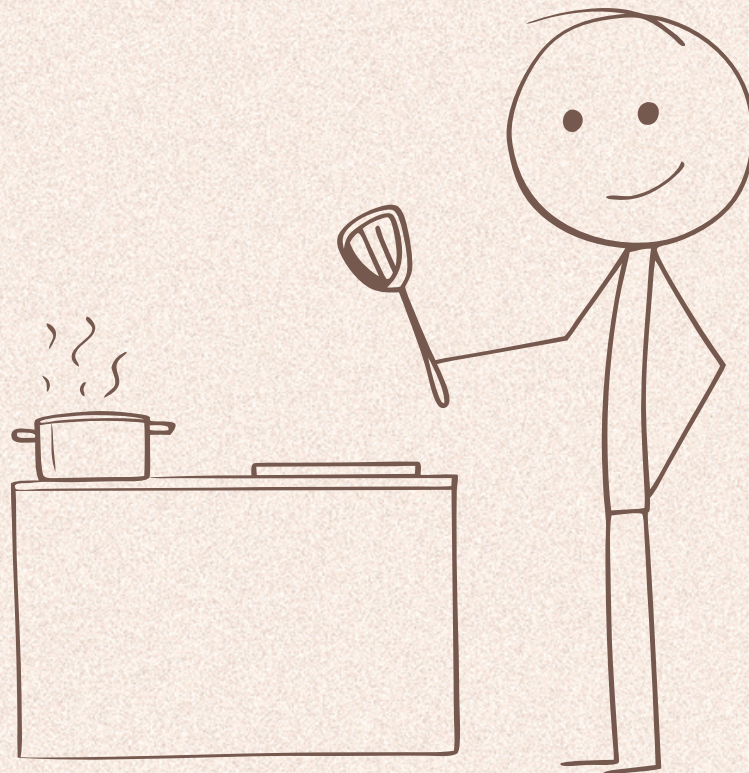




COOKING FOR ONESELF

*A WORLD FULL OF
POSSIBILITIES*



2nd version - April 2024

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WHY DO WE COOK?

When we talk about cooking for ourselves, we often imagine that the dish should be special, well prepared, with many ingredients, foreign spices and other high level tastes.

While it would be awesome to have 3* diners everyday, many of us just don't have a lifestyle that permits to spend 3 hours in the kitchen on a daily basis.

In this society where it's easier to find sodas than fresh water, cheaper to buy pre-cooked burgers than fresh salmon and faster to order food than to cook (although that's debatable), many of us have to (re)learn the skills of cooking, picking the right ingredients and cleaning up their tastebuds.

It can be overwhelming to have to create a nutrient rich menu for X persons, go grocery shopping, cook and take the time to eat every damn day or week. Especially when you also have to deal with work, make time for training, your hobbies, your spouse, kids and friends.

To start thinking in the right direction, we can ask a simple question:

Why do humans cook their food in the first place?

Our ancestors didn't start cooking to create fancy dishes, they much probably started cooking because it helped digest food more efficiently. They needed to break down fibres and proteins, spend less energy digesting and optimise the nutrients absorption. Our current needs are just the same!

When you're planning the meal for your week, all you really need is to make sure to get enough of macro and micronutrients to sustain a healthy and functional life.

The fancy comes after the bases are met, it's the optional cherry on the top.

EATING “ACTIVELY”

AKA PLACING YOUR ATTENTION ON WHAT YOU'RE DOING.



1/Take the time and relax

Sit down, breathe, relax a little. It may sound a bit too simple and it is! So simple that we tend to ditch this step and just feed ourselves in order to pass to the next thing faster.

The issue is, the nervous system needs to relax in order to send signals to our digestive system and start the process of being hungry, secreting saliva, expanding the rib cage and launching the whole digestion process.

Eating while being in a stressed state can cause short and long terms issues going from simple cramps to gastrointestinal disorders such as the Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) and Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD). [More info here](#) and [here](#).

2/Chew

To properly digest and, most importantly, assimilate food, we need to break it down. This process starts in the mouth through salivating and using your teeth.

You can easily test your chewing skills by counting how many times you chew each bite. The count should be somewhere close to 10-15 for fruits and soft foods and up to 30-40 for meat and harder foods.

3/Make your diner last

You've probably heard that it takes 20 minutes for the guts to send satiation signals to the brain, this can be true for some and not for others, try to find your own rhythm.

In practice: if you're eating with a slow eater, try to keep up with their pace, if you eat in front of a movie or video, keep track of the duration. You can also put the fork down after each (well portioned) bite, taking that time to chew thoroughly.

4/End with something satisfying.

Whether it is a piece of chocolate, a yogurt, a fruit, cheese etc., have something satisfying that marks the end of the eating process.

To know more about oral processing, satiation, satiety and their effects on eating behaviour or obesity, have a look [here](#) and [here](#).

COVERING THE BASES

Macro & micronutrients

Macro- and micronutrients are chemical compounds in food used by the body to function and maintain itself. The quantity of nutrient that we need is influenced by factors such as the age, height, weight, sex, activity...

Macronutrients

Required in larger amount



Carbohydrates (+fibers)

Source of energy and support digestive health. Refining grains leads to a major loss of nutrients.

The intake can vary based on personal preferences.



Lipids

Manufacture and balance hormones, form cell membranes, brain and nervous system, help transport fat-soluble vitamins and provide essential fatty acids (omega 3 and 6).

The intake can vary based on personal preferences.



Proteins

Made up of amino acids that are responsible for our structure, hormones, enzymes, immune chemicals and protein transport.

Intake should be stable, somewhere between 1,6-2,4g/kg bodyweight.

Micronutrients

Required in smaller amount and sourced from the macronutrients.



Find detailed information on the guide “Micronutrients and why they matter”



Vitamins

Support cell function, development and growth, assist the absorption of other nutrients



Phytochemicals

May help prevent chronic diseases, have anti-inflammatory, anti-microbial and antioxidants effects.

Those are not considered essential.



Minerals

Support bone, muscular, cardiovascular and nervous system functions, produce enzymes and hormones.

The tables in the next pages offer an alternative approach of seeing food. Here they are graded from least processed and often most nutritious, to most processed, highest in fats, sugar and possible chemicals.

You can use those tables to build quality awareness and build your meals with it.

EAT MORE

PROTEIN



Eggs and egg whites



Fish



Shellfish



Chicken



Duck breast and thighs



Turkey



Plain Greek yogurt



Cultured cottage cheese



Tempeh



Tofu



Edamame



Insects



Beans and lentils*

*These only count as your protein source if a more protein-rich option (such as above) is not in the meal. Otherwise, they count as a carbohydrate source (as they contain more carbohydrates than protein).

CARBS



Beans and lentils



Steel-cut, rolled, and old-fashioned oats



Buckwheat



Quinoa



Whole-grain, black, and wild rice



Sorghum



Farro



Millet



Potatoes



Amaranth



Plain non-Greek yogurt



Plain kefir



Fresh and frozen fruit



Corn



Barley



Sweet potatoes



Taro



Yuca



Whole or sprouted grain bagels, breads, English muffins, pastas, and wraps

FATS



Extra virgin olive oil



Walnut oil



Marinades and dressings with oils in this category



Avocado and avocado oil



Cheese, aged > 6 months



Egg yolks



Seeds: chia, flax, hemp, pumpkin, and sesame



Cashews



Pistachios



Almonds



Brazil nuts



Pecans



Peanuts & natural peanut butter



Olives



Pesto made with extra virgin olive oil



Nut butters from other nuts in this category



Fresh unprocessed coconut



Walnuts

Prioritize lean, minimally-processed sources of protein.

Focus on whole, minimally-processed sources of carbohydrates that pack lots of nutrition and fiber, and include a mix of starches and colorful fruits.

Aim for a mix of whole-food fats (like nuts and seeds), blended whole foods (like nut butters), and pressed oils (like olive and avocado).

EAT SOME

PROTEIN



Uncultured cottage cheese



Beef



Bison



Lamb



Pork



Wild game



Other meats: goat, camel, kangaroo, crocodile



Minimally-processed lean deli meat



Textured vegetable protein



Canadian bacon



Meat jerky



Poultry sausage



Protein powders



Seitan



Tempeh bacon



Bean and veggie burgers*

*These only count as your protein source if a more protein-rich option (such as above) is not in the meal. Otherwise, they count as a carbohydrate source (as they contain more carbohydrates than protein).

CARBS



Couscous



White rice



Granola



Instant or flavored oats



Milk



Vegetable juices



Flavored yogurt



Flavored kefir



Pancakes and waffles



Whole-grain crackers



Oat-based granola bars



Canned, dried, and pureed unsweetened fruit



Bean and pulse pasta



White bagels, breads, English muffins, pastas, and wraps

FATS



Virgin and light olive oil



Expeller pressed canola oil



Sesame oil



Flaxseed oil



Coconut oil / milk



Fish and algae oil



Dark chocolate



Marinades and dressings with oils in this category



Peanut oil and regular peanut butter



Cream



Cheese aged <6 months



Flavored nuts and nut butters



Trail mix

Often rich in carbohydrates as well, with sources of varying quality.



High oleic safflower oil



High oleic sunflower oil

These naturally-bred oils are high in heart-healthy monounsaturated fats and contain little saturated fats and no trans fats.

EAT LESS

PROTEIN



Fried meats



Chicken fingers, nuggets, and wings



High fat ground meat



High-fat sausages



Processed soy



Processed deli meats



Protein bars



Pepperoni sticks



High-mercury fish

CARBS



Cereal bars



Fruit juices



Honey, molasses, syrups, & jellies



Canned, dried, and pureed fruit with added sugar



Soda



Crackers



Foods with 10+g added sugar



Pretzels



Sugar



Flavored milk

FATS



Butter



Margarine



Processed cheese



Corn oil



Cottonseed oil



Sunflower oil



Canola oil



Soybean oil



Safflower oil



Marinades and dressings with oils in this category



Vegetable oil



Fat-rich foods with 10+ g added sugar



Hydrogenated oils and trans fats



Shortening

These foods are also rich sources of fats, so be mindful of both their carbohydrate and fat content.



Candy bars



Donuts



Cookies



Chips



Fries



Pastries



Muffins



Cakes



Bacon



Sausage

ALCOHOL

The Mediterranean diet is associated with red wine, but that doesn't mean you should drink a lot of it. Because alcohol has unique risks and benefits, we recommend drinking moderately, counting it as an "eat less" carb or fat serving.



1 serving of wine, light beer, or spirits



1 serving of mixed drinks, craft or high-alcohol beer, or dessert wine

VEGETABLES

Veggies are always an “eat more” food. For a variety of nutrients, try to “eat the rainbow!”



Eating a variety of colorful fruit and starchy vegetables (like potatoes) also helps you “eat the rainbow,” though these foods live in the carbohydrate category.

PLANNING & COOKING - THE THEORY

1/ Create your plan, or menu

To build a plan you'll need to know where you start and where you want to go. Here are a few examples of questions to ask yourself either once or regularly:

- What frequency of cooking are you aiming for? Are you going to cook everyday? Every two days? Once a week?
- Are you ok to eat the same-ish things often or do you need every meal to be different?
- Do you have the option to freeze, can or dry your meals? Are you able and willing to prepare in advance or do you only eat fresh?
- Do you have a special diet that includes or excludes certain foods?
- What are your current needs? Are you training hard and need more proteins and carbs? Are you implementing more fruits or veggies?

Once you're clear with yourself, take a pen, paper, your favorite recipes or new ones and more or less clearly draw your schedule and menu:

- When are you doing the cooking?
- Which days are you planning to eat which meal?
- When are you (if you are) keeping room to freestyle?
- What are you going to eat?
- Which ingredients will you need? Take an other paper and write your grocery list based on your menu.

You can chose to set and follow everything by the millimetre or give yourself some room to swap meals around, flexibility can be a very interesting cooking skill.

2/ Grocery shopping

There's a few things to keep in mind when you're grocery shopping:

1. You're better off reading the ingredient lists rather than trusting the packaging.
2. Quality ingredients = higher quality nutrients = more efficient nutrition. The time won by going to the supermarket is rarely worth the value of the food you find there. Have a look at your local markets, farms, small butchers, fish and bio shops. If you can, grow things yourself.
3. Frozen and canned foods are just as good as fresh, often cheaper and have longer expiry dates. They can be stored easily for "emergency" situations.
4. Follow the list as much as possible.



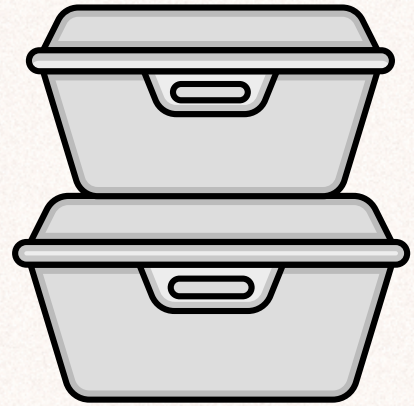
Learn to find your way in grocery stores with the doc "A little guide to better understand food labels and packagings"

You've probably heard that **people shouldn't go grocery shopping when they are hungry** (or hangry) and it's true. The stores and markets are very special environments in which we are exposed to a lot of different triggers such as smells, colours, textures. The natural reaction of our system is to send hunger signals to the brain and digestive system as if we were going to eat. Negating/ignoring these signals takes a lot of energy for our nervous system and willpower, add a little of daily stress or post-training fatigue to the situation, and the common behaviour will be to buy whatever comes around or ditch the grocery list.

3/ Cooking, boxing, freezing

Once you get home: it's cleaning and cooking time!

- Clean all that's fresh: vegetables and fruits and place them (ideally) at room temperature or in the warmest part of your fridge. Some products should be kept in a bag to stay moist (like salad) while others can become moldy if they don't breathe enough.
- To thoroughly clean your fresh veggies and fruits you can soak for 5-15 minutes and/or scrub them with a mix of cold water, salt and/or vinegar, rinse with cold water and proceed.
- If you've decided to cook right after doing the groceries (which can be time consuming BUT makes the whole week easier at once), go for it.
- Let cool down and store or freeze your meals within 2 hours of cooking.



Be careful with temperatures changes.

Bacterias grow the fastest at room temperature and a lot of food poisoning happen because the cold chain was not respected.

Never freeze something in the same state as it was that was defrosted. A food that was defrosted and then processed through cooking can be frozen again (ex: frozen raw meat turned into cooked bolognese can go back to the freezer).

[More info here.](#)

PLANNING & COOKING - THE PRACTICE

In cooking, the amount of possibilities can be both a blessing and a nightmare. If you find yourself overwhelmed, simplify the process by reducing the amount of ingredients and/or diversity of meals.

Start with ingredients that you already use and like and open your horizons as you get more comfortable and (hopefully) curious. Use spices and herbs to add taste and freshness.

Based on the tables seen previously, we could build our menu with:

Macronutrients	Eat more	Eat some	Eat less
Proteins	salmon, chicken breasts, eggs, sardines, yogurt	minced beef, milk	-
Carbohydrates	Whole wheat bread, lentils, rolled oats	Pasta, dark chocolate	Maple syrup
Fats	chia, sunflower and pumpkin seeds, olive oil, peanut butter, avocado	feta	butter
Veggies/fruits	carrots, cucumber, avocado, broccoli, garlic, onion...		

My 2 “emergency” go to:

- Oven baked potatoes (carbs) and fish (proteins + fats) + frozen spinach (fibers + iron).

Nothing more to do than place the ingredients in a pan or in the oven, wait for it to be cooked while getting as much nutrients as possible.

- “Left overs wraps”, with whatever veggies I’ve already cleaned (often salad, tomatoes, cucumbers), a can of corn, a can of tuna (proteins), some mayo or cream cheese (fats) and maybe lentils, rice or quinoa (carbs).

Find other inspirations [here](#)

BUILDING A MEAL

MENU example for 4+ days:

Monday

Breakfast:

2 hard boiled eggs
2 slices of whole wheat bread
cucumber and avocado

Lunch:

“One tray meal” of the week with
salmon, broccoli, carrots,
bellpepper and potatoes

Diner:

“One pot beef pasta”
Dessert: yogurt with maple syrup

Tuesday

Breakfast:

Fruit smoothie
Yogurt + oats

Lunch:

Homemade salad with lettuce, boiled
eggs, lentils, tomatoes, cucumber,
avocado, feta, lemon juice

Diner:

“One tray meal” of the week with
salmon, broccoli, carrots, bellpepper
and potatoes

Wednesday

Breakfast:

Fruit smoothie
Yogurt + oats

Lunch:

Left over “one pot beef pasta”

Diner:

Homemade left over veggie soup,
2 tartines with sardines
Dessert: homemade chocolate
overnight oats

Thursday

Breakfast:

Apple with cinnamon
homemade chocolate overnight oats

Lunch:

Wrap with the left over of lentil
salad

Diner:

Homemade veggie soup with
shredded chicken breast and 2 slices
of whole wheat bread

Snacks of the week:

Pre-workout: peanut butter toast with apple slices or smoothie, homemade cookie.

Anytime: fruits and nuts

ASSOCIATED GROCERY LIST

Proteins:

6 Eggs
2 pieces of salmon
1-2 pieces of chicken breast
500g ground beef
2-4 boxes of sardines
4-6 plain yogurts of choice
1 bottle milk of choice

Carbs:

1 Whole wheat bread
1 bag lentils of choice
1 bag rolled oats
1 bag whole wheat/lentils wrap
Maple syrup
Pasta of choice
Chocolate
Chia seeds

Fruits / Veggies

3-4 carrots
1 Cucumber
1-2 Avocado
1-2 Broccoli
2-4 Bellpepper
5-8 Potatoes
1 Romaine lettuce
3-5 Tomatoes
1 lemon
1-4 apples
Garlic, onion...

Lipids:

1 Feta
1 Parmigiano (not shredded)
Olive oil
Chicken stock

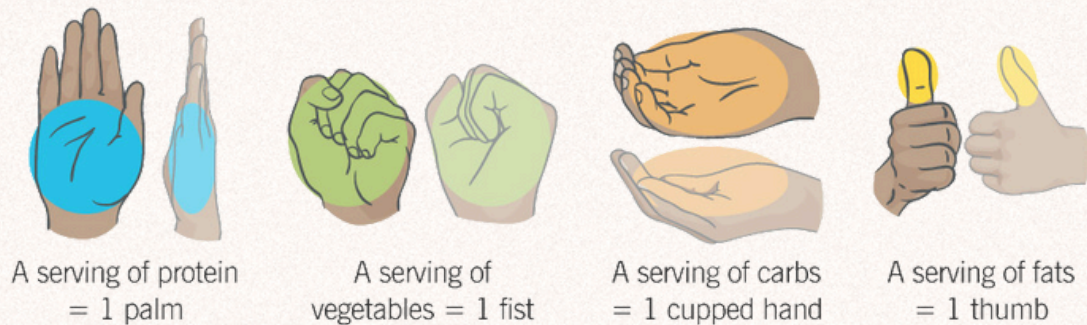
There will be left over of fruits, vegetables and proteins that can become handy snacks or parts of other meals.

COOKING AGENDA

- Boil & store the eggs,
- Clean all the fruits and store,
- Clean and cut all or some vegetables for the salad + “one tray meal”,
- Bake the “one tray meal” and store,
- Cook the lentils for the salad, add the veggies once cold and store,
- If consumed on the same/next day: prepare overnight oats/smoothie,
- Optional: cut the bread and freeze what you won't need for later use.

PORTIONS

Your hand is a great tool to scale portions, it is proportionate to your body and it's always available. Gauge portions in the form you plan to eat them, they are for **plating** your food.

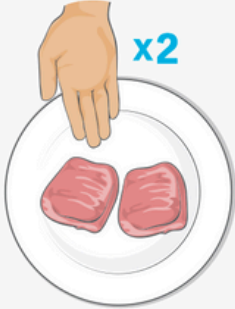
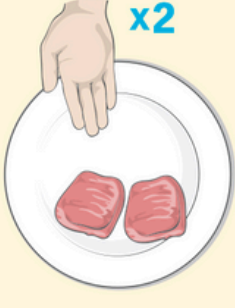
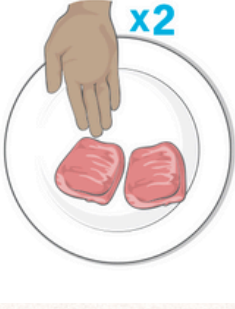


Examples for people with low energy expenditure:

	PROTEIN	VEGETABLES	CARBOHYDRATES	FATS
	E.g. meat, fish, eggs, cottage cheese, Greek yogurt, tempeh, tofu	E.g. broccoli, spinach, squash, carrots, tomatoes	E.g. grains, potatoes, beans, fruits	E.g. oils, butters, nut butters, nuts, seeds
	Minimal activity: No purposeful exercise, <6,000 steps/day			
Goal: Lose body fat and overall body weight Preference: Balanced				
Goal: Improve health and maintain body weight Preference: Higher-carb				

Note that choosing between more or less of a certain macronutrient, like more or less carbs is a personal choice. While different diets will have different effects (ex: keto vs high carbs), there is no restriction requirement, if your goal is body recomposition, do not cut our carbs just because “you’ve been told it would help”, some people do really good without carbs and some people do really bad. The ultimate goal is to find what works for you.

Examples for people with medium to high energy expenditure:

	PROTEIN	VEGETABLES	CARBOHYDRATES	FATS
Moderate activity: 3-4 workouts/week, 6,000 - 10,000 steps/day				
Goal: Lose fat and overall body weight Preference: Lower-carb	 x2	 x2		 x3
Goal: Improve health and maintain body weight Preference: Balanced If you're new to hand portions, this plate may be a good place to start.	 x2	 x2	 x2	 x2
Goal: Gain muscle and overall body weight Preference: Balanced	 x2		 x3	 x3

How to portion alcohol

- 1 serving of wine, light beer and spirit =



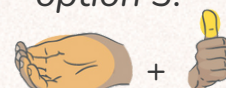
- 1 serving of mixed drink, craft or high alcohol beer and dessert wine =

option 1:

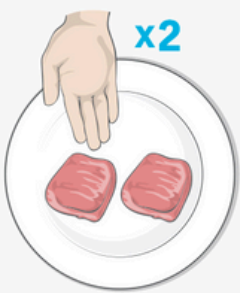
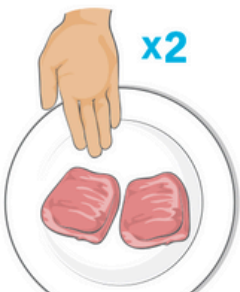
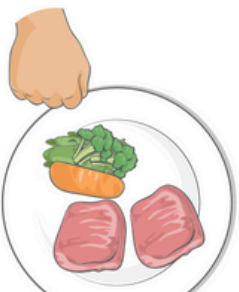
option 2:



option 3:



Examples for people with high to very high energy expenditure:

	PROTEIN	VEGETABLES	CARBOHYDRATES	FATS
High activity: 6-7 workouts/week, 10,000 - 15,000 steps/day				
Goal: Improve health and maintain body weight Preference: Lower-carb	 x2	 x2	 x6	 x6
Goal: Gain muscle and overall body weight Preference: Higher-carb	 x2	 x2	 x6	 x2

Adjust the portions up or down depending on:

- How frequently you eat,
- How active you are,
- Appetite and satiety,
- Your size/caloric needs,
- Your dietary preferences (to a limit),
- Your results.

If you need to increase:

Start by adding a handful of carbs or a thumb of fats to a few meals for a total of 2-3 extra portions each day.

If you need to decrease:

Remove a handful of carbs or a thumb of fats to a few meals for a total of 2-3 fewer portions each day.



Dive further on breakfast, pre and post-workout nutrition in the doc "Nutrition around breakfast and training, science & tips".

SUMMARY

- In the first place, eating and cooking are about getting enough energy to sustain life, health, activity and increase absorption. Cooking doesn't need to be complicated or fancy to be tasty and nutritious.
- Chewy slowly and taking the time to appreciate what's in our mouth can support and improve the digestive system's functions and mechanisms.
- Humans need 3 main macronutrients: proteins, carbohydrates (+fibers) and lipids. Those macronutrients are rich in micronutrients: vitamins, minerals, phytochemicals.
- There is no "bad" or "good" foods, just a spectrum with which you can play to eat what you need and what you want. Prioritise whole, un- or little processed foods to maximise nutrient availability and healthy outcomes.
- If you're new at cooking or don't feel comfortable, start simple and build things up. Adapt your menu and plans to your own needs, likes and goals.
- Batch cooking and meal planning are great tools to manage the time, energy and money spent doing grocery shopping, and cooking.
- Storing extra homemade meals or half prepped ingredients like chopped vegetables or cooked meat, can be a life saviour for times when you're not in the mood or don't have the possibility to cook. Be extra careful to respect the cold chain and control bacterial development.
- Use your hand to portion your meal: palm for proteins, fist for vegetables, cup for carbs and thumb for fats.

Got a question?
Want to know more?
Let me know!

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