying to do.”

PROF. TIM SPECTOR
ZOE's Scientific Co-founder,
and one of the world's top
100 most-cited scientists

How can you eat mindfully?

Follow these simple steps to put mindful eating into practice.

1. HAVE PRESENT-MOMENT AWARENESS

As you eat, be aware of the smell, taste, and feel of your food, your internal bodily sensations, and the cues that guide your eating.

2. NOTICE WHAT YOUR BODY IS TELLING YOU

Is your brain or another area of your body urging you to eat? Learn to listen to your body's hunger cues and use them to choose when to start and stop eating.

3. ACCEPT FOOD-RELATED THOUGHTS

Acknowledge how you feel about the food. Do you like it? Do you dislike it? There are no right or wrong thoughts — mindful eating is about accepting whatever arises and not restricting yourself.

The app that puts mindful eating into practice



CREATING A NEW HABIT IS HARD

The new ZOE App makes mindful eating easier by helping you stay present and pause to appreciate the meal you are about to consume. You simply pause, snap a photo of your meal, and get personalised, evidence-based nutrition feedback in seconds.

With a better understanding of what you're eating and the help of Ziggie, your in-app nutrition coach, you can build healthier eating habits over time.

BECOME A ZOE MEMBER



PRINCIPLE 2

30+ plants

We know that eating more fruits and vegetables is good for our health. But why exactly should we aim for 30 different plants a week?

ZOE's research shows that eating 30 *different* plants each week is one of the most powerful ways to improve your gut microbiome.

Each plant brings unique prebiotics, or plant fibers, that feed different “good” gut bugs, helping your microbiome become more diverse and resilient. **A healthier gut supports better overall health.**

The Plant Counter in the [ZOE App](#) tracks your weekly plant count for you, so you always know how many you've eaten and how many more to aim for.



WHY WE RECOMMEND 30 PLANTS A WEEK

The recommendation stems from the findings of the [2018 American Gut Project](#).

- **The study:** This was a large-scale, international citizen-science study. Our Scientific Co-founder, Prof. Tim Spector, led the UK arm of the research.
- **The discovery:** Researchers analyzed the stool samples and dietary habits of thousands of participants. They found that people who consumed **30 or more different types of plants** each week had a significantly **more diverse and healthier gut microbiome** compared to those who ate 10 or fewer.

ARE YOU EATING 30 PLANTS A WEEK?

Did you know that some items in the spice aisle – and even the confectionery aisle – [can count as plants](#)? So you might be consuming more plants than you might realize. Your morning cup of coffee even counts!



How to add 30+ plants to your plate, instantly

Simply scoop and sprinkle Daily30+, ZOE's 30+ plant gut supplement, on your favourite meals. It's that simple. Whether you add it to your avocado toast in the morning or your soup at lunch, Daily30+ offers an easy, delicious way to support your gut and up your plant diversity.



What's Daily30+ made of?

Daily30+ is made with our proprietary blend of over 30 plants. It features 4g of fiber* and ingredients that support gut health, digestion, energy, and daily nutrition. Plus, it helps keep you feeling full.

- 8 x fruit & veg
- 8 x mushrooms
- 5 x herbs
- 6 x seeds
- 3 x nuts
- 2 x legumes & wholegrains
- 1 x seaweed
- 1 x kombucha

*Contains 4g of total fat per serving.

PRINCIPLE 3

Reduce high-risk *processed* foods

Ultra-processed foods (UPFs) are everywhere. They flood our grocery store shelves and now make up over half of our calorie intake.

Research shows that eating high levels of UPFs is linked to poorer health outcomes.

However, not all processed foods are created equal. Some may be high-risk to our health, while others might actually be beneficial.

WHAT ARE “HIGH-RISK” PROCESSED FOODS?

High-risk processed foods are the ones packed with additives, high levels of sugars, fats, and salts and altered to overeat without truly nourishing your body.

WHY SHOULD WE CUT DOWN ON THEM?

By reducing your intake of high-risk processed foods, you lower your exposure to these harmful properties and create more space for minimally processed, nutrient-rich foods that support better long-term health.

HOW TO SPOT HIGH-RISK PROCESSED FOODS

ZOE's Processed Food Risk Scale can help. Available in the [ZOE App](#), you quickly scan any label or barcode to learn which processed foods may pose a risk to your health. It's designed to help you shop healthier.



Cut down on processed foods with these science-backed swaps

2



Cold cuts > white meat or fish

Why this swap?

Pre-cooked or cured meats, like ham and salami, are often high in salt, saturated fats, and preservatives like nitrates, which, when eaten in excess, can be harmful to your health. Swapping them for white meat or fish gives you leaner protein, fewer processed ingredients, and more nutrients that support both brain and heart health.

4



Milk chocolate > dark chocolate

Why this swap?

Most milk chocolate is packed with sugar and offers very little nourishment (and not much cocoa). A good way to honor your craving is with dark chocolate (at least 70% cocoa). It's a natural source of fiber, vitamins and minerals, and has potential health benefits for your heart, brain, and gut.

1



Cheese slices > minimally processed cheese, like cheddar

Why this swap?

Heavily processed cheese contains added oils, emulsifiers, and extra salt. But that doesn't mean you need to skip cheese altogether. Choosing a less processed, fermented option like cheddar gives you healthy fats and natural probiotics your gut loves.

3



Swap sugary store-bought cereal > oats or wholegrain cereal

Why this swap?

Many store-bought cereals are high in refined carbs and added sugar. Swapping to plain oats or wholegrain cereals like low-sugar muesli or granola, and then adding healthy toppings like yogurt, berries, nuts or seeds, increases your intake of fiber, healthy fats, and polyphenols (powerful plant compounds), which are excellent for your gut microbes and help keep you feeling full.

5



Flavoured yoghurts > Greek yoghurt or kefir

Why this swap?

Flavoured yogurts often contain high amounts of added sugar. Plain Greek yogurt or kefir is naturally high in protein and contains gut-friendly bacteria. Adding fresh berries provides natural sweetness, and adding seeds boosts healthy fats and fiber without the hidden sugars.

PRINCIPLE 4

Focus on *quality*, not calories

- 80% of people who follow a diet that focuses on drastically reducing calorie intake end up almost back at their start weight after ~3 years.
- Not all calories are equal. Focusing on calories alone ignores the nutrient density of foods — it doesn't distinguish between a 100-calorie sugary snack and a 100-calorie serving of nutrient-dense nuts or vegetables. The latter provides essential vitamins, minerals, protein, and fiber.
- Calories are based on an estimate, and amounts can vary. “**100 calories**” on a snack or meal might actually be anywhere from **80–120 calories**.
- Even with exact portion control, you could absorb ~1/3 fewer calories than the label suggests — or much more, depending on how your body handles the food.
- Identical-calorie diets can lead to quite **different weight-loss results**, depending on what proportion of those calories is protein, fat, or carbs.
- Over time, focusing on calories alone may backfire — leading to nutritional deficiencies, poor satiety, overeating, or disordered eating.

THE QUALITY OF YOUR FOOD MATTERS FAR MORE THAN CALORIES

An avocado has more calories than a can of Coca-Cola — but it is one of the best things you can feed your gut. The number of calories in a food doesn't tell you anything about the other nutrients present, how good it is for your gut microbiome, how quickly it gets absorbed, or how many additives and preservatives it contains.

Rather than focusing on restriction, focus on what you can add to your plate to support your gut and overall health.



Why calories don't count
with obesity scientist,
Prof. Giles Yeo

THE WORLD'S #1
NUTRITION PODCAST

[LISTEN NOW](#)

Set your eating *window*

An eating window, or Time-Restricted Eating (TRE), is a period of time in which you eat your food. For example, you could have a 10-hour eating window, meaning that you have your first meal of the day at 8 am, and your final meal at 6 pm.

Reducing your eating window can improve **metabolic health, blood pressure, cholesterol levels, and inflammatory measures**. And you don't need a highly restrictive window – even small adjustments can lead to positive change.

The Big IF Study: Our findings

In October 2022, ZOE launched the largest-ever community experiment into intermittent fasting (IF). It's called [The Big IF Study](#), which focused on Time-Restricted Eating (TRE).

Over 37,000 contributors completed a 3-week trial where they maintained a 10-hour eating window. The results were impressive:

- **22%** reported an increase in **energy** and an **11%** increase in **mood**
- **64%** saw a reduction in **uncomfortable bloating symptoms**
- **58%** of participants found they consumed fewer **snacks** throughout the day

[READ MORE ABOUT THE STUDY](#)



Eat the *rainbow*

The idea to "eat the rainbow" — consume a wide variety of colorful fruits and vegetables — is now strongly supported by science, due to compounds called phytonutrients, including **polyphenols**.

Polyphenols are a plant's natural defence chemicals. When we eat brightly colored plants, we ingest these polyphenols, which act as crucial fuel for our "good" gut bugs.

The intensity of color directly relates to the polyphenol content. For instance, a purple carrot contains more polyphenols than a white carrot. Noticeable bitterness (like broccoli or black coffee) is another key indicator of high polyphenol content.

PROVING THE POWER OF FIBER-RICH PLANTS

ZOE's recent paper on the gut microbiome, [published in Nature](#), found that diet quality itself — particularly the intake of diverse, fiber-rich foods — can change the microbiome's composition in ways that support better health.

In other words, when our diets change, our microbes and health can change with them.

Once again, we're thrilled to have our research recognized by Nature, the premier international scientific journal.

[READ MORE ABOUT ZOE'S MICROBIOME BREAKTHROUGH](#)



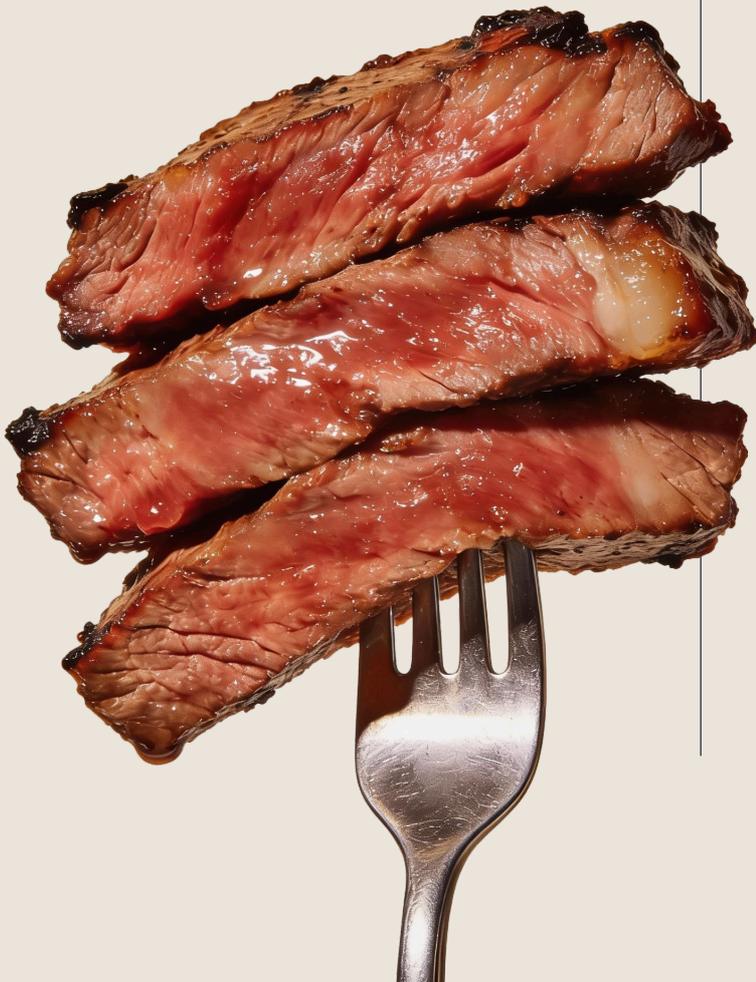
Consuming a diverse range of colorful and bitter plants ensures you're feeding your gut a wide variety of polyphenols, plant compounds that act as powerful antioxidants and anti-inflammatories.

Protein quality

Protein is made of amino acids — the building blocks of life. Your body uses it to build and repair tissues, make hormones and neurotransmitters, and support digestion, immunity, and energy.

Of the 20 amino acids, 9 are essential. Your body can't make them, so you need to get them from food. Too little protein can lead to muscle loss. Too much may be stored as fat.

There's no doubt that protein is essential, but quality is key, and it's important to consider amino acids and food sources.



“Complete” doesn’t always mean quality

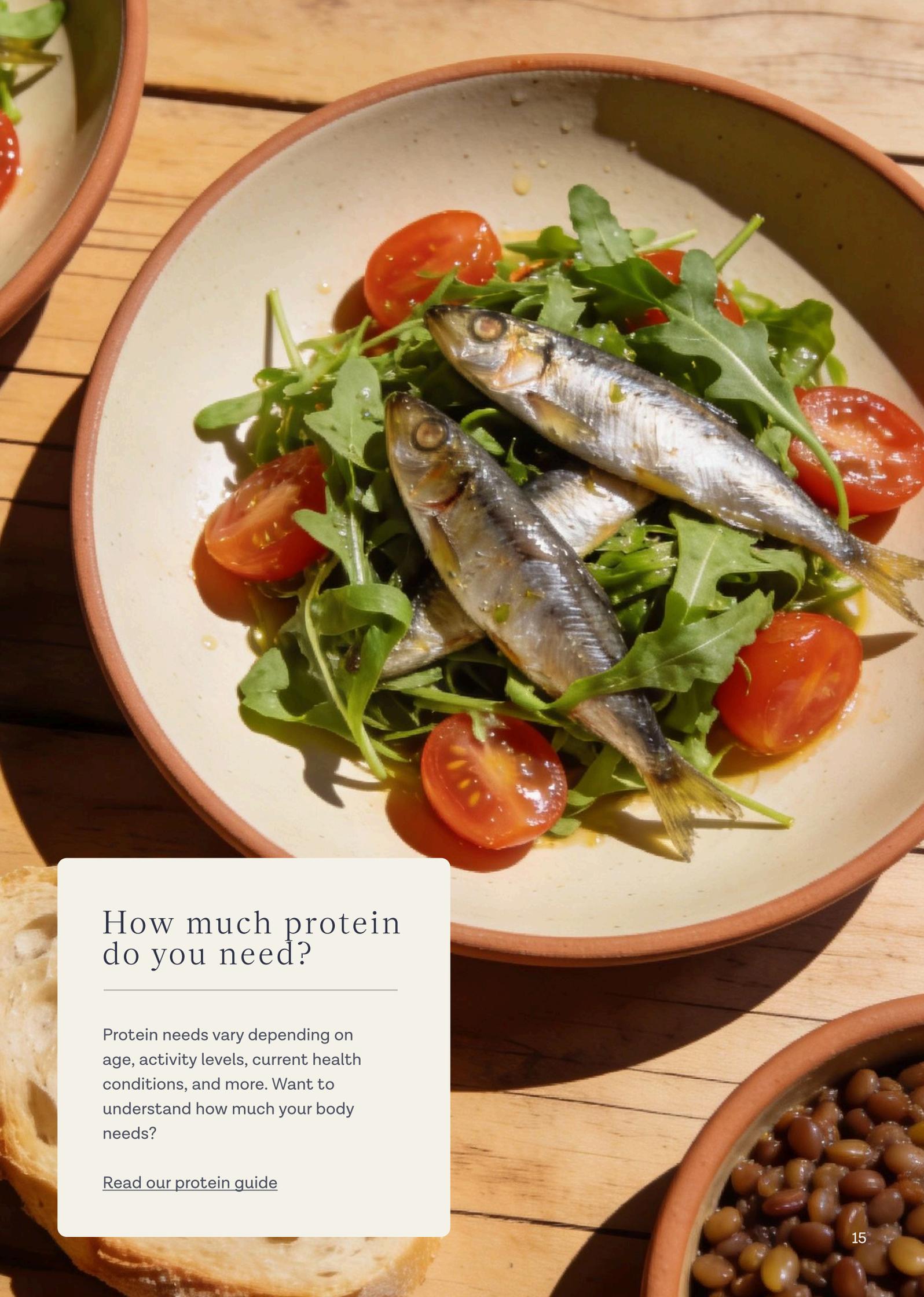
Animal proteins like red meat and processed meats are “complete” proteins, containing all 9 essential amino acids. But some of these sources are also high in saturated fat, and higher intakes are linked to poorer health outcomes.

Protein shakes and bars offer another example. While they’re marketed as “complete” protein sources, many contain additives, added sugar or synthetic sweeteners, and other ingredients that may be high-risk for your health.

Choosing quality protein sources

The best quality protein comes from unprocessed, whole foods. These sources deliver essential amino acids while also offering other valuable nutrients:

- ✓ **Fermented dairy (kefir, Greek yogurt):** High-quality protein plus probiotics, calcium, and gut-supporting benefits.
- ✓ **Oily fish and eggs:** Complete proteins rich in omega-3 fatty acids, vitamins (like D and B12), and healthy fats.
- ✓ **Plants (pulses, whole grains, seeds, nuts):** Protein along with fiber, antioxidants, and a wide range of vitamins and minerals.



How much protein do you need?

Protein needs vary depending on age, activity levels, current health conditions, and more. Want to understand how much your body needs?

[Read our protein guide](#)

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Looking for a high-protein,
plant-packed recipe?

Try our *Pumpkin Dal*.

This warming bowl combines protein-rich red lentils with plenty of plants, including leafy greens, pumpkin, turmeric, and ginger. Together, the lentils and vegetables support a diverse gut microbiome, while the spices contribute natural anti-inflammatory compounds.



INGREDIENTS

- ✓ 11 tbsp olive oil
- ✓ 1 onion, diced
- ✓ 2 garlic cloves, minced
- ✓ 1 tbsp grated fresh ginger
- ✓ 1 tsp cumin
- ✓ 1 tsp turmeric
- ✓ 1 tsp curry powder
- ✓ Juice of 1 lime
- ✓ 1 cup red lentils, rinsed
- ✓ 400g pumpkin or butternut squash, diced
- ✓ 3 cups vegetable broth
- ✓ 2 cups of chopped spinach
- ✓ Salt and pepper

Serves
2-4 people

Protein
7g

Fiber
12g

Preparation time
15 minutes

Cooking time
30 minutes

Plant count
7

Diet
Vegetarian

Method

- 1 Heat olive oil in a pot. Cook the onion until soft, then add the garlic, ginger, and spices.
- 2 Add lentils, pumpkin, and broth. Simmer for 15-20 minutes until lentils and pumpkin are soft.
- 3 Blend 1/4 to 1/3 of the soup until smooth and mix back in.
- 4 Stir in the spinach and let it wilt.
- 5 Season to taste. Finish by swirling in kefir for a white drizzle throughout, squeeze some lime juice, then sprinkle with toasted pumpkin seeds and fresh cilantro.
- 6 Enjoy!

Eat *fermented* foods

We're big fans of fermented foods here at ZOE — and for good reason. If eaten regularly, these nutritional powerhouses can offer long-lasting health benefits.

What are fermented foods?



Fermented foods are made by adding microorganisms, like bacteria or yeast, to food. These microbes break down components such as sugar, producing acids that help preserve the food, enhance flavour, and improve digestibility.

How they benefit your gut

Many fermented foods, including kimchi, kefir, and certain cheeses, contain **probiotics** — live microorganisms that support your balance of “good” gut bugs.

Why up your intake: The science

Eating 3 or more portions of fermented foods a day could:

- ✓ Improve mood
- ✓ Increase energy levels
- ✓ Reduce feelings of hunger
- ✓ Reduce bloating

To dig a little deeper into the science, we conducted the [ZOE Ferment Study](#). 6,500 people completed the trial, and went from eating virtually no ferments, to at least three portions per day for two weeks.

Over half of the participants reported improvements in mood and increased energy levels. They also reported feeling less hungry and experiencing less bloating and other gut symptoms.

[Read about the study](#)



FERMENTED
RECIPE:

Super-simple Kefir Dressing

Great on salads and savory dishes, this dressing is an effortless way to add more ferments to your favourite meals.

INGREDIENTS

- ✓ 1 small ripe avocado (90 g prepped weight)
- ✓ 20 g cilantro
- ✓ Zest and juice of 2 limes
- ✓ 2 tbsp apple cider vinegar
- ✓ 125 ml kefir
- ✓ 2 pickled green chillies, plus 2 tbsp brine
- ✓ Pinch of salt

Makes
250 ml

Preparation time
8 minutes

Fiber
5g

Method

- 1 Put all the ingredients into a blender and blitz until smooth. Store in an airtight container in the fridge for up to 1 week.

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The world's no. #1 nutrition podcast

If you want to hear more about our 8 nutrition principles and how to eat in 2026, then listen to our dedicated podcast episode with Prof. Tim Spector and Prof. Sarah Berry.

[Listen to the full episode](#)



8 ways to Eat Better in 2026

ZOE is a nutrition science company
leading the gut health revolution.

A large, stylized graphic of the letters 'ZOE' in a light yellow color, set against a darker yellow background. The letters are rounded and have a soft, glowing effect.

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