

Let's Talk About Sustainability.

Sustainability – What is it?

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) define sustainable diets as those that promote health and well-being, and prevent all forms of malnutrition, including micronutrient deficiency, while considering the environmental impact, cultural acceptability, accessibility, and affordability.¹

According to the FAO and WHO, “Sustainable healthy diets must combine all the dimensions of sustainability to avoid unintended consequences.”¹

Sustainability is a complex issue. As a dietitian, you may not have in-depth expertise in this area, but you can use your specialized food and nutrition knowledge and skills to translate science into healthy living advice for your clients, by using the tips below.

Four Positive Strategies to Share with Your Clients.

You know, as a dietitian, that nutrition is a key factor in sustainable, healthy diets. By using these four strategies, you can help your clients reduce their environmental impact, while also meeting their nutritional needs.

1. Reduce food waste.

Why does it matter? Avoiding household food waste is one of the most important ways you can help clients reduce their food-related environmental impact; discarded food wastes resources used to grow, process, and distribute food.^{2,3} In addition, food waste in landfills is a key source of methane, a greenhouse gas linked to climate change.⁴

How can you help? Share tips with your clients to avoid food waste: plan for meals, shop only for what's needed, use up what's on hand, store food properly and freeze extras.



Put it into practice: Frittatas are an ideal way to use up various ingredients and leftovers in your fridge, which helps minimize food waste. This **frittata** works perfectly with slightly wilted spinach, mixed bits of cheese and those random mushrooms at the bottom of your crisper.

Talking About Sustainability with Your Clients.

Connect first. We want to provide evidence-based advice, but opening our conversations with complex, science-based information may turn off clients. Instead, start by identifying a shared value. For example: for clients who are concerned about the environment, you can connect by empathizing and saying, “I understand. I'm also concerned about the health of the planet.”

Lead with deliciousness. Taste is a key driver for food choices! Entice your clients to make changes by talking about food. Chatting about fresh, seasonal ingredients or mouthwatering recipes is a great way to engage your clients about healthy eating.

Take a positive approach. Encourage clients to add in nutrient-rich foods or use up leftovers to reduce food waste, rather than focusing on cutting out food choices. Feeling great about initial positive changes can lead to even more.

“In my work as a Dietitian, clients often come to me with overarching goals to eat in a way that is more sustainable not only for their personal goals but also the health of our community at large. I enjoy teaching ways in which people can enjoy Canadian food and connecting them to local farmers, biotechnology leaders and resources that can help them on this journey. I believe it's important to understand sustainability within the context of Canadian food and agriculture.”



Nita Sharda, Registered Dietitian

2. Eat to satisfy hunger and support health.

Why does it matter? By encouraging clients to be mindful in their food purchases and helping them to eat to meet their nutrition and health needs (with indulgences, of course), we can promote a nutritious eating pattern that is adequate in energy and nutrients and uses fewer agricultural inputs.¹

How can you help? Provide a personalized approach that considers mindful eating habits and foods in portions that satisfy hunger and nutrient needs.

Good to know: Milk products are affordable, nutrient-rich foods that provide protein plus six of the eight nutrients of concern for Canadians: calcium, magnesium, zinc, vitamin A, vitamin D and potassium.⁵

3. Choose local foods.


Why does it matter? Supporting clients to prioritize Canadian-grown and Canadian-produced whole foods, when possible and in season, is an important practice in sustainability.⁶ It also helps support the local economy, including the farmers who provide us with nutritious whole foods.

How can you help? Share recipes and shopping tips that favour foods grown and produced in Canada. Provide suggestions around how to choose sustainable alternatives when local or in-season options aren't available, such as frozen vegetables.

Good to know: Canadian dairy farming has one of the lowest milk production carbon footprints in the world.⁷ And as a local food, Canadian milk typically comes from farms within 200 km of major cities across Canada, resulting in minimal environmental impact from transportation.

“The carbon footprint of various foods and diets found in the scientific literature is sometimes incomplete, as it may exclude transportation from processor to retailer. When this is the case, study outcomes should be considered with caution, especially in the Canadian context. In Canada, many of the foods we consume are imported from far away or travel extensively across the country, which can have a significant impact on their carbon footprint, especially for foods that are large, heavy or require refrigeration. While the growing and processing stages are often the most important in the life cycle of food, the impacts associated with its distribution cannot always be overlooked.”

**Geneviève Martineau, B.Ing., M.Sc.A.,
Groupe AGECO**



“Sustainability to me is being extra thoughtful in my food choices, prioritizing local food producers and vendors whenever possible, and purchasing foods that will be savoured, enjoyed, and won't go to waste. Taking the time to shop locally and purchase only what my family and I need (and encourage my clients, family and friends to do the same) helps to cut down on food waste and contributes to mindful eating practices.”

Sarah Remmer, Registered Dietitian

4. Choose a nutritious, balanced approach to eating.

Why does it matter? Helping clients to focus on nutrient-rich whole foods and rely less on highly processed, nutrient-poor foods can improve their overall diet quality. Limiting consumption of highly processed, nutrient-poor foods can reduce environmental footprint thanks to fewer environmental inputs required for processing.⁸

How can you help? Share easy, economical and culturally inclusive meal and snack ideas that focus on a variety of nutrient-rich, minimally processed ingredients and suggest alternatives to highly processed, nutrient-poor options.



To maximize nutrition and minimize your environmental footprint, choose minimally processed protein foods from both animal and plant-based sources. They each provide complementary nutrients for good health and whole foods have a lesser impact on the planet than processed foods. Win-Win!

Put it into practice: One-Pot Barley and Vegetables

In Summary

Provide practical advice that emphasizes positive steps for healthy, sustainable diets, such as:

- Shopping, storage and cooking tips to reduce food waste
- Recipe and meal ideas for incorporating nutrient-rich, delicious foods
- Real life strategies for how to limit consumption of highly processed foods
- How to choose local foods in season and sustainable choices when foods are not in season

References

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