

# Keck Medicine Quarterly: Nutrition Edition

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A collaboration between the Clinical  
Nutrition and Food and Nutrition  
teams.

## Habits to Live Longer and Healthier

The Blue Zones are areas in the world where people live the longest and are the healthiest: Okinawa, Japan; Ikaria, Greece; Sardinia, Italy; Nicoya, Costa Rica; and Loma Linda, California. Researchers are studying the factors associated with longevity in these areas to learn lessons that we can all use. Let's explore some key, achievable lifestyle factors that are linked to a longer and healthier life.

### Healthy Diet

The diets in the Blue Zones around the world are commonly characterized by moderate-to-high carbohydrate and low-but-sufficient protein intake. They are mostly plant-based with some animal-based products. In other words, eating a diet rich in whole grains, lean meat, fish, fruits and vegetables shows benefits in promoting a long, healthy life. Eating and food preparation are important activities that offer social connection and mental stimulation. Additionally, the food preparation process, involving purchasing, preparing and cooking, lowers sedentary time.

### Intermittent Fasting

Animal studies suggest that caloric restriction, such as intermittent fasting, may increase lifespan. How might this work? Fasting can lead to better blood glucose regulation, improved insulin sensitivity, lower blood pressure, decreased inflammation and decreased production of damaging free radicals. Together, these may prevent obesity, diabetes and heart disease, thus leading to living more years in good health. More human studies are needed.

### Regular Physical Activity

Exercise lowers the risks of many age-related chronic conditions such as heart disease, hypertension, osteoporosis and cognitive decline. Physical activity also helps to lower anxiety and improve sleep quality, and overall supports mental health. It's recommended to have at least 150-300 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity every week such as brisk walking and yoga.

### Brain Stimulation

Stimulation to the brain by doing new activities, such as learning a skill during free time, may reduce the risk of cognitive decline. Engaging in activities that require mental effort can help to lower the risk of dementia and Alzheimer's disease.

There are many factors that can affect our lifespan and health. Eating a healthy diet, engaging in regular exercise and nurturing our mental well-being are some of the key lifestyle habits that pave the way for longer, healthier lives.

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Whether fresh or frozen, vegetables are important to incorporate into daily life.

## Are Fresh Vegetables Healthier than Frozen?

Frozen vegetables often get a bad name as being unhealthy, overprocessed or just inferior to fresh produce. However, are they really?

Frozen vegetables are harvested at their peak, which means that they are at optimal freshness and nutrient level. They are then blanched and frozen. Blanching will kill bacteria and freezing preserves the produce from spoiling and keeps the vegetable in peak nutrient condition. Other perks include that purchasing frozen vegetables can save time when preparing meals in a time crunch, typically are cheaper than fresh vegetables and are available year-round.

Frozen vegetables also typically have a shelf life of around 8 months, vastly reducing food waste. Fresh vegetables tend to go bad in around 3-5 days.

A study published in 2017 showed that there was no significant difference in vitamin content between frozen and fresh vegetables.

What to choose? Fresh or frozen? Maybe both! According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, only one in ten US adults consumes the 1.5-2 cups of fruit and 2-3 cups of vegetables that are recommended daily. Vegetables provide many different essential nutrients and are a vital part of a well-balanced, healthy diet. Consuming a healthy diet can reduce chronic conditions such as heart disease, obesity and diabetes, as well as certain cancers. Whether fresh or frozen, vegetables are important to incorporate into daily life.

Frozen may be the best option when cooking after a busy day when preparing a meal isn't realistic. However, if you're choosing fresh produce when entertaining or when you have a little more time available to prepare a meal for example, look for seasonal vegetables from a locally-sourced supplier. Fresh vegetables can lose their nutrients the greater the distance they travel and the longer they sit in a store.

So whether fresh or frozen, eat more vegetables!

*References on page 8*



Learning about these phrases and following these tips can help you make a more informed decision on the food products that you buy.



## Food Label Phrases: What Do They Mean?

If you walk through the aisles at a grocery store you will see various phrases on food labels that display words like organic, low fat, sugar free and so on. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) have requirements and regulations for phrases that are put on the product's packaging. Let's discuss some of these.

### Phrases to Know

- **Sugar Free** means that less than 0.5 grams of sugar is in each serving.
- **No Sugar Added** means no sugar was added during the manufacturing process. However, it does not mean that the product is sugar free: the ingredients could have contained sugar prior to the manufacturing process.
- **Fat Free** means that each serving has less than 0.5 grams of fat, while **Low Fat** is defined as 3 grams or less of fat per serving size.
- **Organic** means that at least 95% of the

food product contains organic ingredients, indicating that the other 5% may be non-organic agricultural products. Organic animals are to be fed organic feed and not injected with hormones or antibiotics. Organic produce is to be grown in soil that has not contained prohibited substances (including most pesticides and synthetic fertilizers) in the three years prior to harvest.

- **Grass Fed** means that the feed source consumed by the animals is grass, legumes or cereal grain crops in a pre-processed state.

### Other Tips

- Keep in mind that these phrases do not address the health benefits of the food products; these statements are based on content as defined by the FDA or the USDA.
- When you see these phrases, make sure to look at the Nutrition Facts label on the back to determine the exact serving size. Depending on how much you eat at one time, you may consume more sugar and/or fat than you had expected.
- Also be sure to read the ingredients list on the label to determine if there are added calories or sugar that you may not have realized.

Learning about these phrases and following these tips can help you make a more informed decision on the food products that you buy.

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## The Results Are In!

The Food and Nutrition Department conducted an online survey regarding plant-based diets from April 21st to May 10th and almost 300 of you responded!

### Background

A plant-based diet focuses on eating foods from plants, such as fruits, vegetables, grains, legumes, nuts and seeds. Plant-based encompasses vegan diets, which exclude all animal products, as well as vegetarian diets, which allow for some animal products such as dairy and/or eggs.

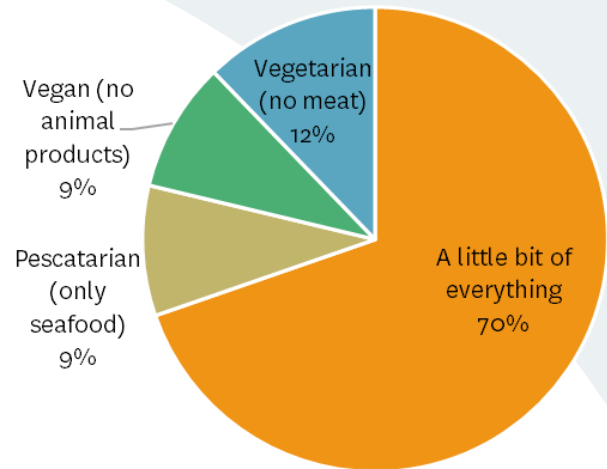
Plant-based sources of protein, as asked on the survey, include pea protein, seitan (wheat gluten) and soy protein, but not whey protein, which comes from cow's milk.

### Results

- 21% of respondents identified as following a vegan or vegetarian diet (see chart top right).
- 99% of respondents correctly identified that vegan and vegetarian diets are not the same.
- 68% of respondents correctly identified that whey protein is not plant-based.

Great suggestions were also received for plant-based items that you would like to see in the cafeteria.

### Respondents' Diet Patterns



### What's Next?

At the Keck Hospital cafeteria:

- Look out for our featured "Superfood of the Month."
- Try our new vegan options such as JUST egg, vegan cheese and vegan nuggets.

A big thank you to all who participated in the survey. Keep an eye out for even more plant-based items at the Keck cafeteria!



# Recent Happenings & Coming Soon

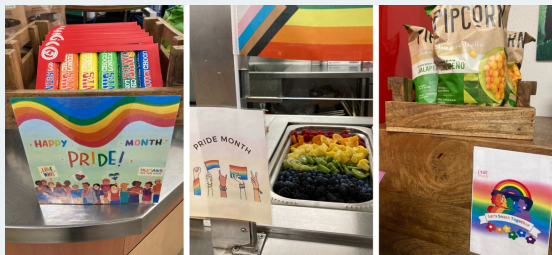


## Celebrating National Nutrition Month® in March

Thank you to everyone who stopped by our National Nutrition Month celebrations on March 8 at the Keck Hospital and USC Norris dining facilities! We loved everyone's custom trail mix creations. We hope you enjoyed learning about different superfoods in the Daily Huddle each week, and had the chance to try out new recipes.

## Celebrating AAPI Month in May

To celebrate Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month, every Tuesday in May we featured a special menu item and had a selection of yummy snacks!



## Celebrating Pride Month in June

In solidarity with the LGBTQ+ community, we are featuring some snacks that are LGBTQ+ owned or LGBTQ+ supporters. We are also featuring some fun items in our dining facilities throughout the month of June. Let's snack together!

## Sustainability Updates

- Look out for bamboo plates and utensils now being used for caterings!
- We hosted our Second Annual Earth Day Sustainability Fair on April 21, featuring great vendors, delicious samples and a spin-the-wheel game!



## Payroll Deduct Coming Soon to the EVERYDAY App at Keck Hospital of USC's Cafeteria

You'll soon be able to use your payroll deduct to pay within the mobile app! Get ahead of the lines and buy online.



## Meet some of our team members!



**Mei Leng Iao, MS, RD, CSO, CNSC**  
Clinical Dietitian  
USC Norris Cancer Hospital

**How did you get into the field?**

After completing my Bachelor of Science in biology, I worked as a lab technician at UCLA. During that time, I primarily worked with cell cultures, mice and bacteria. I soon realized that I missed human interaction in my professional life. Consequently, I began taking some classes for fun, and that's when I met a highly inspiring professor who happened to be an RD teaching nutrition. After in-depth discussions with her, I decided to pursue my master's degree in nutrition. Since then, I have been serving as a dedicated dietitian for nearly 13 years.

**How long have you been on our team?** I have been proud to work at USC Norris for the past 7 years, using my skills and knowledge to provide exceptional service to my patients.

**What's your favorite dish to make?** I love experimenting with my Instant Pot. One of my favorites is smoked salmon with cauliflower rice.

**What are your hobbies outside of work?** I enjoy spending time in nature and exploring the great outdoors. Hiking and camping are two of my favorites that help me stay grounded and refreshed.



**Jonjon Tolentino**

**Chef Manager**  
Keck Hospital of USC

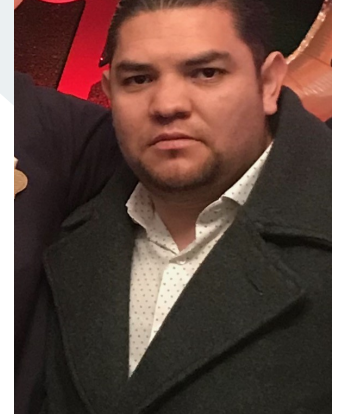
**How did you get into the field?**

Originally, I was pursuing my education in nursing so I applied for my first job in a hospital setting and received a dishwashing position. I've always been interested in cooking as a hobby and worked my way up to the lead cook. I worked alongside several chefs and was able to refine my skills. It was then that I realized I had a deep passion for cooking and wanted to pursue this as my career.

**How long have you been on our team?** I have been the Chef Manager here since 2019.

**What's your favorite dish to make?** As a chef it's very difficult to have a favorite dish to make but I do enjoy creating fusion dishes. For example, combining Asian and Latin dishes has to be my forte.

**What are your hobbies outside of work?** I really enjoy working out and I aspire to enter a weightlifting competition in the near future. My other interests include playing tennis and binge watching shows on Netflix.



**Victor Ruiz**

**Supervisor**  
USC Norris Cancer Hospital

**How did you get into the field?**

I started working as a dishwasher, and then worked different positions here at USC Norris. I was then promoted to supervisor and have served in this role for 13 years.

**How long have you been on our team?** I have been a part of the Food and Nutrition team at USC Norris for 21 years.

**What's your favorite dish to make?** My favorite is authentic Mexican food.

**What are your hobbies outside of work?** Bike riding.

# Ellie Krieger's Hummus Wrap with Zucchini

*From Mindful by Sodexo*

Yield: 4 wraps

## Ingredients

- 2 medium zucchini, (about 8 ounces each) trimmed and cut lengthwise into 1/4-inch thick slices
- 1 1/2 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- Pinch freshly ground black pepper
- 1 cup prepared hummus
- 4 pieces whole-wheat wrap bread or tortilla (about 9 inches in diameter)
- 2 tablespoons dukkah\*
- 1/2 medium red bell pepper, seeded and thinly sliced
- 2 cups baby spinach leaves
- 1/2 cup thinly sliced half-moons of red onion

## Directions

- 1 Preheat a grill pan over medium heat. Brush both sides of the zucchini slices with the oil and sprinkle with the salt and pepper.
- 2 Working in batches as needed, cook the zucchini for about 4 minutes per side, until tender and grill marks have formed.
- 3 Spread a quarter-cup of the hummus on each piece of bread. Top each, in the following order, with:
  - 1 1/2 teaspoons of the dukkah
  - 2 or 3 slices of zucchini
  - a few slices of red bell pepper
  - 1/2 cup of the spinach
  - 2 tablespoons red onion
- 4 Fold the bottom edge of the bread over the filling then roll up to form a wrap sandwich.

\*Note: If you do not have dukkah (an Egyptian nut, seed and spice mix), you can make your own with this recipe: [www.themediterraneanandish.com/dukkah-recipe/](http://www.themediterraneanandish.com/dukkah-recipe/)

**NUTRITION PER SERVING:** 320 calories, 42g carbohydrates, 8g protein, 15g fat, 520mg sodium, 7g fiber



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