

SIMPLE FOOD / LESS GUESSWORK

Eat simply. Support your gut.

Meals, portions and timing for fatigue,
Long COVID and ME/CFS.

When you have limited energy, food needs to be manageable. This guide gives you a flexible starting point: familiar ingredients, regular nourishment and adjustments for a sensitive stomach.

01 Eat enough, regularly.

Build meals around protein, a starchy food, produce and some unsaturated fat. Use snacks when appetite or meal size is limited. [2, 9]

02 Make three useful swaps.

Replace sugary drinks, take a break from alcohol, and make olive oil your everyday cooking oil. Keep easy, nourishing foods within reach.

03 Fit the plan to your symptoms.

Try smaller meals if large ones leave you uncomfortable. Increase fiber gradually, and use prepared food or help with cooking when needed. [1, 6]

What "clean" means here: mostly nourishing foods you tolerate, with enough food overall. Frozen, canned and ready-made options can all fit.

Food can support nutrition and gut comfort. No diet is established as a cure for Long COVID or ME/CFS. General education for adults; adapt with your clinician or registered dietitian. [1, 2]

THE BIGGEST PRACTICAL CHANGES

Start with these three swaps.

Keep the focus on changes you can repeat without making food another job.

01 Cut everyday added sugar.

Why: sweet drinks and frequent sweets can displace more nourishing foods; excess free sugar contributes to tooth decay and unhealthy weight gain. Cutting it is a general health step, not a proven CFS treatment. [3]

Start here: swap soda, sweet coffee and juice for water or unsweetened drinks. Choose plain yogurt and add fruit. Honey, agave and syrups still count as free sugar.

Keep: whole fruit, plain dairy and starchy foods. You do not need a zero-sugar or zero-carb diet.

02 Take a break from alcohol.

Why: alcohol can fragment sleep and irritate the stomach, adding to next-day fatigue and discomfort. It can also worsen symptoms in people with POTS. [4, 7]

Start here: make alcohol-free evenings your default. Choose water, an unsweetened drink or a 0.0% option; check added sugar. A two-week check-in is a practical experiment, not a recovery deadline.

Safety: if you drink heavily or have had withdrawal, get medical help before stopping abruptly.

03 Make olive oil your default.

Why: it is an easy source of unsaturated fat. Use it for dressings and everyday cooking, and have deep-fried foods and packaged sweets less often. [5]

About seed oils: current human evidence does not support treating canola, soybean or sunflower oil as inherently inflammatory. Eliminating them is not an established treatment for gut problems, Long COVID or CFS. A fried snack and a balanced meal cooked with vegetable oil are different foods. [5]

If you prefer to avoid them: olive oil is a practical choice. Avoid replacing them mainly with butter, coconut oil or tallow.

If you are losing weight or struggling to eat enough, adequate nutrition comes first. Keep prescribed nutrition drinks even if they contain sugar. [1, 2]

A FLEXIBLE MEAL FORMULA

Build a meal you can repeat.

Use these visual starting portions, then adjust for appetite, body size and weight stability. The food groups follow recovery guidance; portions are flexible examples. [9]

PROTEIN**About 1 palm**

Fish, chicken, eggs, tofu, plain Greek yogurt or beans. Plant-based eaters can combine tofu, beans or lentils across the day.

STARCH**1-2 cupped hands**

Oats, rice, potatoes, wholegrain bread or pasta. Keep carbohydrates in the plan; choose textures and portions you tolerate.

PRODUCE**About 1-2 fists**

Vegetables and/or whole fruit. Begin with a smaller amount if your gut is sensitive; cooked vegetables may be easier to manage.

FAT**A modest serving**

Try 1-2 teaspoons of olive oil, some avocado or a small handful of nuts. Add more food or snacks if you are still hungry.

MAKE IT GENTLER ON YOUR GUT

- **Add fiber slowly.** Start with familiar foods such as oats, fruit and cooked vegetables. Add small portions of beans or lentils as tolerated; a sudden large increase can cause gas and bloating. [6]
- **Build variety gradually.** Rotate the plants you enjoy. Plain yogurt with live cultures is optional if tolerated; fermented foods and probiotic supplements are not required. [1]
- **Use substitutions.** Try lactose-free dairy or calcium-fortified soy alternatives if needed. Gluten-free, low-FODMAP and low-histamine diets should be tailored to a specific need with professional help. [1, 6]

A simple fallback meal: microwave rice + cooked chicken or tofu + frozen vegetables + olive oil. Frozen produce and ready-cooked protein count.

A RHYTHM THAT FITS YOUR DAY

Regular meals. Flexible timing.

Start with three meals and add snacks if needed. If nausea or fullness limits meals, try four to six smaller eating occasions. Keep enough food across the whole day. [1, 2]

AN EXAMPLE DAY - SHIFT THE TIMES TO SUIT YOU

8:00 AM **Breakfast** | Plain Greek or fortified soy yogurt + oats + banana.

12:00 PM **Lunch** | Chicken or tofu + microwave rice + cooked vegetables.

3:00 PM **Snack, if needed** | Toast with nut butter, or fruit with plain yogurt.

6:30 PM **Dinner** | Fish or beans + potato or rice + vegetables + olive oil.

ADJUST THE MEAL TO THE SYMPTOM

- **Heavy meals leave you worse?** Try a smaller balanced meal and move the remaining food into a later snack. With POTS, smaller meals and less refined carbohydrate per sitting may help. Keep total intake adequate. [7]
- **Reflux at night?** Aim to finish meals at least three hours before lying down or bed when feasible. If you need to lie down often, ask your clinician how to adapt this. [8]
- **Low appetite or nausea?** Try small, frequent servings and easy textures. Avoid deliberate fasting or skipping meals to "rest the gut" when you are already struggling to eat. [1, 2]
- **Hydrate through the day.** Keep a drink nearby and sip regularly. Follow any fluid restriction. Extra salt or high-volume fluid plans for POTS need individualized medical guidance.

These times are a planning example, not a proven treatment schedule. If eating brings on marked dizziness, palpitations or repeated crashes, discuss it with your clinician rather than assuming it is only a food issue. [7]

YOUR NEXT GROCERY ORDER

A small plan for the next week.

Choose a few foods you already like. Repeating a good-enough meal is useful.

Buy a small set of basics

2 proteins: eggs, tofu, chicken, yogurt, fish or beans

2 starches: oats, rice, potatoes or wholegrain bread

3 plants: a fruit + two vegetables, fresh or frozen

Extras: olive oil, nuts or nut butter, and an unsweetened drink

THREE HABITS TO PRACTICE

- **Make meals accessible.** Keep one easy breakfast and one freezer meal available. Use grocery delivery, ready meals or help with preparation when cooking costs too much energy. [1]
- **Check in briefly.** Note meal size, gut comfort, sleep and appetite. Change one thing at a time; a bad day does not prove a food intolerance.
- **Review after a week or two.** Keep what makes eating easier. Persistent symptoms or falling weight call for support, not a longer list of banned foods. [1, 2]

Get individual help for unintentional weight loss, trouble swallowing, persistent vomiting or inability to eat enough. A clinician or dietitian should tailor this plan for diabetes medicines, kidney disease, allergies or an eating-disorder history.

SOURCES & FURTHER READING

Selected guidance checked September 2026. Tap a title to open the source.

1. **British Dietetic Association** - Long Covid and diet
2. **NICE** - ME/CFS guideline NG206: diet and symptom management
3. **World Health Organization** - Healthy diet: free sugars and food quality
4. **NIAAA** - Hangovers: alcohol, sleep and stomach irritation
5. **American Heart Association** - Seed oils: evidence and common misconceptions
6. **NIDDK** - Eating, diet and nutrition for irritable bowel syndrome
7. **NHS** - Postural tachycardia syndrome (POTS)
8. **NIDDK** - Eating, diet and nutrition for acid reflux
9. **Guy's and St Thomas' NHS** - Diet and eating habits after COVID-19

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