



the ultimate diet

for health and weight loss

Fad diets may help you shed a few pounds. But to enjoy more energy, balance mind and spirit, lose the weight and keep it off, you need the world's healthiest eating plan.

You want—we all want—to trim down and get energized. Well, there's a bestseller list crammed with dietary alternatives: low-carb, ultra-low-calorie, ultra-low-fat, food-combining, metabolic, detoxifying, even religion-based. Lots of people have lost weight following these types of programs—though, as studies show, not necessarily for the long term.

So before you launch yourself into the world of trendy weight-loss plans, ask yourself: Is this the most healthful path to losing excess weight? Is it the best option for mind and body? And will the weight loss last?

The answer to these questions is almost always a resounding *no*. This may come as a shock, but—according to research—the best, most effective weight-loss plan is high in carbohydrates and rich in healthy fat. It includes lots of plant foods and very few processed ones; it lets you consume *more* food yet weigh *less*—and it has proven to work for centuries. Finally, it's satisfying enough to enjoy on an ongoing basis, where most diets, including the ubiquitous low-carb schemes, are notoriously difficult to stick with.

This *ne plus ultra* of nutritional plans is based on the traditional diets of the world's healthiest people. And you can follow their revitalizing, pound-shedding examples by adopting some of their fundamental eating behaviors. Here's how.

hearty fish stew

SERVES 4

For a nutritional boost, serve this stew with 2 cups mixed salad greens tossed in an olive-oil dressing and 1/2 cup cooked spinach linguine (which will soak up the delicious sauce). The greens add a nice dose of heart-protective folate and the antioxidant chlorophyll, while the olive oil provides healthy monounsaturated fat.

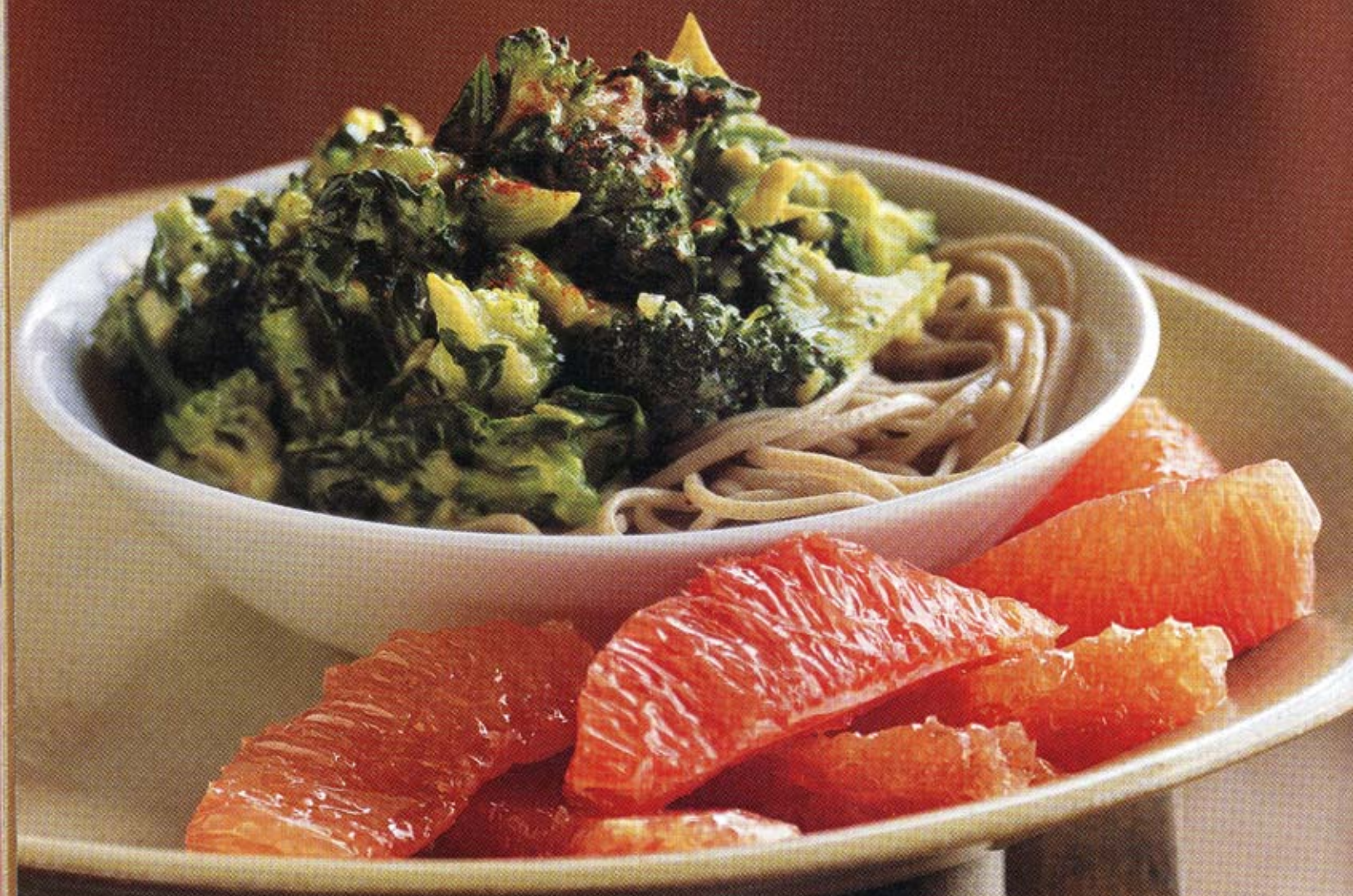
- 2 teaspoons olive oil
- 1 cup chopped yellow onion
- 2 celery stalks, chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 2 bay leaves
- 1/4 teaspoon crushed red-pepper flakes
- 1/2 cup vermouth
- 1 28-ounce can petite-cut diced tomatoes or regular diced tomatoes
- 1 cup reduced-sodium chicken or vegetable broth
- 1/2 cup frozen corn kernels
- 1/4 pound raw medium shrimp, peeled and deveined
- 1/2 pound Pacific halibut (or cod), cut into 2-inch pieces
- 1/2 pound bay scallops
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley
- salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 Heat the oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add onion, celery and garlic and sauté 5 minutes, until vegetables are soft. Add thyme, bay leaves and red pepper flakes and stir to coat. Cook 1 minute, until thyme is fragrant.

2 Add vermouth and simmer 1 minute. Add tomatoes, broth and corn and bring mixture to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover and cook 2 minutes.

3 Add shrimp, halibut and scallops and simmer 5 to 7 minutes, until seafood is opaque and cooked through. Remove from heat and stir in parsley. Season to taste with salt and black pepper.

PER SERVING (1 1/2 cups): 438 calories, 13% fat (4 g; 1 g saturated), 39% carbs (26 g), 48% protein (32 g), 5 g fiber, 104 mg calcium, 774 mg sodium.



for weight-loss success, balance body, mind and spirit

While smart eating choices are the core of any healthy slim-down plan, a positive mental attitude and regular physical activity are crucial to keeping the pounds off. Here's some food for thought to help you begin your weight-loss journey:

praise yourself, but never criticize. Self-criticism breaks the inner spirit while praise builds it up. Tell yourself how well you're doing as you start to follow your new plant-based program.

be gentle and patient with yourself. Breaking old habits and making positive change doesn't happen overnight. Research shows that it takes at

least three weeks for a new behavior to become a habit. Meanwhile, treat yourself as you would a beloved friend.

take care of your body. Learn about nutrition (this article is a good start!), and become aware of the kinds of fuel your body needs for optimum energy and vitality. Zero in on the type of movement you enjoy: walking, yoga, dance, tennis, etc.

find support. Reach out to friends and allow them to help you. Join a weight-loss group, a walking club or a gym to get social reinforcement for your goals.

start today. Don't wait until you lose weight, find a new job or meet the right person before you adopt a healthy eating plan. Begin right now, and do the best you can.

the healthiest and slimmest women

Western diet docs may have slick theories and a handful of short-term studies to show that their regimens work. But when it comes to long-term results, the actual experience of healthy populations is much more persuasive. And when it comes to fitness, it's hard to outdo the amazing women of Okinawa, a lush green archipelago of 161 islands in southern Japan.

Compared to Americans, Okinawan women have half the strokes, a quarter of the lymphoma and a fifth of the heart disease. Breast-cancer rates are among the lowest in the world. "Most Okinawans don't even know anyone who's had a breast tumor," says Bradley Willcox, M.D., of the Pacific Health Research Institute in Honolulu and co-author of *The Okinawa Diet Plan* with his twin brother, Craig, a medical anthropologist at Okinawa Prectural University.

Equally intriguing, Okinawan women remain slender throughout their lives, even though the concept of dieting is foreign to them. And they remain active well into old age, which can easily extend to 100 or beyond. "Okinawan women outlive other Japanese women by two years—and the Japanese outlive Americans by five," says Willcox.

What's their secret? "We liken this to balance," says Willcox. "Like four legs of a chair, the older Okinawans have combined a tasty low-calorie diet, regular physical activity, psychospiritual factors that help with life satisfaction and stress resistance, and social factors, such as integrative health care, into a strong foundation for lifelong health."

Scanning the globe, doctors have come upon another nutritional tradition that confers exceptional health: the Mediterranean diet. It first came to scientists' attention in 1948, when the Rockefeller Foundation discovered that the plant-based diet of impoverished Cretans was "surprisingly good" compared with that of American meat-eaters. Studies have bolstered the findings ever since. Last summer, an eight-year investigation published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that out of 22,043 adults, those who adhered most closely to a classic Mediterranean diet were 25 percent less likely to die than those who strayed, primarily because their heart-disease and cancer rates were so much lower.

the sweet-potato man

On the surface, the Okinawa and Mediterranean diets sound very different. At least 70 percent of the Okinawan diet consists of low-glycemic carbs, while Greeks and Italians consume as much as 40 percent of their calories as fat, much of it from olive oil. The Mediterranean menu favors wild greens, tomatoes, lemons, fish, beans, garlic, dark whole-grain bread, cheese or yogurt, and rice or pasta. The Okinawans prefer miso soup, bean sprouts, tofu, fish, dark greens, carrots, cabbage, tropical fruit, lean meats, spices—and sweet potatoes. "That's their main carb," says Willcox. "Baked sweet potatoes are sold from the backs of trucks. The sweet-potato man's cry is as familiar in their neighborhoods as the bell of an ice cream truck is in America."

Yet experts see important similarities between the two ways of eating. "The Okinawa plan is the Mediterranean diet with soy oil," jokes K. Dun Gifford, president of Oldways, a nonprofit think tank in Boston that promotes the Mediterranean diet. The key to both diets is that neither one slavishly follows a low-carb or low-fat regimen. Instead they mix and match so-called "good" carbs and fats, while going easy on the "bad" ones.

In short, if you ignore the media slugfest over fats and carbs and focus on nutritional value, you get a diet that is healthy and slenderizing.

creamed spinach and broccoli on soba

SERVES 4

This interesting blend of East and West combines Japanese noodles with creamed vegetables. Soba, or buckwheat noodles, provide the fiber, soy milk and broccoli offer healthy flavonoids, and spinach is rich in carotenoids and iron. The mix of colors—brown noodles, white milk, green vegetables and red paprika—turns this dish into a visual delight as well as an incredibly healthful meal. Serve with citrus sections for an extra zing of vitamin C.

- 8 ounces Japanese soba (buckwheat noodles), dry
- canola oil spray
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 shallot, minced
- 3 cups chopped broccoli
- 1 cup soy milk, plain
- 1 tablespoon whole-wheat flour
- pinch of sea salt
- freshly ground black pepper
- 2 cups chopped spinach
- 1 teaspoon ground paprika

1 Cook the soba noodles as instructed on the package.

2 Spray a large skillet with canola oil and cook the garlic and shallot over medium heat for 1 minute, or until the shallot is partly transparent. Add the broccoli and cook, stirring frequently, for 5 minutes or until thoroughly cooked.

3 Increase heat to medium high and add the soy milk. Cook for 2 minutes, or until just before the liquid boils. Immediately reduce heat to low. Do not allow the liquid to boil. Stir in the flour, salt and pepper. Cook for 1 minute or until the liquid is thickened. Stir in the spinach and cook for 1 minute or until spinach is soft.

4 Evenly divide the soba noodles among 4 plates. Ladle the sauce over the noodles and garnish with paprika.

PER SERVING (1 cup): 279 calories, 10% fat (3 g; 0 g saturated), 75% carbs (52 g), 15% protein (10 g), 6 g fiber, 79 mg calcium, 111 mg sodium.

the bottom line on fats

Though the fats you eat can have a complex effect on your health, the basic message couldn't be simpler. Here are ways to limit bad fats and replace them with good fats:

clean your pantry. Toss out cooking oils that aren't monounsaturated- or omega-3-rich. Stick to canola and olive oils.

reduce trans fats. Avoid processed foods that contain "hydrogenated" or "partially hydrogenated" oils.

buy only the lean cuts. With beef, opt for extra-lean ground beef, sirloin, round steak/roast, rump, strip sirloin stew beef or tenderloin. With pork, go for leg or butt roast, tenderloin or center-cut loin. With poultry, choose white meat over dark; it has half the fat. One serving of meat is just 3 ounces—that's half a chicken breast, one pork chop, a lean burger patty, or a fish fillet the size of a deck of cards.

toss the frying pan. Not literally. But try to bake, broil, poach or grill instead of frying foods. Meats can be kept moist with broth, wine or fresh lime juice. Invest in nonstick cookware: No fat is needed for cooking, and cleanup is a cinch.

reach for the tofu. Replace meat in sauces with extra-firm tofu; just drain and crumble before adding.



eat carbs

Perhaps most surprising, given the current craze, is that neither diet shies away from carbs. “You absolutely need carbohydrates,” states Willcox. “They’re your brain’s preferred fuel and the body’s primary source of ready energy.” Just one sweet potato can fill you up for a mere 117 calories, including healthful vitamins and fiber. Contrast that with a doughnut or bag of junk food: Either can easily pack 500 or more empty calories—and when you’ve polished it off, you’ll still want more!

Good carbs like fruits and vegetables contain beneficial phytochemicals. The lycopene in tomatoes, for example, is a potent antioxidant, battling cancer-causing cell damage. The turmeric that Okinawans use so frequently dampens low-grade inflammation, which has been linked to heart disease and diabetes. “Think of it as defensive eating,” says Daniel Nadeau, M.D., medical director of Exeter Hospital’s HealthReach Diabetes, Endocrine and Nutrition Center in Hampton, N.H., and co-author, with James Joseph, Ph.D., and this writer, of *The Color Code*, which analyzes the rewards of a diet rich in colorful produce.

Whole grains aren’t exactly gaudy, but they’re remarkably better than refined ones. In whole wheat, the germ supplies vitamin E, thiamin, folic acid, phosphorus, magnesium, zinc and iron, while the bran is loaded with fiber, which fills you up without adding calories. These are the very parts that are stripped away in the refining process. In a recent report in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*, overweight people who were given low-fat, high-fiber meals for three months lost an average of 7 pounds without even trying. “They ate as much as they wanted every day,” says lead researcher Nicholas Hays, Ph.D.

eat fat

As with carbs, the Mediterranean and Okinawan diets prefer good fats over bad. “Your body needs fat,” says Willcox. “It uses it to build cell membranes and make hormones.” But liquid fats—think olive or canola oil—are more healthful than the solid fats in animal products and snack foods. The former help keep your arteries clear, the latter are building blocks of artery-clogging cholesterol.

Mediterraneans favor two heart-healthy fats: the monounsaturated fat in olive oil and the inflammation-fighting omega-3 fatty acids in fish, walnuts, dark greens and flaxseed. And lean sources of protein are an essential component of both diets. Protein helps build muscle tissue. But again, the source matters. Fish contains omega-3s, but red meat is larded with damaging saturated fat. “The Okinawan elders eat about a quarter of the meat that we do in America,” says Willcox. “And they traditionally boil it for hours and scoop the fat off, so they end up with a very lean meat.” Both plans also derive protein (and heart protection) from legumes, such as lentils and soybeans. “Okinawans eat more soy than any other population on earth,” says Willcox.

the ultimate face-off

So which diet wins the day? Neither and both. Whether you prefer East or West—or create your own international treaty between the two—if you stick to the plant-based, good-carb, good-fat fundamentals of the Okinawan and Mediterranean menus, you’ll find a lifetime of pleasurable eating, ease of weight loss and powerful health benefits. Pass the tofu and olive oil, please!

wild mushroom mediterranean salad

SERVES 4

Increase the nutritional heft of this tasty salad by topping it with 2 tablespoons crumbled feta cheese (adding 84 calories, 5 grams protein and 157 milligrams calcium). Serve with a 2-ounce whole-grain pumpernickel slice (providing 106 calories, 5 grams fiber and plenty of B vitamins).

- ¾ pound stemless portobello mushrooms, gills removed and sliced into ¼-inch-thick slices
- 1 cup canned artichoke hearts (8-10 count), quartered
- 1 small red onion, cut into ⅛-inch-thick rings
- 1 yellow squash, julienned
- 1 red bell pepper, seeded and cut into thin strips
- 1 15-ounce can chickpeas (garbanzo beans), rinsed and drained
- ¼ cup chopped fresh basil
- 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- 2 tablespoons white balsamic vinegar
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- 1 teaspoon finely grated lemon zest
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground pepper

① In a large bowl, combine mushrooms, artichoke hearts, onion, squash, bell pepper, chickpeas and basil. Toss to combine.

② In a small bowl, whisk together both vinegars, oil, mustard, lemon zest, salt and black pepper. Pour mixture over vegetables, and toss. Cover and refrigerate 2 hours (and up to 24 hours) to allow the salad to marinate. Serve chilled or at room temperature.

PER SERVING (1½ cups): 227 calories, 22% fat (6 g; <1 g saturated), 57% carbs (33 g), 21% protein (12 g), 11 g fiber, 104 mg calcium, 262 mg sodium.



caloric density: eat more, feel fuller and weigh less

Okinawan and Mediterranean foods tend to be low in caloric density, i.e., they contain relatively few calories per pound. "We all eat two to three pounds of food a day," says Bradley Willcox, M.D. "If you eat foods with low caloric density, then your two pounds may have half the calories of your Big Mac-eating neighbor's." As a result, Willcox calculates that the average Okinawan consumes 1,800 calories a day to the average American's 2,500, without feeling deprived.

Caloric density is usually based on 1-gram units. The fewer calories in 1 gram of a food, the more of it you can eat and still lose or maintain your weight. The more calories contained in 1 gram of a food, the less of it you can eat without gaining.

Let's say you eat a 280-calorie cheeseburger for lunch. At 100 grams, the cheeseburger has a caloric density of 2.8. But for the same 280 calories, you could have a plateful of stir-fried vegetables, rice and a bowl

of miso soup. The weight of this lunch is a hefty 500 grams—five times the weight of the cheeseburger! And, thus, the caloric density is a much lower 0.6.

Foods with a low caloric density, such as mushrooms, tofu, salsa, broths, and most fruits and vegetables (all with a density of less than 1), will fill you up and aid your weight-loss efforts. (For more options, see the caloric-density pyramids, opposite.) On the other hand, cheese, bagels and even popcorn have a higher caloric density, so watch your portions.

To determine caloric density, divide a serving's calorie count by its weight. For example, a 1-ounce slice of turkey has 60 calories per 28 grams, and $60 \div 28 = 2.1$ calories per gram for a caloric density of 2.1.

Here's a brief list of foods to give you an idea of the range of caloric densities: asparagus, spinach or tomato (0.2); broccoli, grapefruit or strawberries (0.3); nonfat milk or peach (0.4); boiled sweet potato (1); steamed scallops (1.1); whole-wheat pasta (1.2); whole-wheat bagel (2); soy cheese (2.5); popcorn (3.8); potato chips or dark chocolate (5.4); cashews (5.7); butter (7.2).

spicy tofu and summer vegetables with rice

SERVES 2

(pictured left) Although hot bean sauce is a Chinese seasoning, people all over Japan love to cook with it, especially the Okinawans. It adds a vibrant splash of bright red to an already colorful plate. For extra nutrients, top each serving with 2 tablespoons chopped walnuts (adding 95 calories, 4 grams protein and 9 grams monounsaturated fat).

- 1 cup water
- 1 low-sodium vegetable broth bouillon cube (or 1 cup low-sodium vegetable broth instead of water and bouillon)
- ½ tablespoon low-sodium soy sauce
- ¼ teaspoon Szechwan-style hot bean sauce
- 1 teaspoon sesame oil
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon ginger, minced
- 5 ounces water-packed extra-firm light tofu
- ½ cup bitter melon, sliced into ½-inch-thick pieces (substitute yellow-neck squash if desired)
- 1 cup zucchini, sliced into ½-inch-thick pieces
- ½ cup diced celery
- 1 cup broccoli florets
- ½ cup julienned red bell pepper
- ½ cup julienned yellow bell pepper
- ½ cup cooked brown rice

1 In a skillet, bring the water, bouillon cube, soy sauce, bean sauce, sesame oil, garlic and ginger to a boil. Add the tofu, bitter melon, zucchini, celery, broccoli and bell peppers to the pan. Cover, and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Stir, reduce the heat to low, and cook for 5 minutes.

2 Cover again and cook for another 3 minutes, or until the vegetables are cooked to the desired temperature. Serve over brown rice.

PER SERVING (1 cup tofu mixture, ¼ cup brown rice): 284 calories, 15% fat (5 g; <1 g saturated), 67% carbs (48 g), 17% protein (12 g), 8 g fiber, 100 mg calcium, 601 mg sodium.

vegetarian burgers with pecans

SERVES 6

(not shown) For a bonus, serve these absolutely scrumptious veggie burgers with sliced apples and pears to increase your intake of cholesterol-lowering soluble fiber.

- ½ cup reduced-sodium vegetable broth
- ½ cup bulgur
- 4 teaspoons peanut oil, divided
- ½ cup minced red onion
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon dried Mexican oregano or regular dried oregano
- 2 tablespoons chopped unsalted pecans
- ½ cup chopped fresh or frozen spinach, thawed
- 1 15-ounce can black beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 tablespoon sherry vinegar
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
- 6 2-ounce whole-grain sesame buns or whole-grain hamburger buns

1 In a medium saucepan, bring the broth to a boil. Stir in bulgur and remove from heat. Let stand 20 to 25 minutes, until liquid is absorbed.

2 Meanwhile, heat 2 teaspoons of oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add onion and garlic and cook 5 minutes, until onion is soft. Add cumin and oregano and stir to coat. Cook 1 minute, until cumin is fragrant. Add pecans and cook 1 minute to toast. Add spinach, cover and cook 1 minute, until spinach wilts. (If using frozen spinach, squeeze out excess water after thawing.)

3 Place beans in a large bowl and mash with a large fork. Add vinegar and continue mashing beans into a lumpy paste. Add cooked bulgur, onion mixture, salt and black pepper and mix well. Cover with plastic and refrigerate 1 hour.

4 Shape bulgur mixture into 6 patties, each about 1-inch thick.

5 Heat remaining 2 teaspoons of oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add burgers to hot pan and cook 3 minutes per side, until golden brown. Place on bun and serve.

PER SERVING (1 burger, 1 bun): 234 calories, 19% fat (5 g; <1 g saturated), 63% carbs (37 g), 18% protein (11 g), 11 g fiber, 138 mg calcium, 310 mg sodium.



Okinawa Style In *The Okinawa Diet Plan*, Bradley Willcox, M.D., and Craig Willcox build a diet pyramid by caloric density. Get 75 percent of your food from the feather- and lightweight categories, which will help promote weight loss.

featherweights You can feast freely on fruits, vegetables, salsa (without the chips), light tofu, soy milk, broth soups, etc.

lightweights Add, in moderation: cooked whole grains (rice, pasta), sweet potatoes, white flaky fish, low-fat yogurt and legumes.

middleweights Control portion size on lean meat, hummus, fatty fish and bread.

heavyweights Calorie-dense chocolate, cheese and nuts—eat them sparingly.



The Mediterranean Way This classic pyramid doesn't shy away from carbs; whole grains, breads and potatoes can be consumed regularly. (It's hard to argue with a population that has one of the lowest rates of heart disease in the world.)

a foundation of plant sources: fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, beans, grains, potatoes and olive oil.

olive oil is the chief dietary fat (total fat usually ranges from 25 percent to 35 percent, with saturated fat no more than 8 percent of calories).

fresh fruit is a typical dessert; eat other sweets just once to a few times weekly.

fish, especially fatty fish laden with omega-3s, is preferred over poultry and red meat; limit the latter to just a few times per month.