'Emma has created a plan we can all benefit from'
AMELIA FREER

The *Sunday Times* Bestseller

The 30g Plan

How to eat more protein, fibre and plants to lose weight & feel great

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EMMA BARDWELL

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How to Balance Protein, Fibre and Plants to Lose Weight and Feel Great

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To Sue and Jim, for everything

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Introduction

Just tell me what to eat

Are you ever so bamboozled by nutrition messaging that you feel unsure about what to actually put in your mouth? Does the conveyor belt of shiny new diets – always promising rapid weight loss – mean you're constantly flip-flopping between trendy fads and not seeing any meaningful results? And do you have niggling worries about your long-term health and the risk of chronic diseases, such as type 2 diabetes, but feel so overwhelmed that you just don't know how and where to start? Please rest assured, you're not alone. If you're anything like the thousands of people I've worked with, you probably feel as though you're stuffed to the gills with healthy eating information, but starved of practical ways to put the right stuff on your plate.

I created The 30g Plan for exactly this reason, because so many of my clients want to know, in simple terms, what to eat in order to lose weight and feel on top of their game. Many of them come to my clinic recognising the importance of eating better but lacking the headspace and nutritional understanding to translate that information into actual meals. Their common

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refrain is: 'Just tell me *what* to eat', and so, in this book, that's exactly what I'll be doing.

The 30g Plan pulls together everything I've learnt in my decade as a registered nutritionist to help you feel lean, strong and energised, all while living a long and happy life. Think of it as a no-nonsense, easy way to upgrade your diet. Whether we're losing the plot over lectins, obsessing about eating windows or hyper fixating on blood sugar 'spikes', I believe we're currently making healthy eating and weight management way more complicated than it needs to be. In the following chapters, I'm going to show you that eating to manage your weight while also feeling satisfied and well nourished doesn't have to be taxing on your brain, your wallet *or* your time.

The 30g Plan is built on the premise that to lose weight and feel your best we need to get some core foundations in place – what I call my four principles – and stick to them for the majority of the time. You don't have to be perfect. You can still enjoy foods you love. And you won't feel hungry, deprived or restricted. In fact, once you master this way of eating, you'll have much more bandwidth to get on with living your life. Trust me (and my thousands of happy clients can attest to this): it really works!

The four principles of The 30g Plan are:

- 30g of protein (give or take) at each meal
- 30g of fibre a day
- 30+ different plants a week
- a small (300–500) calorie deficit

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These four principles are well researched, backed by scientific data, and have been tested with over one thousand clients in my clinic and through my online programmes. Following them will keep you feeling full, stave off cravings, minimise muscle loss (which can often happen when we diet), regulate mood swings, help lower cholesterol, improve energy and feed your gut microbes. Sounds like a lot, right? But I want to reassure you that what I'm going to teach you is incredibly easy to put into practice.

The 30g Plan works because it isn't prescriptive or set in stone. It can be adapted to suit your individual taste buds and dietary preferences. There's no removal of food groups or slavishly sticking to a certain way of eating. For many of you, especially if you've tried fad diets in the past, it'll actually mean eating more food volume than you have been previously.

Once you master the principles of incorporating more protein, fibre and plant variety into your diet and matching your calorie intake to your needs, you'll have a blueprint that you can adapt to suit you, your lifestyle and your taste buds. You'll also have more freedom, less anxiety and a greater understanding of how to put nutritionally balanced meals together quickly and effortlessly.

Everything I do as a clinician is backed by data and research, but don't worry: I'm not going to unload the science on you and then leave you to it. I'm here to help you put the plan's principles in place with practical behaviour change strategies and over eighty recipe ideas that feature vegan and vegetarian options and include lots of batch cooking and meal prep ideas to

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make life as easy as possible. The meal plans in Chapter 11 are particularly helpful for guiding you through how a typical eating week might look.

As for the all-important results that you can expect, get ready to feel better within days and start losing weight within weeks – check out the timeline below for more on this and to help you start getting excited about the changes you're going to experience. More and more research is coming out on the benefits of protein, fibre and plant diversity. By following The 30g Plan, you're positioning yourself at the forefront of a revolutionary – albeit very straightforward – way of eating. And as far as the future is concerned, it's fair to say the tools you'll learn in this book have the power to shape the way you fuel yourself for the rest of your life.

The 30g Plan timeline: what can you expect?

1. Changes in mood
[day 1]

Congratulations, you've decided to take your health into your own hands. This is a big step and the start of something incredibly powerful that will have long-lasting benefits. Make the most of the 'fresh start effect' to mentally reset and start feeling excited about the road ahead.

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2. Changes in gut microbiome [24 hours]

Research published in *Nature* shows that, within just 24–48 hours of adding more fibre, plants and diversity to your diet, your gut microbiome can start to respond, although significant improvements will understandably take longer.

3. Changes in digestion [a week]

With increased fibre comes improved digestion, better bowel movements and reduced cravings. You won't be able to see it with your eyes, but the lining of your gut, which allows all the goodness from your food to be absorbed, is becoming more resilient and your gut bacteria are starting to flourish.

4. Changes in taste buds [7–14 days]

You have 10,000 taste buds, on average, which regenerate every 7–14 days or so. So if you're introducing new foods and/or reducing the amount of sugar or salt you consume, you need to remember to hold out for a good few days as your taste receptors adjust.

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5. Changes in metabolic markers [a few weeks]

Dietary changes can positively influence cholesterol and blood glucose levels in just days and have considerable benefits within two weeks. After a month of closely following The 30g Plan, which is rich in protein, as well as many different types of fibre, you may well see considerable improvements in metabolic test results (for more details regarding this, turn to p. 260).

6. Changes in weight [realistically, a month plus]

Unlike crash diets, The 30g Plan focuses on sustainable weight loss over a period of time. You can expect to see body fat changes after 4 weeks, although people with a higher starting weight may well find they lose weight faster.

7. Reduced risk of long-term chronic health conditions [ongoing]

The sum total of the benefits of this way of eating: the weight loss, improved insulin sensitivity, better blood glucose regulation, increased energy, more efficient digestion, richer microbiome and more stable mood will, I'm delighted to tell you, continue long into the future.

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How to use this book

First up, arm yourself with a pen and pad of paper, as you're going to want to make plenty of notes while personalising the plan to your individual needs. In an ideal world, I'd like you to read the book from start to finish in order to get a clear understanding of the rationale behind The 30g Plan. After all, you'll be much more invested in an eating plan if you understand the mechanisms and reasoning behind it. Along the way you'll get a really robust idea about how and why 30g of protein, 30g of fibre and 30 different plants are so important, as well as how to translate these numbers onto your plate. I'll also give you answers to common questions and concerns that I hear from people, so that you have all the information you need at your fingertips.

If, however, you're keen to get stuck into the recipes straight away and don't feel like you need any background information, head directly to Chapters 7–10, where you'll find a wide range of easy-to-put-together, flavour-filled meal ideas to get you started on your journey. Each recipe is clearly signposted with a nutritional breakdown of how much protein, fibre and how many unique plants and calories it provides. There are flexitarian, vegan and vegetarian options, as well as meal plans, and helpful ingredient suggestions to make this journey as effortless as possible.

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The chapters at a glance

What you eat is clearly important, but I also want you to understand *why* it's important. Chapter 1 delves into the science and the mechanisms underpinning the benefits of eating 30g of protein per meal, 30g of fibre a day and 30 different plants a week.

Chapter 2 then explains why you need to be in a small calorie deficit (i.e. taking in fewer calories than you use) in order to lose weight and how we will approach this within The 30g Plan. I'll then provide you with practical ways (and formulas) to work out your own weight loss numbers. Don't be alarmed: I go into it in quite a bit of detail, but nevertheless have kept it simple and straightforward.

I'll introduce you to the plan itself in Chapter 3, fleshing out how it looks, what's involved and giving you some valuable tips on how to tailor it to your own personal needs.

Nutrition is one of the most powerful tools we have at our disposal, but good health extends beyond what we put in our mouths. For this reason, Chapter 4 offers additional lifestyle recommendations you might want to put in place alongside the dietary changes you're about to make. From resistance training to stress management, I've created a toolkit of some of the essentials to looking and feeling your very best.

The 30g Plan is designed to be easy, but you will naturally have some questions. In Chapter 5 you'll find answers to common queries and in Chapter 6 I'll give you an insight into the tools, gadgets and ingredients

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that can save you valuable time in the kitchen. You'll find all The 30g Plan meals in Chapters 7–10 and the meal plans in Chapter 11.

The resources section on p.259 is a critical part of the puzzle, especially if you want to stay accountable and ensure you continue this journey long after you finish the book. It contains information on tracking your progress, as well as a daily habits template that you can copy and tick off each day to motivate you to stay on board with your new goals. Reading this book and focusing on your wellbeing offers a great opportunity to carry out a mini health audit. From page 259, you'll find a list of tests you can explore – from blood glucose levels to triglycerides – in order to gauge where your health is currently at. It has handy tables for logging your results and any follow-up metrics, which will help you to see your progress at a glance.

I believe wholeheartedly in the power of nutrition; I see the transformative benefits daily in my clinical practice. This book has been written to help show you that creating great tasting, nourishing food doesn't have to be hard, expensive, fussy or time consuming. It's all about eating well to live and feel better, and now is the perfect time to get started.

So, by the end of this book you will:

- Have access to over 80 high protein, high fibre recipes
- Know how to easily consume 30 (or more) different plants a week

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- Understand the benefits of eating 30g of protein at mealtimes
- Have a go-to checklist of your favourite, high protein and high fibre ingredients
- Understand the mechanism behind weight loss and how to make my formula work for you
- Know the tests to ask for to check your metabolic health
- Have a 30g Plan blueprint that you can follow for ever

I'm so excited to share all this with you, and a whole lot more besides. Let's jump straight in!

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CHAPTER 1

The power of 30

How refreshing it is to be told you need to eat *more* in order to be healthy. Well, prepare to be pleasantly surprised, because that's exactly what I'm telling you to do on The 30g Plan. From today, you can start looking forward to more flavour, more variety, more colour and more filling foods while following a science-backed way of eating that focuses on adding foods in, not cutting them out. It's no wonder thousands of people before you have found this way of eating so easy.

Another reason the plan gets the thumbs up from those who've tried it is because it's so flexible. Rather than strict rules and rigid perfection, I'm going to get you to focus instead on ranges and targets, which are less prescriptive, easier to personalise and give you some breathing room for when life gets in the way.

The 30g Plan blueprint

- Around 30g of protein per meal
- About 30g of fibre a day
- Roughly 30 (or more) different plant types a week
- A 300–500 calorie deficit (which I'll cover in Chapter 2)

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You might not hit these numbers straight away. You may already be very close some days, but lack consistency on others. Or you might need to shimmy the numbers about a little to suit your personal requirements (I'll help you with this). Whatever the case, please remember these ranges are guides – they are not the law. I've landed on them as their benefits are so commonly highlighted in the research (see pp. 274–5) and, just as importantly, I've found this way of eating gets tangible results and slots easily into busy lives. Even if you're currently falling well short of these numbers, a modest nudge in the right direction can reap significant rewards when it comes to health and longevity.

Let's take a closer look at this magical number 30.

Why 30g of protein per meal?

While it's incredibly rare to find people in developed countries whose diets are deficient in protein, most people I work with aren't reaching optimal levels of 30g of quality protein at each meal. Protein isn't just for fitness fanatics who want to build muscle – it's critical for all of us at any age.

Our bodies are around 60 per cent water. If all that water was removed, half of the remaining 40 per cent would be made up of protein. Protein is literally the structural building block – the backbone, if you like – of every cell, muscle, tissue and organ in your body. We need protein for pretty much everything, as you can see from the impressive list I've included on the next page.

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What does protein help with?

- Hormone production (e.g. thyroid, testosterone and oestrogen)
- Muscle growth and repair
- Blood sugar balance
- Appetite regulation
- DNA structure
- Mental clarity and alertness
- Neurotransmitter production (e.g. serotonin and dopamine)
- Connective tissue health (e.g. tendons and ligaments)
- Longevity and healthy ageing
- Collagen and hair, skin and nail health
- Bone health
- Improved mood and sleep
- Immunity

We don't need to hyper fixate on protein at the cost of ignoring other nutrients, but we do want decent amounts – the all-important 30g per meal – spread throughout the day, to make sure we have a constant pool of amino acids (the small molecules that protein is made up of) available to enable the body to carry out the long list above.

A quick look at the science

There are twenty different amino acids in all, and nine are essential (meaning we need to get them from food), eleven are non-essential (your body can make these on

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its own, so they don't need to be obtained from food). Essential and non-essential amino acids pool together to provide all the protein molecules your body needs.

- **Essential amino acids:** histidine, leucine, isoleucine, lysine, methionine, phenylananine, threonine, tryptophan, valine
- **Non-essential amino acids:** alanine, arginine, asparagine, aspartic acid, cysteine, glutamic acid, glutamine, glycine, proline, serine, tyrosine

Your body is constantly making protein and breaking it down, as needed, but because protein can't be stored in the body, we have to make sure we're eating enough every day through our diet. If we don't eat enough protein to replace the amount we break down, we find that we don't heal as quickly, our immunity can be compromised, our bone density suffers and we may lose muscle. In extreme cases of protein deficiency, our bodies can literally start to eat themselves. The first place to be affected is muscle and, in the case of severe malnourishment, can even extend to organs such as the heart. Day to day, less than optimal protein intake can mean feeling hungry all the time or having weak, lacklustre hair, skin and nails.

Protein in foods

Protein-containing foods are made up of different concentrations of amino acids, with some foods having more of certain amino acids than others. All animal proteins and many plant proteins – including tofu,

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seitan, tempeh, edamame beans, quinoa and hemp seeds – have replete levels of all nine of the essential amino acids, which is why you'll find that these ingredients feature throughout the recipes in The 30g Plan. Even though some plant proteins have lower concentrations of certain amino acids, combining a variety of different plant food sources throughout the day means you'll easily cover all your bases. For example, a diet that regularly includes wholegrains, lentils, beans, chickpeas, nuts and seeds will ensure you're getting all the essential amino acids you need if you follow a solely plant-based diet.

Protein in midlife

For anyone over forty, please note that protein becomes even more important as we get older because, due to lower levels of the enzymes needed to break down protein, we become less efficient at digesting, absorbing and utilising it. So, if you're in midlife, it's especially crucial to be aiming for around 30g of protein or more per meal.

Why is 30 grams so significant?

We know from extensive research that 30g of quality protein is the amount required to reach something called 'the leucine threshold', which is essentially a signal that triggers the body to build new muscle – a process known as muscle protein synthesis. If you don't eat enough protein to supply 2.5–3g of the amino acid leucine – which then kickstarts muscle protein

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synthesis – you won't build new muscle as quickly or effectively. It's as simple as that. If you're reading this and thinking muscle isn't important to you, because it's only for people who want to be strong and look toned, hold that thought.

For anyone looking to lose weight or change their muscle-to-fat ratio (otherwise known as body composition), protein is important, as it is the most satiating of the three main macronutrients (the other two being carbohydrates and fats), meaning it makes us feel full. So, by eating 30g of chicken or tofu at dinner, you may well find you don't feel the need for dessert afterwards.

And while it's true that muscle does help us look and feel strong, healthy and robust, its benefits extend way beyond that. One of muscle's most helpful roles that really doesn't get talked about enough is that it acts like a sponge for glucose and fats. So forget about taking expensive and unproven 'anti-glucose-spike' supplements or using continuous glucose monitors (that aren't necessary unless you're living with diabetes), and instead focus on building healthy muscle to regulate your blood sugar and blood fat levels.

The 'Protein Leverage Hypothesis' suggests humans have an innate urge to consume a certain amount of protein and that appetite won't subside until the threshold is met. The thinking is that, because so many of us rely on ultra-processed foods that don't contain much protein, we are driven to overeat – almost as a compensation – until we reach our protein target. It is cited as one of the reasons obesity is becoming an ever increasing problem in Western

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populations. This theory would certainly be backed up by a few recent studies. In 2022 researchers from the University of Sydney found a link between eating more protein and eating less food overall and, in the same year, an American study linked higher protein intake with better food choices and overall diet quality.

Something else to consider is that men and women start losing muscle mass from their late thirties, which is one of the reasons we often begin carrying fat in places we don't want (i.e. around our middles) when we hit this time of life. While, to some degree, muscle loss can be a natural part of ageing, we really want to minimise it as much as possible. And we certainly don't want to lose muscle too quickly through poor diet, illness or lack of exercise, a condition known as sarcopenia. Thankfully, as we're about to find out, protein plays an important role in minimising the risk of this happening.

The best way to prevent muscle loss is to eat enough dietary protein and do resistance training (something I talk more about on p. 67). In order to stimulate muscle protein synthesis (remember: this is the mechanism that creates new muscle), the body requires around 30g of quality protein at each meal. In fact, research suggests diets that contain around 30g protein per meal provide improvements regarding lots of other things too, including appetite, body weight management, mood, sleep and energy, when compared with lower protein diets, and this is something I see in my clinic time and time again. In a nutshell, eating decent amounts of protein – especially when combined with fibre, as we'll discuss later on – can be nothing short of life-changing.

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Protein is also a key consideration if you're using GLP-1 weight-loss injections, such as Mounjaro or Ozempic, in order to mitigate the commonly reported fatigue and muscle loss side effects.

30g protein meals at a glance

It's interesting, not to mention useful in practical terms, to see what 30g of protein looks like in reality, so take a look at the examples below. There's also a guide to protein sources and quantities on p. 23, which is enormously helpful if you want to see at a glance how much protein is in a certain food. But how does this translate onto your plate? To make life as easy as possible, I've included flexitarian, vegetarian and vegan meal recipes in Chapters 7–10 that will help you convert this knowledge into delicious meals.

- 200g of 0% Greek yoghurt + 1 tbsp of pumpkin seeds + 1 tbsp of peanut butter
- 2 eggs + 100ml of egg-white omelette + a protein bagel thin + 2 heaped tbsp of cottage cheese
- ½ a block of tofu (scrambled) + 3 heaped tbsp of nutritional yeast + 1 slice of rye toast
- 4 turkey rashers + ½ an avocado + ⅓ can of black beans
- ⅓ block of tempeh (stir fried) + a cupped hand of edamame beans + ½ pouch of cooked brown rice

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- 1 small chicken breast + mixed leaf salad
- ½ small can of tuna + wholemeal pitta bread + ½ can of mixed beans

Common questions about 30g of protein

Why are you advising more than the recommended daily amount of protein?

Good question! The RDA (recommended dietary allowance) for protein is around 0.8g per kg of body weight. For a 70kg person, this equates to 56g of protein a day. It's important to recognise, however, that this recommendation is based on the amount needed to prevent deficiency – it is not an optimal amount, nor does it take into account someone's health status or whether they're physically active. Depending on your age, gender, lifestyle, dietary preferences and physical activity levels, a more optimal protein target is around 1.2–2g of protein per kg of body weight (see chart on p. 20). With this in mind, a 70kg person would need somewhere between 84–140g of protein per day.* If all this feels too taxing on the brain, I think 90g is a really good place to start for the majority of people, which three recipes from The 30g Plan will provide. And you

*NB: Many studies state that the benefits of a protein intake higher than 1.6g per kg of bodyweight aren't really seen in the general population.

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can easily bump this up to 120g a day by adding in a smoothie from Chapter 10.

How much protein do you need a day?

Your weight*	1.2g per kg	1.4g per kg	1.6g
50kg	60g	70g	80g
55	66g	77g	88g
60	72g	84g	96g
65	78g	91g	104g
70	84g	98g	112g
75	90g	105g	120g
80	96g	112g	128g
85	102g	119g	136g
90	108g	126g	144g

Is it true that high protein diets are bad for your kidneys?

A 2018 meta-analysis (a meta-analysis pools the results of many studies together) of twenty-eight trials concluded high protein diets (up to 2.4g per kg of bodyweight a day) did not harm kidney health. However, it should be noted that these were fairly short-term trials and we don't have much long-term data. Unless you're a professional athlete, there isn't really a strong argument for you to go over 1.6g of protein per kg of bodyweight. Please note, however, that if you have

* Use your goal weight if you have lots of weight to lose.

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any kind of kidney disease, high protein diets are not recommended.

Aren't plant-based proteins incomplete and therefore inferior to animal protein?

Plant-based protein isn't incomplete necessarily, but some plant protein sources can have lower levels of certain amino acids (as covered already on p. 14). For example, beans have lower levels of methionine and rice has lower levels of lysine, whereas animal protein tends to have good levels of all the essential amino acids. However, you can easily get all the amino acids you need from plant proteins simply by including a wide range of foods into your diet each day, which, of course, is exactly what we're doing on The 30g Plan, so whether you're vegan, vegetarian or flexitarian, I have you covered.

Can I use supplements to reach my protein goal?

Protein powders are highly processed but can be a very convenient and quick way to increase your protein intake. Personally I wouldn't use them as meal replacements multiple times a day, as it's always best to get your nutrients from whole food sources, but high-quality protein powders are safe and particularly helpful for people who struggle to get enough protein through diet alone. I have included some protein powder smoothie recipes for this reason in Chapter 10. When

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buying a protein powder, look out for whey (made from milk), casein (made from milk but low in lactose, so helpful if you're lactose intolerant) or plant-based (typically from soya, brown rice or pea blends) varieties, ideally third-party-tested for purity and quality (organisations like NSF Certified for Sport, Informed Choice and Informed Sport all carry out certifications) and check any labels to try to avoid added sugars, additives and preservatives. Ideally you want a single serving to provide at least 20g of protein and 2.5–3g of leucine.

Does a vegan diet provide enough protein?

There are plenty of great sources of vegan protein. For me, the top hitters are: tofu, tempeh (a fermented soya bean protein), seitan (a wheat-based protein), and legumes (beans, lentils, chickpeas and edamame beans). In terms of protein in milk, soya is pretty much on a par with cow's (see p. 227 for a side by side comparison), although it's worth noting that most soya yoghurts are considerably lower in protein than authentic (i.e. the thick, strained variety) Greek yoghurt. Any shortfall can be made up for by adding in extra seeds (hemp and pumpkin are the highest in protein) or even mixing in a scoop of good quality plant-based protein powder.

Here's a handy list of the protein content of animal foods that you can refer back to whenever you need an idea of how much protein is in a certain food.

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