

Holistic and Inclusive Approaches to Nutrition for Health, Healing, and Wellbeing



A Guide to Navigating the Complicated World of Equitable Nutrition



At Virgin Pulse, we understand nutrition can be a complex and nuanced topic. The psychological, social, and cultural contexts influencing food choices are multifaceted and well documented.

That's why we want to help members build nutrition habits and patterns that are flexible, accessible, and individualized. We also recognize that human beings and life are complex and nuanced as well, and what works for one person may not work for the next.

Similarly, the updated [2020 Dietary Guidelines](#) and [National Institute of Health Nutrition Research Strategic Goals](#) focus on helping people follow whole dietary patterns over time, at every life stage, with an individualized approach. These approaches are based on scientific evidence that appreciate the profound differences between individuals in dietary responses along with links between diet and disease risk. These guidelines include healthy individuals, those at risk for diet-related diseases, and those already diagnosed with disease.



The Dietary Guidelines are meant to be adaptable to personal preferences, cultural foodways and budgetary considerations. The Dietary Guidelines framework purposely provides recommendations by food groups and subgroups—not specific foods and beverages—to avoid being prescriptive. This framework approach ensures that people can ‘make it their own’ by selecting foods, beverages, meals, and snacks specific to their needs and preferences.”

[Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025](#)

This is exactly why the whole-person approach that VP Live Coaches and Guides espouse is so important and so effective. It translates and applies to everyone, speaking to the needs of members across generations, cultures, and geographies.

Applied to nutrition, it also enables us to honor that food is way more than fuel. What and how we eat is steeped in cultural and familial traditions and woven into the fabric of our everyday lives and broader society. As such, celebrating traditional foods and cooking methods can be a joyful and grounding experience that is uniquely satisfying. In our diverse society, we understand the significant role food plays in a person's cultural identity and therefore believe it unnecessary to sacrifice culture to achieve good health. When balanced and optimized to a unique individual's lifestyle and health needs, a healthy relationship with food also has the power to heal. To quote the wisdom of Hippocrates, "Let food be thy medicine, and medicine be thy food."

Here are four ways that Virgin Pulse Coaches and Guides support members using holistic and inclusive approaches to nutrition.

1. Honoring Individual Differences with a Person-First Approach

Coaches and Guides normalize individualized health values and encourage members to explore what healthful eating means to them. By asking questions like, "What eating habits help you feel your best?," diverse interpretations, bodies, and lived experiences are respected and valued. This allows us to meet the member where they are as individualized goals are set and eating patterns are established.

2. Reconnecting with the Body's Innate Wisdom

We empower participants to cultivate self-awareness and re-learn how to trust the wisdom of the body's internal hunger and satiety cues, such as stomach sensations, ability to focus, energy levels, and irritability. This means slowing down and paying attention to these physical sensations and monitoring how those cues change in response to eating consistently throughout the day in a balanced way.

This also involves recognizing how nutritious food and balanced meals affect not just energy and satisfaction but mood, digestion, sleep, and more. This requires members to tune in to the physical response to certain combinations or amounts of different types of food (sugary, salty, fatty, acidic, fresh, processed, etc.). Additionally, the individual is asked to notice how the presence or absence of satisfaction after a meal can impact current and future food choices and eating habits.

3. Promoting Quality and Balance

Coaches and Guides promote and support members with incorporating quality, nutrient-rich foods as much as possible according to where the individual is on their journey to healthful eating. This often means helping participants recognize the specific benefits of carbohydrates, fat, and protein. This understanding is critical in encouraging balanced eating for stabilizing blood sugar response, which in turn stabilizes energy and mood. A balance of carbohydrates, fat, and protein in foods and meals also curbs the extremes of "hangry" and uncomfortably full that can sometimes result from overdoing it on any one macronutrient.

We empower members to enjoy a wide variety of foods to provide different vitamins and minerals. A broad diet supports a greater diversity of healthy bacteria in the gut and helps to prevent boredom from the same-old, same-old. Variety can also mean celebrating pleasurable and satisfying foods without guilt. Letting go of overly restrictive food rules and embracing the joy of eating can allow for greater satisfaction and connection to internal satiety cues. All of this promotes an overall balanced and sustainable eating pattern without the on-again, off-again rollercoaster of dieting.



4. Connecting the Dots for Sustainable Habits

Perhaps more than any other concept we support members with, Coaches and Guides recognize that optimal wellbeing is a symphony of healthful behaviors in nutrition, physical activity, sleep, and stress management that positively influence each other when in harmony. Why? Because the intersection of emotional, mental, and physical health cannot be overstated.

Case in point: making and sustaining dietary changes is often difficult due to the influence and interactions of numerous factors spanning biological, psychosocial, sociocultural, and environmental domains to create and shape an individual's "food environment." Thus, to be effective, nutrition interventions must target multiple levels of the food environment. That's why success with one's nutrition goals may start somewhere unexpected—like addressing sleep issues or coping with stress to find the energy to devote more time to nutritious food choices. It's also why the whole-person approach and support VP Live Coaches and Guides offer can make all the difference. We empower members to create a personalized plan which will fit their unique lifestyle, budget, preferences, cultural norms, time constraints, religious beliefs, and more.

[Learn more about VP Live](#)

[VP Live Coaching](#) features a whole-person approach that blends lifestyle optimization with specialization in an industry-leading 22 conditions, providing total population health management that helps the healthy stay healthy, improves clinical outcomes, and reduces costs associated with chronic conditions. Members access coaching resources directly through the Virgin Pulse app. Once paired with a coach, they identify their goals for a thriving life and work together to progress toward their vision and achieve their targeted outcomes.

Also part of the VP Live product suite, Next-Steps Consult helps members get the most out of their wellbeing program. It is a concierge-style conversation between member and Health Guide, focused on determining a member's first or next step in their wellbeing journey and personalized guidance of all that Virgin Pulse and employer benefits have to offer. Our Health Guides uncover the best route for a member based on their health status, motivators, and obstacles, with deep knowledge of client programs and resources.

As part of our [Homebase for Health](#)[®], VP Live pairs human interactions and digital tools to deliver a cohesive member experience while improving population health across your organization.

[Interested in learning more about our high-tech, high-touch approach to health and wellbeing? Connect with a wellbeing expert today.](#)

About the Authors



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Kathleen Pearless, MS, RDN, Certified Intuitive Eating Counselor | Kathleen Meehan Pearless is a Registered Dietitian and Certified Intuitive Eating Counselor who practices with a weight-inclusive approach. She has an undergraduate nutrition degree and a Master of Science from Boston University in Nutritional Sciences and has previously worked in both inpatient and outpatient counseling settings. Kathleen is passionate about weaving evidence-based science with lived experience and individual expertise. She partners with members to help them rediscover the pleasure and satisfaction of food, while increasing awareness of the experience of eating and connection to the body.



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Lisa Johnson, BA, Certified CDC NDPP Lifestyle Coach | With a passion for behavioral health and wellness, along with understanding how social determinants affect our health outcomes, Lisa has been a wellness content writer and coach for 15 years. A Bachelor of Arts graduate of the University of Alabama - Birmingham in Communications/Sociology, she has a diverse work experience within the health coaching field which includes diabetes prevention, comorbid conditions, and smoking cessation. Her training includes Positive Psychology Coaching and Transtheoretical Model of Behavioral Change. Currently, she is merging her previous life work as a paralegal with health/wellness content to write and review content for diversity, equity, and inclusion within Virgin Pulse.