

# BALANCED MENU SCORECARD

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## CORK UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL

Cork University Hospital menus succeed in offering fresh fruit daily, red-orange and dark green vegetables regularly, and meatless and plant-based meals and convenience items. However, the menus fail to offer as many plant-based proteins as animal-based proteins, and fail to offer 100% whole grains daily. The menus still feature processed meats and high-cholesterol and -saturated fat foods are not significantly limited.

To improve, the menus should offer water and other healthy beverages in place of sugary soft drinks, replace refined baked items and higher-fat dairy items with healthier alternatives, and offer more whole-food convenience items than highly refined options. Lastly, we urge that all animal products, especially meats, be cooked using low-heat methods to blunt carcinogen formation. Thus, the menus at Cork University Hospital earn a "D" score.



## MERITS

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Fresh fruit offered daily

Menu transparency

Red-orange and dark green leafy vegetables offered at least twice a week

Offers meatless and plant-based convenience items

Warm, meatless and plant-based meals offered daily

Offers water and other healthy beverage options

## TO IMPROVE

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Eliminate processed meats from the menu

Offer plant-based proteins daily and in equal measure with animal proteins

Ensure that whole-food items are offered in at least equal measure with less healthy items

Reduce the availability or selection of unhealthy beverages like sugar-sweetened soft drinks

Limit foods high in cholesterol and saturated fat, like red meat and eggs, and provide serving sizes of all meats

Offer 100% whole grains

Replace refined baked items and higher-fat dairy items with healthier alternatives

Use low-heat methods of cooking animal proteins to reduce carcinogenicity

Offer a greater volume and diversity of vegetables

Offer whole-food convenience items in greater proportion to more refined options

# BALANCING MENUS

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Given that a significant and increasing proportion of Americans today show signs of metabolic syndrome, including high blood cholesterol, and diabetes or pre-diabetes, focusing menu reforms on three dietary components—saturated fat, cholesterol, and fiber—is a particularly high-impact way to improve food environments so that they will promote long-term health in your community.

There is a robust causal link between saturated fat intake and elevated LDL cholesterol levels, a well-established marker for risk of heart disease and cardiovascular events. In addition to increasing risk for cardiovascular diseases, higher saturated fat intake is a significant risk factor for systemic inflammation, insulin resistance, and obesity.

Furthermore, the oxidation of dietary cholesterol, found only in animal products, poses significant potential health risks. Cholesterol oxidation products (COPs) are likely involved in both initiation and progression of chronic diseases, including atherosclerosis, neurodegenerative disease, kidney failure, and diabetes.

Regrettably, less than 3% of Americans meet or exceed the minimum adequate intake of fiber per day, which may constitute the most widespread nutrient deficiency in the United States. This profound lack of dietary fiber—found in phytonutrient-rich, whole plant foods but not highly refined foods or animal products—combined with general overconsumption of saturated fats and cholesterol is a clear indicator of the imbalance of our food environments and the need for change.

# ENHANCING HEALTHFULNESS

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Cork University Hospital can improve the healthfulness of its menus by featuring more fresh, whole-food plant products and fewer meat and ultra-processed food products. The following example of a simple swap assumes the serving size for each entree is 3 ounces. For a custom assessment, please contact us at [menus@balanced.org](mailto:menus@balanced.org).

Average nutrient values of <b>meat-based</b> dishes	7g	————	<b>Saturated Fat</b>	————	2g	Average nutrient values of <b>plant-based</b> swap
	50mg	————	<b>Cholesterol</b>	————	0mg	
	900mg	————	<b>Sodium</b>	————	600mg	
	2g	————	<b>Fiber</b>	————	17g	

Replacing one meat-based entree per week with a plant-based entree would:



Replacing one chocolate chip cookie dessert with 1/2 cup of strawberries would **eliminate**:

- ✗ **Saturated Fat** (2.3g to 0g)
- ✗ **Cholesterol** (11mg to 0mg)
- ✗ **Added Sugar** (4g to 0g)
- ✗ **Sodium** (55mg to 0mg)