



Discover the Power of Nutrition

March is National Nutrition Month, and this year's theme, *Discover the Power of Nutrition*, does not mean much until you look at how it plays out across a typical day, since most of it has less to do with big changes and more to do with how your day unfolds from one meal to the next. Maybe you notice how different meals keep you full or leave you looking for something else an hour later, or how your energy holds through the afternoon or starts to dip once the day gets busy and your options get more limited.

Breakfast is typically where this is most obvious, since so many morning options like cereal, bagels, and donuts are mostly refined carbohydrates that wear off quickly even when they seem filling at first. This energy drop leads to hunger coming back sooner, and you might start reaching for whatever is easiest to grab next. In contrast, when your breakfast includes fiber, fat, and protein, it holds up much better, not because anything dramatic has changed, but because those nutrients slow digestion and absorption, preventing that energy crash.

Here are some examples:

- Toast on its own → toast with eggs, nut butter, or yogurt on the side
- Fruit by itself → fruit paired with nuts or seeds
- Oatmeal → oatmeal made with milk and topped with nuts or seeds
- A pastry → something that includes both protein and fiber

Meals that include foods like beans, whole grains, vegetables, nuts, and seeds keep you full longer, and over time those same eating patterns are linked with better blood sugar control, heart health, and lower risk of chronic disease. It is not one food or one nutrient doing the work, but the combination of foods you eat across the day, repeated day after day, that makes the difference.

Things usually break down later in the day when time is limited, energy is low, burnout is high, and convenience becomes the great temptation. Grabbing something on the go, ordering takeout, or snack stacking ends up as the default, and those choices are not generally the ones that keep you going for very long, which is how the cycle repeats.

What helps is having a few meals you can make on repeat that require very little effort, whether that means one or two meals you can put together without much thought, or a set of ingredients that are always in your kitchen and ready to use. Once something works and you know it keeps you full, making it again and again is usually more useful than continuing to search for something new.

Make mealtime easier

- Have 2 or 3 easy fallback meals, and remember to keep the ingredients on hand
- Build your meals to include protein, fiber, and fat
- Keep a few low-effort staples around like canned beans, frozen vegetables, or pre-cooked grains
- When you're tired or cranky, aim for something you enjoy that will keep you going for a few hours, not just something quick

The power of nutrition plays out through what you return to, since what you do consistently shapes both how you feel in the short term and what your health looks like in the long term.

Pantry Pasta with Beans, Spinach, and Artichokes



This is a good example of having a few staples on hand and turning them into a balanced meal without much effort. Pasta, canned beans, canned tomatoes, EVOO, frozen spinach, and jarred artichokes are inexpensive, easy to store, and always there when you need them.

Ingredients:

- 1 lb whole grain pasta
- 1 can (15 oz) white beans or chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- 1 can (15 oz) diced tomatoes
- 2–3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2–3 cloves garlic (or 1–2 teaspoons jarred garlic)
- 1 lb bag frozen spinach
- 1 jar marinated artichoke hearts, drained and chopped
- Salt and pepper (skip added salt if you're limiting sodium)
- *Optional:* red pepper flakes or grated cheese

Instructions:

1. Cook the pasta according to package directions. Before draining, reserve about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the cooking water.
2. While the pasta cooks, heat olive oil in a large pan over medium heat. Add garlic and cook briefly. Add the beans and diced tomatoes and cook for a few minutes to let the flavors come together. Add the frozen spinach and cook until heated and any excess moisture cooks off.
3. Add the cooked pasta to the pan along with a splash of the reserved pasta water. Stir in the artichokes and toss everything together until the sauce lightly coats the pasta. Season with salt and pepper.
4. Finish with red pepper flakes or grated cheese if you like.