

**WHOLE LIFE
CHALLENGE**

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE WHOLE LIFE CHALLENGE NUTRITION RULES

LEARN HOW TO PICK THE RIGHT NUTRITION LEVEL FOR YOU

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A WORD FROM WHOLE LIFE CHALLENGE CO-FOUNDER MICHAEL STANWYCK

Taking on nutritional changes always comes with personal considerations. Knowing what's important to us and our reasons for change both matter in creating balance and a lifestyle we can truly live with.

Someone changing their habits for general health may make different choices from someone dealing with a health condition. Family, social life, level of physical activity, and how important the experience of food is to us are all important considerations when committing to eating better. **Regardless of these considerations, there are still foods that can and will damage our health if eaten in excess.** It is important to prioritize health in the list of things that are (and will stay) important to us.

Changing our diet can also come with an amount of confusion. New nutrition recommendations completely contradict old ones. It's frustrating at best. Yet amid that uncertainty, there are foods that have stood the test of time and sustained humans for as long as we can remember. **Without focusing on the sensationalism of the most recent claims, there are foods we can rely on to keep ourselves healthy.**



THE PURPOSE OF THIS EBOOK IS TWOFOLD:

1. To help you understand what's behind our Whole Life Challenge nutrition guidelines.
2. To help you select the nutrition approach most appropriate for you, based on your life, your needs, and the best nutritional guidance we've gathered over our years as coaches.

By the time you're done, you'll understand:

- The difference between our approach to nutrition and others you may have tried
- The "why" of our food rules
- What each of our nutrition levels consists of and what each can do for you
- How to select the best level for yourself
- Our notion of "compliance"
- What to do if you have special considerations or conditions

As you read, keep in mind where you are starting from, why you are committing to changing your lifestyle, what results you want, and what you are willing to do. There are no "wrong" answers and these things will evolve as you do. **Just remember: it's always okay to be true to yourself rather than to who you think you "should" be.**

A QUICK INTRO TO THE WLC NUTRITION LEVELS

The Whole Life Challenge has three main nutrition levels:

- Kickstart
- Lifestyle
- Performance

Each of the three levels eliminates some, but not all, foods in the following food groups:

- Grains and starches
- Sugar
- Dairy
- Alcohol
- Fats and oils
- Artificial ingredients
- Junk and snack foods

Conversely, you will find many “compliant” foods in the following food groups:

- Meat and protein
- Vegetables and legumes
- Fruit
- Nuts and seeds

Throughout this eBook you will see reference to “compliant” and “non-compliant” foods. This simply means that once you select your nutrition level there will be certain foods you will treat as allowed (compliant) or not allowed (non-compliant). And, don’t worry, we’ll get into the “why” of compliance in just a few pages.

KICKSTART

Kickstart is designed to eliminate the main items in the Standard American Diet (SAD) that tend to cause the most harm to the greatest number of people. The SAD includes more processed foods—like breads, pasta, and items with sugar—than most traditional diets did. Therefore, Kickstart targets some key eliminations to each food group listed above. For example, bread and pasta in the “grains and starches” group and dessert, sweets, and candy in the “sugar” group.

LIFESTYLE

Lifestyle is similar to the Mediterranean Diet. The inclusion of whole grains, fermented dairy, and a little wine or spirits makes this approach more feasible as a long-term commitment for many people.

PERFORMANCE

Performance has the greatest number of non-compliant food items and is similar in structure to paleo nutrition. It is well suited for people who have concerns with inflammation or allergies (although if you have an autoimmune condition, we have further recommendations that we’ll cover later in this eBook) as well as people who are seeking a higher level of performance in sports and athletics or even in their everyday life. This approach to nutrition can result in more consistent energy, reduced pain and inflammation, and even improved digestion.

Note: *We also provide guidelines for vegan and vegetarian players. We recognize that the needs of those who pursue a vegan or vegetarian lifestyle are unique and the levels for vegans and vegetarians have their own standards that don’t necessarily match the omnivore levels. For example, soy is categorized differently for vegans and vegetarians than it is for omnivores.*

QUIZ

WHICH NUTRITION LEVEL IS RIGHT FOR YOU?

To help determine which nutrition level you'd like to follow during the Challenge, take the following short quiz. It will point you in the direction that best suits your needs. **Select the answer that best describes you.**

1. Is this your first Whole Life Challenge:

- a. Yes
- b. No, I have completed it once
- c. No, I have completed it multiple times

2. I currently eat:

- a. Bread, pasta, and other foods made from whole grains, other grain flours, or gluten-free grains
- b. Mainly protein, vegetables, fruits, and healthy fats, with whole grains (rice, quinoa, oats), yogurt
- c. Mainly grain-free, sugar-free, dairy-free, junk-free (paleo, primal nutrition)

3. I currently drink:

- a. More than one alcoholic beverage a day
- b. One alcoholic beverage a day
- c. Less than one alcoholic drink a week

4. My sugar and carbohydrate cravings are:

- a. Powerful. I'm not sure I can do the Challenge because of them.
- b. Strong, but so am I!
- c. Not too bad. I have them, but they don't control me. However, I don't have them totally under control either!

5. I am currently:

- a. Vegan or vegetarian
- b. Pregnant or nursing
- c. Diagnosed with an autoimmune condition
- d. None of the above



SCORING

Now, go back and look at your answers to questions 1 through 4. If your answers were:

- Mostly (a): We recommend Kickstart
- Mostly (b): We recommend Lifestyle
- Mostly (c): We recommend Performance

And regarding your answer to question 5:

- If you answered (a), please refer to the vegan and vegetarian version of your level
- If you answered (b), please refer to the pregnancy modifications section
- If you answered (c), please refer to the autoimmune modifications section
- If you answered (d), you can choose the level that is right for you with no additional modifications

A FEW THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

We don't want you to look at the levels as "harder" or "easier."

While Kickstart may seem like the "easiest" and Performance the strictest or most "hardcore," that doesn't mean you as an individual will get better results by choosing Performance.

Think of this as a path.

If eating according to the Performance guidelines is a goal of yours, but you're currently nowhere close to it in your habits, we recommend you choose what you consider your next step, rather than what you want your final step to be.

If either Kickstart or Lifestyle is already out of your comfort zone, you will earn a lot of physical benefits by following one of them. More important, though, is your success. Your ability to adhere to the rules you choose is a great exercise in discipline and demonstrating to yourself that you can make a change and stick to it. **That is what develops your abilities and creates long-term success.**

Maybe most important of all is that the Whole Life Challenge is **not about "winning"** by doing the hardest thing possible. It is a developmental program that encourages you to **take small and appropriate steps** into new territory. By doing this, you will build on each new success and bring yourself closer to your ultimate goal. Be true to your needs by selecting what you think a doable step is rather than what might impress you or anyone else.

As you continue to play future Whole Life Challenges, you can always experiment with a different nutrition level. Coming back and repeating the Challenge in any of the levels will offer new obstacles and different results.

But the most important factor in all of this is that you **learn to bring greater levels of awareness, willingness, and accountability to your food choices and daily nutrition practices.**



HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN A FOOD IS COMPLIANT?

When you examine the food list for each of the nutrition levels, you will find lists of both compliant and non-compliant items:

- **The non-compliant list is exhaustive.** That means if a food is on the list, then it's not allowed for you. If you eat it, you'll deduct a point. But, if a food is not on the non-compliant list, then it is allowed.
- **The compliant list is not exhaustive.** This is because we can't possibly fit all the foods you do get to eat on one piece of paper. There is much more that is allowed than is not allowed. So, consider the compliant list simply a short list of items we suggest.

You might find that something you regularly eat is not listed on either side. In that case, it is safe to assume it is compliant.

If you find a food that is made of food from the compliant list, it is compliant (e.g. basic mayonnaise is made of eggs, oil, lemon juice, salt - all those ingredients are compliant. That means this mayonnaise is compliant).

HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN A FOOD IS COMPLIANT?

There are two main reasons for a food being non-compliant:

- **On nutritional grounds.** For example, sugar and refined carbohydrates like bread and pasta can have a damaging effect on your body.
- **On behavioral grounds.** For example, popcorn and baked veggie chips don't have any real value except snacking, which is mostly compulsive and mindless. We'd prefer to see you feed yourself well at meals and notice when you feel the urge to eat compulsively.

If you are unsure about a food item, first do your "due diligence." Learning to examine and decipher the foods you regularly eat is an important component of the Whole Life Challenge. You won't be spending the rest of your life relying on a list of "yes" and "no" foods, and it's important you learn to make choices based on ingredients.

That said, if you're still unsure after your own investigation, feel free to check in with other players in our [Facebook Group](#). There is a lot of experience in there. You can always email us as well, if you can't find any consensus.

Until you have a solid answer, the best course of action is to assume a food is non-compliant and not eat it. This is a good time to learn to trust your gut. If the "right" choice is really that unclear, there is probably also a voice inside your head saying, "You know you shouldn't eat this." It's a good practice to listen to that voice.

*Products don't always list everything. Even when they do, it's common to list things in ways to hide what they really are. There are at least **61 names for sugar**. They don't use them to be interesting, **they use them to conceal content**.*



A DEEPER DIVE INTO THE WHY, WHAT, AND HOW OF WLC FOOD COMPLIANCE

We're sure you're full of lots of questions about now, so let's take a closer look at a few categories of foods that are most often the source of these questions. Then, we'll look at some very specific and commonly eaten foods, as well.

We're going to put on our analytic hats to look at these foods. Because we believe that there's no devil in the details - in fact, the details are where you find the answers to "why," "what," and "how."



SUGARS AND OTHER SWEETENERS

Performance: The only sweeteners allowed on Performance are **stevia** and **monk fruit**. No sweetener with any other name is compliant.

Lifestyle: For Lifestyle, coconut sugar and coconut nectar are added to the compliant list, but that is it.

Kickstart: The Kickstart list does not place a limitation on the kinds of sweeteners you can use, but limits how you can use them. Sweeteners can be used in savory foods only. You can use them in your coffee or tea, and they are compliant in store-bought items like broth, ketchup, or prepared soup. While we encourage you to avoid sugar wherever possible, Kickstart mainly eliminates treats.

Did you know that ingredients are listed in the order of how much is used?

That means if I only used one kind of sugar, it's probably going to appear at the top of the ingredient list. If I break it up into three, four, even five different kinds, they all count as their own ingredient and fall much farther down the list, making sugar look like a less prominent ingredient.



For any level, you will notice that desserts, pastry, candy, and sweets are non-compliant items in the "Sugar and Other Sweeteners" category.

You may discover you can make your own dessert or pastry items with compliant ingredients (and you'll likely see people sharing these recipes online). In the case of these homemade treats, you can have them, but only the allowed sweeteners for your level (i.e. stevia, monk fruit, coconut sugar, or coconut nectar) can be used. Any other sweetener in a dessert, pastry, or treat is non-compliant.

And whether you make the choice to consume these items should be based on your personal goal and not what is necessarily "allowed."



GRAINS AND STARCHES

While casually referred to as “carbs,” we make a distinction in the Whole Life Challenge between three kinds of carbohydrates: grains and starches, fruit, and refined carbohydrates such as flours and sugars. Each of these groups of carbohydrates is addressed separately on our food lists.

Grains and starches fall into one of four areas:

1. Whole grains (rice, quinoa, etc.)
2. Gluten-containing grains (wheat, barley, rye)
3. Vegetable starches (potatoes, sweet potatoes, yuca)
4. Refined (flours, breads, pastas)

Each nutrition level has its rules set up with these four areas in mind. Performance eliminates most foods from all four categories, while Lifestyle and Kickstart allow whole grains and some vegetables starches, but no gluten-containing or flours.

One question many people have is, “**Are almond flour and coconut flour compliant?**”

The answer is “**yes.**” While they are called “flour” by the industry that produces them, they are not made from grains and are suitable for making some things traditionally made from grain flours (like wheat, corn, quinoa, spelt, or teff). Any “flour” made from nuts, seeds, or coconut is compliant (we’ll use “flour” or “bread” in quotes from now on to refer to compliant versions of these items). In addition, on Lifestyle and Kickstart, you may use starches like tapioca or arrowroot as a thickener in place of grain flour.



COMPLIANT OR NON-COMPLIANT? THAT IS THE QUESTION

Lifelong Health Is Also About Our Habits and Behavior

Some of the nutrition levels have rules exceptions you might not expect if you're examining them from a purely nutritional perspective. That is because the Whole Life Challenge works at the levels of behavior as well as nutrition science. Some compliant or non-compliant items fall into their respective places for that reason.

BACON

Depending on ingredients, compliant on every level.



We are not the bacon police. We want you to have your bacon. However, sugar and nitrates (common bacon ingredients) are not allowed if you are playing Performance—and that includes celery salt, which is simply a natural form of nitrates. Bacon that is simply pork and salt is out there and you can eat that.

For Lifestyle players, bacon is an exception to the sugar and nitrates rule. Why? Because learning where to make exceptions is important as a part of a healthy lifestyle. The quantity of sugar in bacon is small and for a long-term strategy, it's not worth losing your mind over. (And people do lose their minds about bacon.)

BUTTER

Compliant on every level.



Despite not being a paleo item, butter is compliant for Performance players. Grass-fed butter (and we do recommend grass-fed) has many benefits. It's one of the only foods containing butyric acid, which promotes gut health and is generally anti-inflammatory. It is also a good source of medium-chain triglycerides (MCTs), which can be converted easily into energy for your muscles and organs. It also contains conjugated linoleic acid (CLA), which has been demonstrated in some studies to combat cancer cells. Finally, it is high in arachidonic acid (ARA), which plays a role in infant growth, brain development, and health.

CORN TORTILLAS

Compliant on Lifestyle and Kickstart.



While easily categorized as a bread product, we chose to allow corn tortillas on Lifestyle and Kickstart as a decent choice for eating a bread product while still avoiding most others. They're typically small, gluten free, and rarely eaten in great quantities. The WLC is about creating a sustainable lifestyle, and compliance and happiness are big parts of keeping yourself on track long term.

POPCORN

Non-compliant on every level.



This falls squarely into the snacking and mindless-eating framework. While technically not bad for you, most people eat popcorn as a meal replacement or as a snack. Neither of these approaches fits well into the awareness practices around food that you'll engage in during the six weeks of the Challenge. Popcorn is not something you will necessarily have to eliminate for the rest of your life, but removing it during the Challenge will help eliminate the bad habits that often accompany that popcorn.

HOMEMADE DESSERTS & TREATS

Depending on ingredients, compliant on every level.

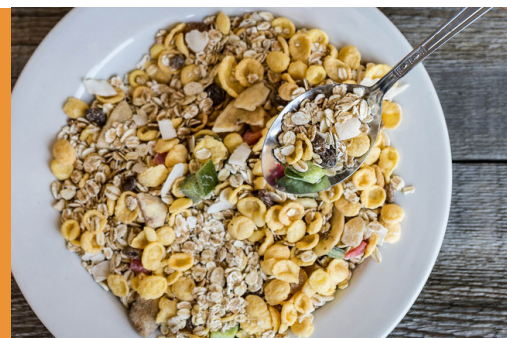


From a long-term point of view, we don't expect everyone to give up desserts and treats forever. A too-restrictive eating regimen can stand in the way of the social aspects of eating. We think that's as relevant as any other aspect of food. And learning to adapt treats into less impactful versions is a great way to incorporate them into a sustainable healthy lifestyle.

Another consideration is that having to make your treats yourself will both assure you know exactly what's in them and generally stand in the way of eating them all the time. When you are willing to go to the trouble of making your treats, it's generally fine to have them.

HOMEMADE CEREAL

Depending on ingredients, compliant on every level.



While we discourage breakfast cereal as a morning meal choice, it's not terrible in all its forms. Homemade cereal tends to avoid the processing and sugar that go into the average breakfast cereal. Homemade cereals usually contain things like raw oats, nuts and seeds, and fruit.

BAKED FRIES & CHIPS

Depending on vegetable and how they're made, compliant on every level.



Some foods appear compliant by their ingredients, but are created in a highly consumable and “craveable” way. Baked chips are an example. While these are compliant if you make them yourself, it is not compliant to buy them at the store. This is more about the behavioral aspect of snacking and eating for the sake of eating. Like the homemade desserts and treats, making baked fries or chips yourself ensures you know the ingredients and that you’re not eating them every day because of how easy they are to obtain.



THE WHOLE LIFE CHALLENGE FOOD LISTS

Use these links to access our official compliant and non-compliant lists for each nutrition level.

[KICKSTART Food List](#)

[LIFESTYLE Food List](#)

[PERFORMANCE Food List](#)

[VEGAN AND VEGETARIAN Food List](#)

You can also see an overview of the similarities and differences between levels by viewing our [Nutrition Levels Comparison Chart](#).



MODIFICATIONS

As with every set of general guidelines, there are exceptions and modifications depending on specific situations and needs.



Important Note: Our food lists and recommendations are not in any way a substitute for medical advice given to you by your doctor or healthcare provider. Only you and your doctor are aware of the specifics of your situation and if our guidelines contradict anything your doctor has suggested, recommended, or otherwise told you to do, please follow your doctor's guidance.

Modifications for **PREGNANT AND NURSING MOTHERS**



For pregnant players, we recommend you not drastically change your current nutrition. If your current approach to nutrition is similar to one of our nutrition levels, it makes sense to choose that one.

Kickstart is likely the most appropriate of our levels for pregnant or nursing mothers. It provides a great deal of flexibility and removes mainly refined items like bread, dessert, soda, and fried foods.

However, the health of you and your baby is always the most important thing to consider. You will be experiencing demanding physical challenges and you can't know in advance what your body will need or ask for. For the health of your pregnancy, please listen to what your body is saying and consult your doctor before adopting any nutritional changes.

Whichever nutrition level you choose, it is not advisable to remove all starchy carbs from your diet. The same goes for nursing mothers. For these players, it is totally appropriate to include some starchy or carbohydrate-rich items like the following:

- Sweet and white potatoes
- Rice (white or brown)
- Quinoa
- Hummus

Modifications for **AUTOIMMUNE CONDITIONS**



For players with autoimmune conditions (diagnosed or suspected), we recommend the following:

- If you have a condition, please use the food protocol you have decided on with your doctor or nutritionist as your food list for the Challenge. This is the most appropriate choice to make.
- If you suspect you might be sensitive to highly allergenic foods, please consult your healthcare provider. There are many foods on our lists that would otherwise be considered compliant that you might consider removing with your doctor's guidance.

These foods are known as common allergens or gut irritants:

- Eggs
- Nightshade vegetables: tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, eggplant, and chilies (and related spices like paprika, chili powder and flakes, cayenne pepper), mustard seeds
- Seeds and seed butters, including chia, flax, pumpkin, sunflower, etc.
- Nuts, nut butters, nut oils
- Beans and legumes
- Any grains, including whole grains
- Yogurt and other dairy (except ghee)
- Dried fruit
- Stevia
- Alcohol
- Vegetable oils

Remember, participating in the Whole Life Challenge is not about following any one particular set of guidelines. It is about building your ability to follow the guidelines that are best for you. Our nutrition levels only provide a template. Learning to decide what is best for you (and to stick to it) are the essence of the Whole Life Challenge.

A FINAL WORD ON THE REAL LESSONS OF THE WHOLE LIFE CHALLENGE NUTRITION HABIT

Our objective with this eBook is to **make the Nutrition habit in the Whole Life Challenge as clear and manageable as possible.** But there will still be lot to learn that experience alone can teach you. The important thing now is to make a choice regarding which level is appropriate for you. This should be a choice that represents growth and that will also support your success.

Taking a step is the most essential part of embarking on any new path. The future may not be clear, but the steps we take bring it closer and into sharper view. As you move forward, you will naturally make better and better choices that more clearly reveal and reflect what you want for your future.

The ability to make the best choices you can and to follow through with the actions needed are the real skills you learn in the process of the Whole Life Challenge and beyond. **With those skills you can do anything you need to do in life.**

The good news is that by reading this eBook you've already taken a step, and your next one can't be wrong. Because once you are on your journey, you learn from every move. Each step will tell you something more about what works, what you want, and what you don't want. Even if you turn around (or sprint ahead), you've picked up something valuable.

So, here's to you and your journey—we support you in choosing your path and on your pursuit of success!



ABOUT THE WHOLE LIFE CHALLENGE

With just a nudge (and a little bit of effort), you can have the life you want – happy, healthy, active, energetic, and connected.

ABOUT THE CHALLENGE

The Whole Life Challenge is a 6-week health and wellness game that focuses on The 7 Daily Habits.

THE 7 DAILY HABITS

Throughout the Challenge, you'll practice the habits every day – Nutrition, Exercise, Mobility, Sleep, Hydration, Well-Being, and Reflection – with the ultimate goal of incorporating them into your life. They'll work together to help you become happier and healthier.

WANT TO PLAY?

You can register to play the next Whole Life Challenge here:

<https://www.wholelifechallenge.com/join-the-challenge/>

LET'S CONNECT

We use social media to share our popular blog posts, motivational quotes, and information on the upcoming Challenge!

Connect to get your daily dose of inspiration and motivation.



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