



# EATING FOR A HEALTHY PLANET



What are you eating for dinner tonight? Probably something good and tasty. But is it good for you? And is it good for the planet?

## A GROWING PROBLEM

You know climate change is causing big trouble around the world. And it's getting worse.

What you may not know is that agriculture – growing food – is a big part of the problem.

Growing food makes up 30 percent of our greenhouse gas emissions and uses 70 percent of the world's fresh water.

We grow food on nearly 40 percent of the Earth's land surface. Expanding farmland is the single biggest threat to **biodiversity**.

It's not **sustainable** to keep growing food this way. We

already have 7.7 billion mouths to feed. What happens in 2050, when the population reaches 10.3 billion?

Food is part of the problem, but food can be part of the fix, too. Getting it right today will help us reduce global carbon emissions tomorrow.

## TO YOUR HEALTH

Most North Americans could start with a healthier diet.

The most recent Canada Food Guide recommends eating fewer animal products and processed foods. We need to choose more plant-based proteins, like legumes, beans, nuts, and tofu, and less red meat, chicken, fish, and eggs. This Mediterranean-style diet is popular in many parts of the world.

Nutritionists suggest making small changes. There's no need

to become a vegetarian or vegan, though it's fine if you are. Just lighten up on the meat, dairy, processed foods, and sugars.

Choose foods that suit your lifestyle. Do you have access to wild game and locally-hunted or caught country food? Are certain foods important to your culture? No problem.

Journalist Michael Pollan sums it up in seven words: "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants."

## A WIN-WIN SITUATION

Researchers at the University of Oxford studied the link between healthy food and a healthy environment. Turns out they go hand in hand.

"**Predominantly** plant-based diets are much healthier and more sustainable than meat-heavy diets,"

## DEFINITIONS

**BIODIVERSITY:** the variety of different types of plant and animal life in a region or the world

**PREDOMINANTLY:** mainly or mostly

**SUSTAINABLE:** capable of continuing for a long time at the same level; using methods that do not harm the environment



says study team member Marco Springman.

Foods such as dairy, eggs, and chicken fall in the middle. They can improve health and reduce environmental harm when used to replace foods like red meat.

### **A BALANCED DIET**

The second big dietary change Westerners need to make is the amount of food we eat. More than two billion adults in North America are overweight.

And yet, more than 820 million people around the world go hungry every day. Millions of children are malnourished.

It's a serious problem that will only get worse as the population balloons.

### **EAT-LANCET REPORT**

Does Earth have the capacity to feed healthy diet to a future population of 10 billion people? The **prestigious** medical journal *The Lancet* asked 37 of the world's top scientists that very question.

In 2019, after two years of research, consultations, and number crunching, *The Lancet* published its report.

“A radical transformation of the global food system is urgently needed,” the summary states. “Without action, the world risks failing to meet the **UN Sustainable Development Goals** and the **Paris Agreement**.”

However, this transformation is possible, say the study authors. “It's not unrealistic.”

Food can be a global force for change. The first step is to shift the world's inhabitants to a ‘planetary health diet.’ But that won't be enough. We also need to manage two more problems: food waste and inefficient production.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that we lose or waste one-third of all the food we produce. In Canada, we waste even more – about 58 percent. All this wasted food generates eight percent of greenhouse gas emissions.

We need to cut food waste in half.

We can produce food more efficiently by taking advantage of advances in science and technology. By intensifying production and increasing crop

yields, we can grow more food, more sustainably.

The report concludes that it is possible to feed 10 billion people a healthy diet. It's possible to improve the health and well-being of millions of people, without harming the planet they live on.

“Reports like this one are empowering,” says Norwegian teenage environmental activist Penelope Lea. “They give us tools, show us ways, contribute by letting us see where our opportunities might be, telling us that we still have a chance to make it.”

### **BACK TO YOUR SUPPER**

We can't do it alone, however. Changing the way we feed the world takes international cooperation and policy changes.

But we can make a difference in our individual food choices. Every piece of food on our plates makes a journey. Consider where it comes from and how it was grown.

“Choosing better, more sustainable diets is one of the main ways people can improve their health and help protect the environment,” says Dr. Michael Clark. ★

## **DEFINITIONS**

**PARIS AGREEMENT:** an agreement signed by 197 nations in Paris in 2016 to work together to fight climate change  
**PRESTIGIOUS:** having an illustrious reputation; respected

**UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS:** a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030, adopted by all UN member states in 2015



## ON THE LINES

Answer the following in complete sentences:

1. What is the current world population?

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2. What is the world population projected to be by 2050?

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3. How much land on the planet is used for food production?

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4. Identify at least two important impacts of food production on the environment.

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5. What two changes are needed to improve human health and the health of the planet?

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6. What did a recent report in *The Lancet* conclude must occur to ensure the future world population can be fed?

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7. What first step did *The Lancet* report recommend?

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8. What other two problems did the study identify?

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**BETWEEN THE LINES**

An *inference* is a conclusion drawn from evidence. A *plausible inference* is supported by evidence in the article and is consistent with known facts outside of the article.

What inference(s) can you draw from the fact that food production is responsible for up to 30 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions?

**BEYOND THE LINES**

What does a planet-friendly diet look like? Research tips to follow and specific foods to eat that support a healthy planet. Begin your research at:

<https://davidsuzuki.org/queen-of-green/food-climate-change/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jan/27/environmentally-friendly-foods-samin-nosrat>

<http://www.eatingforahealthyplanet.org/>

Then, communicate the facts you learned in an infographic to post in your school or classroom. A *good infographic* is visually appealing, easy to understand, contains enough facts to support the topic, and tells a good story.

**JUST TALK ABOUT IT**

1. What is the significance of this story? Explain.
2. “*Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants.*” How does your diet compare to this advice from journalist Michael Pollan for a healthy diet?
3. a) What actions could you take to make your diet healthier for your body and the planet? Explain.  
b) Which of these actions would you be willing to take? Which ones would you not be willing to take? Why? Explain.

**ONLINE**

*Note:* The links below are listed at [www.lesplan.com/en/links](http://www.lesplan.com/en/links) for easy access.

1. Find out more about the Mediterranean diet at

<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/324221.php#7-day-meal-plan>

2. Read about the 100 Mile Diet at <http://www.ecolife.com/health-food/eating-local/100-mile-diet.html> In what ways does this approach support eating for a healthier planet?

3. Read the summary report of the EAT-Lancet Commission at

<https://eatforum.org/eat-lancet-commission/eat-lancet-commission-summary-report/> ★

