

Nutrition researchers create eating plan for the Prairies

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Rhonda Bell (left) and Cathy Chan developed the Pure Prairie Eating Plan to help people living in the Prairies eat a healthy diet using local, affordable foods.

Two nutrition researchers at the University of Alberta are making it easy for people living in the Prairies to eat a heart-healthy diet using foods that are local and affordable.

Rhonda Bell and Cathy Chan, nutrition professors in the Faculty of Agricultural, Life and Environmental Sciences, wrote a book entitled

Pure Prairie Eating Plan: Fresh Food, Practical Menus and a Healthy Lifestyle. It contains a detailed 28-day menu complete with numerous recipes for three meals and three snacks every day.

Call it the Mediterranean Diet for the Prairies.

"Just like the Mediterranean Diet, the Pure Prairie Eating Plan promotes a pattern of [healthy eating](#) above all else, and emphasizes fruits, vegetables and grains," said Chan.

The book also includes weekly ingredient lists for easier shopping, along with tips for healthy eating, carbohydrate counting and other useful information about the foods in the plan.

"We wrote this book for people who want to eat healthier foods but don't necessarily know how to go about it. Everything we need to eat more healthy is available at our local grocery stores," said Bell.

Chan noted that the Pure Prairie Eating Plan follows Canada's Food Guide recommendations and uses local ingredients and culturally appropriate food choices.

"For example, the Mediterranean Diet uses [olive oil](#) extensively. Olive oil is quite expensive on the Prairies, but it turns out we have canola oil. It's plentiful, fairly inexpensive and just as healthy," she explained.

Another significant difference between the eating plans is the use of [red meat](#). The Mediterranean Diet suggests eating red meat only about once a month, but that's not realistic for the Prairies, where people love their red meat, particularly beef.

Besides, said Bell, "Red meat has got a bit of a bad rap. It has some very important nutrients."

The researchers incorporated red meat into the eating plan sensibly with leaner cuts, including pork, and appropriate portions and ways to prepare them. The eating plan also contains other protein sources such as pulses and grains.

Though the plan's main purpose is to make it easier for people to eat a healthier diet without depriving themselves of the foods they know and love, the authors say it can also be used to lose weight.

"Each day's menu is about 2,000 calories," said Chan. "And for each day, we show how you can decrease the amount of calories, or increase them, by about 200 calories."

Bell and Chan first developed the plan for people living with Type 2 diabetes, as part of the Physical Activity and Nutrition for Diabetes in Alberta (PANDA) project.

Research indicated that people with Type 2 diabetes who followed the plan improved their [blood sugar levels](#) and lost weight. Stakeholders were impressed with the results and wondered whether the plan could be adapted to promote healthy eating for everyone. Bell and Chan took on the challenge and, through additional research, developed the Pure Prairie Eating Plan.

Provided by University of Alberta

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