

# Your guide to healthy, balanced meals

Making healthy main meals tasty and easy



**Tips &  
main meal  
ideas**

This brochure has been produced by Meat & Livestock Australia (MLA) to promote consumption of beef, lamb and goat as part of healthy, balanced main meals.



MLA is a producer-owned and not-for-profit organisation representing Australia's cattle, sheep and goat industries. For information about MLA and evidence underpinning the healthy, balanced main meal guidelines, visit [www.mlahealthymeals.com.au](http://www.mlahealthymeals.com.au)

For more information about healthy eating, visit:

- [www.eatforhealth.gov.au](http://www.eatforhealth.gov.au) for the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating
- [www.healthstarrating.gov.au](http://www.healthstarrating.gov.au) on how to use the Health Star Ratings
- [www.heartfoundation.org.au/Tick](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au/Tick) on how to use the Tick to identify healthier foods compared to similar foods.
- [www.gisymbol.com](http://www.gisymbol.com) for better quality carbohydrate foods underpinned by scientific evidence.
- [www.daa.asn.au](http://www.daa.asn.au) to find an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) for tailored dietary advice concerning your nutritional requirement.

Information in this brochure is aimed at healthy individuals living in an average Australian household without special dietary requirements. Care is taken to ensure the accuracy and currency of this publication. However, we do not guarantee accuracy or currency. This publication is only intended to provide general information. It is not intended to be comprehensive. You should make your own enquiries before making decisions concerning your nutritional requirements. This information is not medical advice and you should consult a health professional before making any decisions concerning your interests.

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# 4 steps to a healthy, balanced main meal

This guide refers to the main meal only and builds on popular meal choices.

# 1.

## Three core ingredients

At every meal use:



**Vegetables**

+



**Protein foods**

+



**Carbohydrate foods**

# 2.

## Portion size

Serve the right amount of vegetables, protein foods and carbohydrate foods

# 3.

## Variety

Vary your choice of foods within food groups

# 4.

## Healthier choices

Use swaps and healthy flavours



# What is a serve?

Use the guide below to work out main meal portion sizes.

**3+** serves per meal

## Vegetables\*

**1 = serve**

1/2 carrot, zucchini, cucumber, celery, sweetcorn

1/2 large or 1 small tomato, capsicum, beetroot, onion 

1/4 avocado

A handful of beans, snowpeas, peas (~10 pieces)

2-3 florets of broccoli, cauliflower 

2-3 slices (~1cm) sweet potato, eggplant, pumpkin,

3-4 mushrooms, asparagus 


A large handful or lettuce, cabbage, bok choy


**1-2** serves per meal

## Protein foods


**1 = serve**

100g (raw weight) beef or lamb or fish or chicken or pork



2 eggs 

1 cup cooked or canned legumes (if used as a protein food in the meal)




170g cooked tofu


**1-2** serves per meal \*

## Carbohydrate foods


**1 = serve**

1/2 cup cooked or canned legumes (if used as a carbohydrate food in the meal)



1/2 large or 1 small potato 

1/2 cup (75-120g) cooked rice, pasta, noodles, barley, buckwheat, semolina, polenta, bulghur or quinoa



1 slice (40g) bread

1/2 medium (40g) roll or flat bread

\* Active people may need more serves

You may wish to add other foods recommended in the Australian Dietary Guidelines to your main meal, including:

- Dairy foods
- Nuts and seeds
- Fruit

### Dairy foods

**1 = serve**

40g cheese 

200g yoghurt

250g milk

\* Includes fresh, frozen or canned vegetables

To work out portion sizes for other meals and snacks, visit [www.eatforhealth.gov.au](http://www.eatforhealth.gov.au) for information on the total number of serves recommended from all five food groups each day.

## Variety

Vary your choice of foods to get all the nutrients you need for good health.

### Vegetables

- Use at least **three different coloured vegetables** (e.g. red, yellow, orange, green, purple) in every meal. This will provide a wider range of nutrients.
- Have at least **one serve of green vegetables** daily for folate.



**3+**  
different  
colours per  
meal

### Protein foods

To meet nutrient needs, have different protein foods at lunch and dinner, including:

- Three to four red meat meals per week** for iron and zinc in 100 to 200g portion sizes and limit to recommended 650g/week, raw weight.
- Two fish meals per week** for omega-3.

Red meat  
**3-4x**  
a week

Fish  
**2x**  
a week

### Carbohydrate foods

Get your dietary fibre from a variety of carbohydrate foods, including:

- Legumes twice a week** – they are a good natural source of ‘prebiotics’ important for gut health.
- Wholegrain, high fibre and lower GI foods.** If using white pasta and rice for dinner, choose wholegrain, high fibre or lower GI choices for breakfast and lunch.



Legumes  
**2x**  
a week

## Shopping for main meals

Add interest to your meal repertoire by using a variety of different foods.

**V**

#### Green vegetables:

broccoli, spinach, green beans, bok choy, peas, lettuce, snow peas, asparagus, kale, broccolini, brussels sprouts

#### Orange vegetables:

carrots, pumpkin, sweet potato

#### Red/purple vegetables:

tomato, capsicum, beetroot, red cabbage

#### Other vegetables:

zucchini, celery, onion, cabbage, eggplant, cauliflower, mushrooms, cucumber, bean sprouts, avocado, sweet corn

**P**

#### Beef:

lean mince, steak, stir fry, casserole

#### Lamb:

roast, chops, steaks

#### Fish:

fillet, canned tuna, smoked salmon

#### Eggs

#### Chicken:

breast, roast

#### Pork:

roast, chops, steaks

#### Legumes:

lentils, 3-bean mix

#### Goat

#### Kangaroo

#### Rabbit

#### Venison

**C**

#### Legumes:

kidney beans, chick peas, baked beans

#### Potatoes

#### Pasta

wholemeal pasta

#### Rice

basmati rice, brown rice

#### Noodles

buckwheat noodles

#### Breads:

wholegrain or rye bread, wraps, rolls, pitta bread

#### Grains:

quinoa, buckwheat, bulghur, couscous, barley, polenta

## Healthier choices

### Use herbs and spices

- Use stronger spices (e.g. pepper, chilli, garlic, ginger, Chinese five spice, curry powder) and fragrant herbs to flavour your meals with less salt.

### Swaps

- Use reduced salt or no added salt options of stock, pre-prepared sauces and canned vegetables.
- Select healthy oils e.g. olive and other nut and seed varieties.
- Choose lean mince and lean sausages, trim visible fat from meat and remove skin from poultry.
- Choose mostly reduced or low fat dairy choices.

### Look for better choices



The Government's Health Star Rating on packaged foods will help you choose healthier food choices within a food category.



The Heart Foundation's Tick is another useful guide to healthier choices within a food category.



The GI symbol is a useful guide to better quality carbohydrate foods.

## Healthy, balanced meals in practice

### Inspiration

Meal ideas with variations are provided which can be adapted to suit your family's tastes. Recipes for each meal idea are available at [www.mlahealthymeals.com.au](http://www.mlahealthymeals.com.au)

### Per person

To illustrate the right balance of vegetables, protein foods and carbohydrate foods on the plate, quantities are indicated per person.

### Three to four red meat meals a week

Beef and lamb meal ideas are provided to help meet the recommended three to four red meat meals a week as part of healthy, balanced diets. Other red meat options include goat, pork, kangaroo and venison.

### Adapt meal ideas

Exchange the beef and lamb in the meal ideas for other protein foods recommended for good health such as the recommended two fish meals, chicken, eggs and legumes.

**TIP** 1/3 cup dry burghul  
= 1 cup soaked.



## Mexican beef with kidney beans

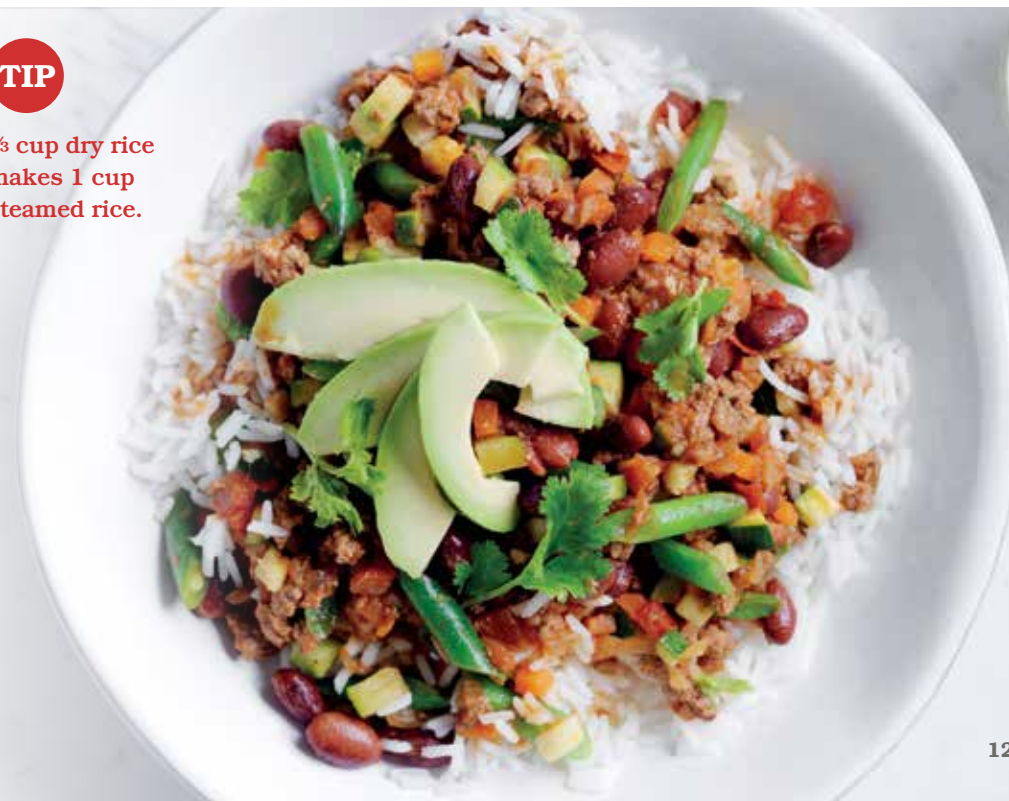
No. serves per person	Ingredients	Variations
<b>V</b> 4 1/4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1/4 onion</li> <li>• 1/4 carrot + 1/4 zucchini</li> <li>• 1 small tomato</li> <li>• 1 handful green beans</li> <li>• 1/4 avocado to serve</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fresh or frozen corn kernels</li> <li>• Frozen peas</li> <li>• Diced red capsicum</li> </ul>
<b>C</b> 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1/4 can kidney beans</li> <li>• 1/2 cup cooked rice</li> </ul>	Four bean mix Brown lentils or chickpeas
<b>P</b> 1	100g lean beef mince (raw weight)	Lean lamb mince
<b>Dairy</b> 1/4	Serve with a dollop of yoghurt	
<b>Flavour</b>	Chopped parsley	Chopped coriander Salt reduced beef stock

## Beef skewers with tabbouli

No. serves per person	Ingredients	Variations
<b>V</b> 3 1/4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1/4 red capsicum + 1/4 green capsicum</li> <li>• 1/4 cucumber + 1/4 carrot</li> <li>• 1 small tomato</li> <li>• 1/4 cup parsley</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shredded red cabbage</li> <li>• Grated carrot</li> <li>• Sliced snow peas and shallots</li> </ul>
<b>C</b> 2	3/4 cup soaked bulghur or cracked wheat	Quinoa or barley
<b>P</b> 2	200g lean beef rump or blade steak, diced (raw weight)	Lean lamb leg steak
<b>Flavour</b>	Garam masala, olive oil (meat rub) Lemon juice, olive oil, pepper (tabbouli)	Chinese five spice (meat rub) Salt reduced soy and lime juice

**TIP**

1/3 cup dry rice  
makes 1 cup  
steamed rice.



**TIP**

60g dry pasta makes  
1 cup of cooked pasta.

1 serve of ragout is  
approximately 2 large  
serving spoons.



## Slow cooked beef ragout

No. serves per person	Ingredients	Variations
<b>V</b> 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ½ celery</li> <li>• ¼ onion + ¼ carrot</li> <li>• 3-4 mushrooms</li> <li>• 1 handful spinach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spinach</li> <li>• Zucchini</li> <li>• Red capsicum</li> </ul>
<b>C</b> 2	1 cup cooked pasta	Wholegrain bread or bread roll
<b>P</b> 1½	150g lean chuck steak (raw weight)	Diced lamb shoulder or beef blade steak
<b>Flavour</b>	Garlic, no added salt tomato paste, balsamic vinegar, reduced salt beef stock, brown sugar	Chopped thyme, fresh parsley or rosemary

## Spiced rubbed lamb cutlets with hummus & char grilled vegetables

No. serves per person	Ingredients	Variations
<b>V</b> 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ½ corn</li> <li>• 2 slices pumpkin</li> <li>• 4 asparagus or ½ bunch</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zucchini</li> <li>• Red capsicum</li> <li>• Baby spinach and/or rocket leaves</li> </ul>
<b>C</b> 2	1 flat bread	Baked potato wedges
<b>P</b> 1½	3 lean lamb cutlets (240g with bone, raw weight)	Lean lamb loin or forequarter chops or beef steak e.g. sirloin, scotch fillet, rump medallion
<b>Flavour</b>	Coriander, cumin and sesame seeds (meat rub) Serve with hummus	Dukkah (meat rub)

**TIP**

Grill extra vegetables  
and add to salads  
or sandwiches  
for lunch.





60g dry or 100g fresh noodles makes  
1 cup of ready-to-eat noodles.



## Lamb and lentil curry

No. serves per person	Ingredients	Variations
<b>V</b> 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ½ onion</li> <li>• ½ carrot</li> <li>• ¼ can tomatoes (approx. 100g)</li> <li>• 1 handful green beans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diced pumpkin</li> <li>• Chopped spinach</li> <li>• Tomatoes</li> <li>• Onion</li> </ul>
<b>C</b> 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ½ cup cooked lentils or ¼ can lentils (drained)</li> <li>• ½ plain naan</li> </ul>	Rice
<b>P</b> 1½	150g lean lamb, shoulder, diced or forequarter chops (raw weight without bone)	Lean beef (blade, chuck or boneless gravy beef)
<b>Dairy</b> ¼	Serve with a dollop of yoghurt	
<b>Flavour</b>	Korma curry paste, salt reduced chicken stock	Massaman or Rogan Josh spices

## Ginger, beef and broccolini stir fry

No. serves per person	Ingredients	Variations
<b>V</b> 3¼	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ¼ onion</li> <li>• ¼ carrot + ¼ red capsicum</li> <li>• 2 broccolini spears or broccolini florets</li> <li>• 1 large handful chopped bok choy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pumpkin</li> <li>• Broccoli</li> <li>• Snow peas</li> </ul>
<b>C</b> 2	1 cup ready-to-eat noodles	Rice
<b>P</b> 1	150g lean beef strips (raw weight)	Lean lamb strips
<b>Flavour</b>	Garlic, ginger, oyster sauce, salt reduced soy sauce	Reduced salt soy sauce and sweet chilli sauce



1 serve of curry sauce is approximately 3 large serving spoons





**TIP**

2 cooked slices is equivalent to 200g raw.



## Indian spiced roast lamb

No. serves per person	Ingredients	Variations
<b>V</b> 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2-3 florets cauliflower</li> <li>• 2-3 florets broccoli</li> <li>• ½ red capsicum</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carrots</li> <li>• Red onions</li> <li>• Beetroot</li> <li>• Sweet potato</li> <li>• Fennel</li> <li>• Asparagus</li> </ul>
<b>C</b> 2	1 cup cooked rice	Roast potato
<b>P</b> 2	200g lean leg of lamb (raw weight, without bone)	Lean lamb shoulder or blade roast
<b>Flavour</b>	Yoghurt, lemon juice, curry paste (meat) marinade Serve with tzatziki	Rosemary and lemon zest (lamb) Wholegrain mustard (beef)

## Lamb meatball & Greek salad wrap

No. serves per person	Ingredients	Variations
<b>V</b> 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ¼ zucchini + ¼ carrot (grated, and added to meat ball mix)</li> <li>• ¼ cucumber + ¼ red capsicum</li> <li>• 1 small tomato or 4-5 cherry tomatoes</li> <li>• 1 large handful lettuce or baby spinach</li> </ul>	
<b>C</b> 2	1 wholegrain wrap	
<b>P</b> 1	100g lean lamb mince (raw weight)	Lean beef or veal mince
<b>Flavour</b>	Serve with babaganoush	Serve with hummus or tzatziki

**TIP**

Use approximately 1 tablespoon of mince mixture to make a meatball.

Makes approximately 6-7 meatballs per serve.





## Roasted pumpkin, lamb and spinach toastie

No. serves per person	Ingredients
<b>V</b> 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 small tomato</li> <li>• 2 slices leftover roast pumpkin</li> <li>• 1 handful spinach</li> </ul>
<b>C</b> 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 slices wholegrain bread or 1 wholegrain bread roll</li> </ul>
<b>P</b> 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 slices leftover lean lamb or beef roast or small steak</li> </ul>
<b>Flavour</b>	Wholegrain mustard or horseradish

## Lamb and barley soup

No. serves per person	Ingredients	Variations
<b>V</b> 3 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>4</sub>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ½ carrot</li> <li>• ½ zucchini</li> <li>• ¼ onion</li> <li>• ¼ parsnip + ¼ corn on cob or ¼ cup corn kernels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diced sweet potato</li> <li>• Sliced green beans</li> <li>• Frozen peas</li> </ul>
<b>C</b> 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ⅛ pearl barley (raw)</li> <li>• 1 slice wholegrain bread</li> </ul>	Brown rice
<b>P</b> 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ½ lean lamb shank</li> </ul>	Lean lamb leg steak or diced beef chuck or boneless gravy beef
<b>Flavour</b>	Chopped parsley, salt reduced chicken stock	Salt reduced chicken stock, chopped rosemary

