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## Eat More Plants in the New Year

by Charlotte Scheid from

<https://fruitsandveggies.org/stories/eat-more-plants-in-the-new-year/>

The beginning of each year offers us a fresh start. We reflect on the previous year and create goals that benefit our overall health. Although we have the best intentions for these goals to stick throughout the year, we sometimes fall short of them becoming habits.

There are multiple reasons those habits are hard to form -do you find yourself exhausted from the day? Are you tempted to grab the most convenient option out there (which doesn't always include fruits and veggies)? This happens to me sometimes, especially after a busy day. I find myself struggling with making time to meal prep, or not wanting to try a new cooking technique. Plus, it is so easy to fall into our old habits! This is the perfect storm of excuses for me to grab a convenient, pre-packaged meal that is often less nutritious and makes me feel sluggish.

As a registered dietitian, I know it's no secret that fruits and vegetables are essential to good health. Not only do they help control blood pressure, boost mood, and promote a healthy digestive tract, they are filled with nutrients that can help raise energy levels. Although produce provides many important nutrients, most Americans still fall short in meeting the recommended amount of 5 servings of fruits and vegetables per day. In fact, according to the CDC, only 1 in 10 Americans get enough produce in their diets!

Adding fruits and vegetables into meals and snacks is an excellent goal for the New Year. The key is creating realistic short-term goals. Accomplishing a series of small goals one at a time helps us have better long-term success. It is very important to break down our goals so we don't feel overwhelmed. Smaller goals are easier to stick with and become part of our everyday routine. One attainable goal that I made for my family and myself is to add one extra serving of produce every week. I'm making sure to build them into our meal plan and snacks, as

well. To help you start fresh in 2021, here are some produce-inspired ideas to try!

### Sneak Them In

Add in vegetables or fruits to many of your popular dishes. Shred zucchini or apple and add to your favorite grain muffins or quick bread recipes Cook and blend butternut squash and mix into macaroni and cheese

Blend pureed sweet potatoes into wale or pancake batter Sauté carrots, onion, or broccoli for 5 minutes and mix into pastas sauce for a quick veggie-filled dinner One of my favorite ways to incorporate produce is in casserole dishes like Veggie Shepard's Pie. This is a perfect warm dish on a cold January day!

### Snack on Chips

Making homemade chips out of sweet potatoes, kale, beets, Brussel sprouts or apples with cinnamon is a snack everyone will enjoy! My family loves kale chips tossed in olive oil and finished with a dash of salt and sprinkle of garlic powder.

### Spread Them On

Avocado toast is one way I love to start my day. Try mashing an avocado and mixing it with diced tomato, onion and garlic powder as a spread on your breakfast toast! I also love putting this easy spread on my sandwiches and wraps.

### Heat Them Up

Roasting vegetables helps to jazz up produce and brings out their natural sweetness. Turnips, broccoli, cauliflower, parsnips, Brussel sprouts are all good choices. My favorite roasted vegetable is Brussel Sprouts. I simply cut the sprouts into quarters, toss in olive oil, and bake for 30 minutes or until tender. To finish them, I toss in a maple balsamic vinegar. My family also loves when I make Roasted Turnips with Herbs and Feta! For more recipes go to <https://fruitsandveggies.org/recipes/>

# Veggie Shepherd's Pie

▪ Serves 6 ▪ Ready in 40mins ▪ Prep time 5mins ▪ Cooking time 35mins  
306 calories per serving

Hearty lentils sub for meat in this vegetarian comfort-food classic that gets a golden top from a sprinkling of cheese.

## Ingredients

- 1½ lbs russet potatoes, peeled and quartered
- 3tbsp olive oil, divided
- 1cup chopped onion
- 1(15 oz) can cooked lentils, drained
- 1(16 oz) bag frozen mixed vegetables (carrots, corn, and peas), thawed
- ½ tsp dried thyme
- 1tbsp all-purpose flour
- 1 ½ cups low-sodium vegetable broth
- ½ cup reduced-fat milk
- ¼ cup grated Monterey Jack cheese

## Steps

1. In a large pot, combine the potatoes and enough water to cover by an inch. Season with salt and heat to a boil on high. Reduce heat and simmer 15 min., until tender. Drain.
2. Meanwhile, in a 12-inch skillet, heat 1 tbsp. oil on medium-high and add the onions. Cook 5–6 min., until golden, stirring occasionally. Stir in the lentils, mixed vegetables, and thyme. Cook 2 min., until mixed vegetables warm.
3. Sprinkle with the flour and cook 1 min., stirring often. Stir in the vegetable broth, scraping up any browned bits. Heat to a boil on high and cook 2–3 min., until gravy is thickened. Remove from heat. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
4. Preheat broiler. When potatoes are drained, return to the pot. To pot, add remaining 2 tbsp oil and milk. Using a potato masher, mash potatoes until smooth. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
5. Transfer lentil mixture to a broiler-proof 2-qt baking dish. Spread the mashed potatoes on top. Sprinkle with cheese. Broil 3–5 min., until top is golden.

### Nutrition information

Calories 306 Kcal 15%

Fat 9.0 g 14%

Saturated Fat 2.0g 10%

Carbs 47g 16%

Sodium 204mg 9%

7.0g sugar 10.0g fiber 12.0g protein 6mg cholesterol