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Heart, Hope, Healing

How to Optimize Energy with the Foundational Intensive Nutrition Energy (FINE) Food Plan

BY KARYN SHANKS MD | AUGUST 16, 2019



Introduction to the Foundational Intensive Nutrition Energy (FINE) Food Plan

I'd like to introduce you to the foundational energy-rich intensive nutrition food plan I use for all my clients to optimize energy and start them on the path to deep healing: The Foundational Intensive Nutrition Energy (FINE) food plan.

The FINE eating strategy is founded on the principles of the healthiest eating:

- Nutrient-rich (macronutrients—protein and fat, micronutrients, antioxidants, phytonutrients);
- Avoids common food toxins and irritants;
- Supports the microbiome.
- Optimizes the gut-immune environment.

In some ways this food plan is about going back to our roots. It's about eating real food, grown in favorable conditions, prepared simply and deliciously, shared with those we love, eaten slowly, and just enough to meet our needs.

FINE Intensive Nutrition

The FINE food plan provides intensive nutrition to support energy and all of our body's needs while [eliminating foods that cause inflammation](#), toxicity, elevated blood sugar levels, and damage to our metabolism. Those who eat this way get to enjoy robust energy, reversal of inflammatory conditions, clearer thinking, attainment of ideal body weight, and more joyful lives.

The FINE Food Plan Is Simple

- Eat real food only and always.
- Avoid all processed, refined, or altered (other than cooking or blending) foods.
- Avoid all sugars (most of the time), aside from those occurring naturally in healthy plant foods (we'll get into what "healthy" is in a bit).
- Eat healthy fat.
- Eat enough healthy protein to meet your needs.
- Eat mostly plants.
- Eat a variety of plants of many colors.
- Feed your microbiome (the microorganisms that share your body with you!).
- Eat fresh food, farm-to-table, seasonably.
- Eat mindfully, joyfully, and socially.
- Don't overeat.

Foods to *Include* in Your FINE Food Plan

Healthy meat choices, eggs, and fish

Eat only grass-fed beef options, free-range poultry and eggs, wild game, and wild-caught fatty fish such as salmon, herring and sardines.

Use organ meat from pasture-raised animal. Include protein in every meal and refer to my protein guide to determine your total daily protein needs and plan your meals and snacks accordingly. Most people will need four to six ounces—approximately the size of a deck of cards—of protein at a meal to meet their protein requirements.

Non-Starchy Vegetables

Eat mostly greens but make sure to include a multitude of other colors. Eat dark-green leafy vegetables daily—spinach, kale, collard, arugula, chard.

Emphasize the crucifer family: cabbage, kale, broccoli, broccoli sprouts, and Brussels sprouts. Include garlic and onions liberally.

Minimize starchy vegetables such as carrots, yams, and potatoes but do include them in small quantities, as they are rich in nutrition.

A simple guideline for quantity is that veggies should take up two-thirds of your plate at each meal, or eight to twelve cups total (when raw—note that steamed and sautéed vegetables will shrink considerably).

Those with metabolic syndrome (high blood pressure, high blood sugar, diabetes, vascular disease, or obesity): avoid starchy veggies altogether!

Low Sugar-Content Fruit

Eat mostly berries (blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, and so on), and may include apples and pears. Pomegranates and cranberries are good options. Save sweeter fruits (e.g. peaches, bananas, apples, pineapple) for special treats and desserts.

Those with metabolic syndrome: avoid all fruit other than berries, tart apples, cranberries and pomegranates.

Nuts and seeds

Stick to raw, fresh options and avoid peanuts (these are actually legumes and can promote inflammation). Roasting can damage the fats in many nuts, making them more toxic.

Nuts and seeds contain healthy fats, which are vital to our good health; however, be aware of their high calorie content to avoid over-consumption. Ground flax and hemp seeds and whole chia seeds provide a lot of fiber, protein, and healthy fats—include these daily. They mix well in smoothies.

Bone Broth

Make bone broth from the leftover bones of free-range chickens, grass-fed beef, or game. Include it in soups and stews, sauté vegetables with it, or drink it by itself. You may add beef-derived collagen hydrosylate (see below) to increase protein content and make a substantial meal or snack out of it. Plus, your dog will love you for adding bone broth to his/her food!

Spices, Condiments, Food Supplements

Some of my favorite highly nutritive varieties of spices and flavoring agents are cinnamon, turmeric, cayenne, cardamom, black pepper, paprika, ginger, rosemary, thyme, basil, Sencha ground green tea, vegetable proteins (such as hemp and pea proteins), gelatin or hydrolyzed collagen derived from grass-fed cows (to use as a protein supplement).

Healthy Fats

Coconut oil and coconut milk

For coconut milk, use the full-fat culinary version sold in cans or make your own. Avoid the diluted version of coconut milk sold in cartons. Make sure your coconut milk and oil are organically sourced. The fats in coconut are rich in medium-chain triglycerides, important for structure and energy production. They are also rich in fats (lauric acid, caprylic acid, capric acid) that may have important antimicrobial effects.

Avocados and Avocado oil

These contain potent antioxidants known as carotenoids, phytosteroids, and polyhydroxylated fatty alcohols, all of which help modulate inflammation in the body. The oleic acid in avocados is a monounsaturated fat that reduces the risk of vascular disease.

Olives and Olive Oil

Olive oil is one of the healthiest foods on the planet. Not only is it rich in heart and

vasculature-protective monounsaturated fats, but it also contains a diverse array of antioxidant and anti-inflammatory nutrients that have been shown to reduce inflammation, cancer risk, allergies, cardiovascular problems, osteoporosis and more. Buy only organic, unrefined varieties and store in dark containers in cool areas to prevent spoilage. Buy only “extra virgin” or “fresh pressed” varieties.

Omega-3 Fats

(fish oil, algae-derived DHA): These have many health benefits as necessary structural fats for cell membranes and anti-inflammatory molecules. If you don't eat fatty fish like wild-caught salmon regularly, you would benefit from supplementing with a good quality DHA and/or (the major omega-3-fatty acids) extract.

Beans and Legumes

Use the full spectrum of beans, legumes, lentils, and other split legumes. Limit the amount you consume to keep the sugar content of your diet low. Omit them entirely if you suspect you have food sensitivities.

Teas

You may include unsweetened green tea (preferably Sencha ground green tea powder, which is grown in the sun and higher in antioxidants while lower in caffeine content compared to matcha, which is grown in the shade), black and white tea varieties, rooibos, and all herbal teas in your food plan.

Fermented Foods

Fermented vegetables such as sauerkraut and kimchi are allowed and provide essential probiotic organisms. Kombucha may be consumed in moderation (one half to one cup per day).

Fluids

It is important to stay well hydrated. Most people need a minimum of two quarts of liquid per day. You may use filtered water, mineral water, green tea, herbal tea, and bone broth.

Smoothies

This is a convenient and potentially delicious way to create a meal while on this plan. Simply include only those foods allowed on the plan. Include hydrolyzed collagen as your protein,

some fat and water and/or coconut milk to create a meal that includes all major food groups to sustain you through part of your day.

Nutritional Supplements

Most nutritional supplements that have been specifically prescribed for you to meet your unique needs are allowed on the FINE food plan if manufacturers have been careful to exclude the undesirable ingredients. Work with your Functional Medicine practitioner on this if necessary.

Foods to *Avoid* on Your FINE Food Plan

All Grains (wheat, rye, barley, oats, corn, rice)

Grains can be irritants to the immune system as well as the lining of the gastrointestinal tract. All of today's genetically engineered grain varieties are high in sugar content and release excesses of sugar through the digestive process.

Check with your nutrition consultant, but some "pseudo-grains," such as quinoa and millet, which are actually seeds, may be allowed.

All Animal Milk Products (includes cow, goat, and sheep's milk)

Animal milk is proinflammatory by virtue of its major protein, casein, and one of its predominant fats, arachadonic acid. Casomorphins are produced in the digestive process of milk and behave like opiates that can cause mood and cognitive dysfunction in susceptible individuals.

All Processed, Synthetic Foods, Preservatives and Additives

Most of these are manufactured molecules that displace real food, are void of nutrition, often high in calories, and can be irritants harmful to human health.

Unhealthy Meats

These include commercial corn-fed feedlot beef, commercial poultry and eggs, many farm-raised fish and all large predator fish (such as tuna and swordfish). (The status of farm-raised fish is changing as growers are responding to the need for ethically and nutritionally raised fish. See National Resources Defense Council's, NRDC, website for more information.)

Feedlot beef are treated with the utmost cruelty and are obese, unhealthy animals. Their meat is less nutritious than their pasture-raised counterparts, containing an abundance of unhealthy fats and higher levels of pesticide and antibiotic residues.

Fish not wild-caught as well as larger predator fish are suspect for pesticides or heavy metal contamination. Refer to the NRDC's detailed guide about choosing fish with the lowest mercury content.

Excesses of Sugar

This includes the sugar naturally occurring in fruits and vegetables (sweet fruit and starchy veggies). The literature is now huge on negative health impact of dietary sugars.

Artificial and Non-Nutritive Sweeteners

Avoid all sugar substitutes and artificial sweeteners that add sweetness to food and beverages but have no nutritional value. These include sucralose, Splenda, aspartame and sugar alcohols (such as mannitol, sorbitol, dextrose and xylitol). Stevia and monk fruit may be consumed sparingly—the sweet taste leads to insulin release, promotion of inflammation, and may support sugar addiction.

Unhealthy Fats

Omit all trans or hydrogenated fats, fat from commercial meats, damaged fats found in rancid oils or fatty foods exposed to excess heat. Protect your oils from excess exposure to heat or ambient air.

Consume only raw fresh nuts to avoid damaged fats produced by excess heat. Store nuts and oils in the refrigerator if you don't plan to use them within a few days.

Processed and rancid fats promote inflammation and lead to tissue damage and disease. Avoid consuming and cooking with vegetable oils derived from canola, sunflower, or safflower as they are easily damaged both on the shelf and through the cooking process.

Beyond Energy Nutrition: Heal Fatigue and Autoimmunity with Food

Chronic fatigue often accompanies autoimmunity and inflammatory disorders. Common autoimmune disorders include autoimmune thyroid disease, rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, multiple sclerosis (MS), psoriasis, inflammatory bowel diseases (ulcerative colitis and Crohn's disease), and many others.

Often times fatigue alone is the way autoimmune disorders initially present, without other identifying symptoms. If your fatigue persists and doesn't respond completely to a fair trial of the FINE food plan and the other components of good self-care have already been addressed (sleep, movement, stress support, and so on), consider the possibility that inflammation or autoimmunity are playing a role.

The common denominators of all autoimmune disorders are genetic susceptibility, impaired gut permeability, and triggers (such as food components, microbes, toxins, intense emotional stress, imbalanced gut flora, medications, and so forth).

If you are suffering with chronic fatigue and also have an autoimmune disorder, or if you suspect you might have an autoimmune disorder, it is important to work with an expert in Functional Medicine to help you heal your gut and identify and treat any persistent triggers. A core part of healing from autoimmunity is a healing food strategy. Please work with the [Gut-Immune Restoration Intensive Nutrition \(GRIN\) food plan](#).

Resources

Karyn Shanks MD. [How to Heal Fatigue with Optimal Energy Nutrition](#). 2019.

Karyn Shanks MD. [How to Reverse Autoimmunity with Optimal Energy Nutrition](#). 2019.

Karyn Shanks MD. [How to Optimize Protein for Energy and Vitality](#). 2019.

Loren Cordain. [The Paleo Diet: Lose Weight and Get Healthy by Eating the Food You Were Designed to Eat](#). 2001. Classic work on optimal human diets based on anthropological food science.

Michael Pollan. [Food Rules](#). 2009. Excellent source of food wisdom.

Agalae Jacobs MS RD. [Digestive Health with REAL Food: A Practical Guide to an Anti-Inflammatory, Nutrient-Dense Diet for IBS and Other Digestive Issues](#). 2018.

National Resources Defense Council. [The Smart Seafood Buying Guide.](#)

Sarah Ballantyne PhD. [The Paleo Approach: Reverse Autoimmune Disease and Heal Your Body.](#) 2014. An encyclopedic exploration of gut and immune biology—how irritant and toxic foods injure the gut lining to promote inflammation.

Karyn Shanks MD. [The Gut-Immune Restoration Intensive Nutrition \(GRIN\) Food Plan.](#) 2019.

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Karyn Shanks, MD, is a physician who lives and practices in Iowa City. Her work is inspired by the science of Functional Medicine, body-mind principles, and wisdom gleaned from the transformational journeys of thousands of clients over her twenty-five-year career. Her work honors each individual and the power of their stories, their inner wisdom, and innate healing potential. She believes that the bones of healing are in what we do for ourselves. She is the author of *Liftoff*, a manual of energy recovery and healing through essential self-care practices.

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