

The Bowl Method

Your complete guide to building
balanced, delicious meals.

Developed by Australian
Accredited Practising Dietitians

Welcome to The Bowl Method

A smarter way to build every meal, designed by Australian Accredited Practising Dietitians.

The Bowl Method is a simple, science-backed framework that takes the guesswork out of healthy eating. No calorie counting. No complicated rules. Just five easy steps that help you build a meal that is balanced, filling, and genuinely enjoyable.

This guide walks you through each step of the framework, shows you how to build your first bowl, and gives you six ready-to-go recipes to get started. Whether you are cooking for one or feeding the whole family, The Bowl Method works with any cuisine, any budget, and any lifestyle.



Healthy eating, beautifully simple.

“The goal is not perfection. It’s progress. One bowl at a time.”

How to Use This Guide

- Start with the framework. Read through the five steps so you understand the why behind each one.
- Learn the portions. The portion breakdown page gives you a visual reference to use every time you cook.
- Try a recipe. Pick any of the six included recipes and make it this week.
- Make it yours. Swap ingredients, change cuisines, use what is in your fridge. The framework is the structure. The flavours are up to you.

About First13: The Bowl Method was developed as part of the First13 program: 13 weeks of guided nutrition, mindset, and lifestyle coaching to help Australians build sustainable healthy habits.

The 5-Step Framework

Five simple steps. One balanced meal. Every time.

Each step adds something important: energy, colour, protein, healthy fat, and flavour. Together they create a meal that keeps you full, fuelled, and satisfied.

5 Step Bowl Method



1. Make it Hearty



2. Make it Colorful



3. Make it Filling



4. Make it Satisfying



5. Make it Flavorful



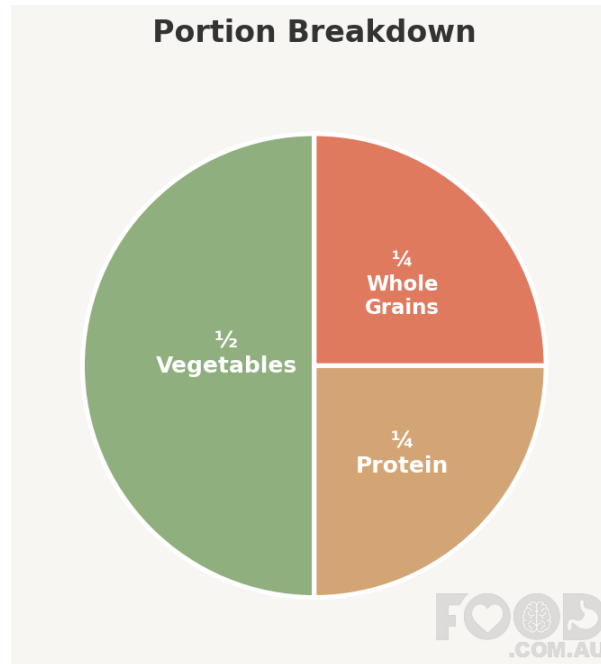
The 5-Step Bowl Method, your meal-building blueprint.

#	Step	What it adds	Examples
1	Make it Hearty	Sustained energy from complex carbs	Brown rice, quinoa, oats, wholegrain pasta, sweet potato
2	Make it Colourful	Vitamins, minerals and fibre	Leafy greens, roasted veg, raw salad, frozen vegetables
3	Make it Filling	Lean protein for muscle and satiety	Chicken, fish, eggs, tofu, legumes, tinned tuna
4	Make it Satisfying	Healthy fats for flavour and absorption	Avocado, olive oil, nuts, seeds, tahini
5	Make it Flavourful	Herbs, spices and smart sauces	Lemon, garlic, herbs, hummus, salsa, soy sauce

The Portion Guide

How to fill your bowl, every time.

You do not need to weigh food or count anything. The Bowl Method uses a simple visual guide: fill your bowl by approximate proportion. This naturally creates a nutritionally balanced meal without any maths.



The Bowl Breakdown

Half your bowl: Vegetables

Load up on colour. Aim for at least two or three different vegetables (roasted, raw, steamed, or stir-fried).

Quarter of your bowl: Wholegrains

Choose slow-release carbohydrates: brown rice, quinoa, oats, wholegrain pasta, barley, or sweet potato.

Quarter of your bowl: Lean Protein

Protein keeps you full and supports muscle. Chicken, fish, eggs, tofu, legumes, and tinned tuna all work perfectly.

Plus a small serve of healthy fats (avocado, olive oil, or a handful of nuts) for flavour, satiety, and vitamin absorption.

Dietitian Tip: If you are using a dinner plate rather than a bowl, the same proportions apply. Half the plate = vegetables, quarter = wholegrains, quarter = protein.

Healthy Fats

The small but important addition to every bowl.

Healthy fats are often misunderstood. They are not the enemy; they are essential. Fat helps absorb fat-soluble vitamins, keeps you satisfied, supports brain health, and makes food taste great.



What to include:

- Half an avocado
- A drizzle of extra virgin olive oil
- A small handful of nuts or seeds
- A tablespoon of tahini, nut butter, or hummus

Dietitian Tip: Healthy fats are not the enemy; they help your body absorb fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E and K, and keep you satisfied for longer. The key is choosing the right fats and keeping portions sensible.

1

STEP 1

Make it Hearty

The energy base that keeps you going all day.

Wholegrains and complex carbohydrates are the foundation of a satisfying bowl. They break down slowly, providing steady energy rather than a quick spike and crash. They also deliver fibre, B vitamins, and minerals that support gut health.

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What to include:

- Brown rice or basmati rice
- Quinoa or freekeh
- Wholegrain pasta or noodles
- Barley or pearl couscous
- Oats (great for breakfast bowls)
- Sweet potato, pumpkin or corn

Dietitian Tip: Wholegrains retain their bran and germ (the nutrient-rich outer layers stripped away in refined grains). Swapping white for wholegrain makes a significant nutritional difference over time.

2

STEP 2

Make it Colourful

Fill half your bowl with colour. The more variety, the better.

Vegetables are the powerhouse of a balanced bowl. They provide fibre, vitamins, minerals, and disease-fighting antioxidants. Different colours indicate different nutrients, so mixing it up is key. Aim to fill at least half your bowl.

**What to include:**

- Leafy greens (spinach, kale, rocket, cos lettuce)
- Roasted vegetables (capsicum, zucchini, eggplant, carrot)
- Cruciferous veg (broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts)
- Raw salad (cucumber, tomato, radish, red onion)
- Stir-fried Asian greens (bok choy, broccolini)
- Frozen vegetables (just as nutritious as fresh, and faster)

Dietitian Tip: Frozen vegetables are just as nutritious as fresh, sometimes more so, because they are frozen at peak ripeness. Keep a bag in the freezer as your no-fuss backup.

3

STEP 3

Make it Filling

Protein is the key to staying full and maintaining muscle.

Protein is essential for muscle repair, immune function, and satiety. When you include a good source of lean protein in every bowl, you stay fuller for longer and are far less likely to reach for snacks an hour later.



What to include:

- Chicken breast or thigh (grilled, baked, or poached)
- Fish or seafood (salmon, tuna, barramundi, prawns)
- Eggs (boiled, poached, scrambled, or fried)
- Tinned tuna, salmon or sardines
- Legumes (chickpeas, lentils, black beans, kidney beans)
- Tofu or tempeh

Dietitian Tip: Plant proteins like legumes and tofu are equally valuable. They also deliver fibre and are generally more affordable than meat. Try going plant-based two or three times per week. Your wallet and your gut will both thank you.

4

STEP 4

Make it Satisfying

A small addition that makes a big difference.

Healthy fats are often misunderstood; they are not the enemy. They are essential. Fat helps your body absorb fat-soluble vitamins (A, D, E and K), keeps you satisfied, supports brain health, and makes food taste great. The key is choosing the right fats and keeping portions sensible.



What to include:

- Half an avocado or a few slices
- A drizzle of extra virgin olive oil
- A small handful of mixed nuts or seeds
- Pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds or chia seeds
- A tablespoon of tahini, almond butter or peanut butter
- A dollop of hummus

Dietitian Tip: Avocado is one of the best sources of heart-healthy monounsaturated fat and is also rich in potassium, folate, and fibre. It is incredibly versatile: mashed, sliced, or blended into a dressing.

5

STEP 5

Make it Flavourful

Flavour is not optional. It's the reason you'll actually want to eat this.

The final step transforms a nutritious bowl into something you genuinely look forward to eating. Fresh herbs, spices, citrus, and smart sauces make the difference between a meal you tolerate and one you crave.



What to include:

- Fresh herbs: basil, coriander, mint, parsley, chives
- Dried spices: cumin, paprika, turmeric, cinnamon, chilli
- Citrus: lemon or lime juice, orange zest
- Smart sauces: hummus, tahini dressing, salsa, pesto
- Light soy or tamari, fish sauce, balsamic vinegar
- Natural yoghurt as a cooling garnish

Dietitian Tip: Turmeric, ginger, and garlic have demonstrated anti-inflammatory properties. Adding them generously to your cooking is a delicious and evidence-based way to support your health.

Building Your First Bowl

A step-by-step guide to putting it all together.

Once you understand the five steps, building a bowl takes about the same mental energy as deciding what to wear. Follow this process and you will have a nutritious, delicious meal on the table in 20 to 30 minutes.

Step	Action	Time
1	Choose your base. Cook or reheat a wholegrain, or use leftover rice.	5 min
2	Prep your veg. Roast, steam, or chop raw vegetables. Frozen works perfectly.	10 min
3	Cook your protein. Grill, bake, pan-fry, or simply open a tin of tuna.	10 min
4	Add your healthy fat. Slice avocado, drizzle oil, or sprinkle seeds.	1 min
5	Finish with flavour. Squeeze lemon, add herbs, drizzle your sauce.	1 min



The Bowl Method in practice.

Meal Prep Tip: Batch cooking your base and protein at the start of the week means building a bowl on a busy weeknight takes about five minutes.

Mediterranean Bowl

Bright, fresh and packed with plant-based goodness.

PREP TIME	COOK TIME	SERVES	DIFFICULTY
15 min	15 min	2	Easy



Inspired by the Mediterranean diet, one of the most extensively researched eating patterns for heart health and longevity. Colourful, filling, and ready in under 30 minutes.

Ingredients

- 1 cup cooked quinoa or brown rice
- 1 cup baby spinach or rocket
- ½ cup cherry tomatoes, halved
- ½ cup cucumber, diced
- ½ cup roasted red capsicum
- ¼ cup kalamata olives
- ½ cup tinned chickpeas, drained
- ¼ avocado, sliced
- 2 tbsp hummus
- Juice of ½ lemon, dried oregano, salt and pepper

Method

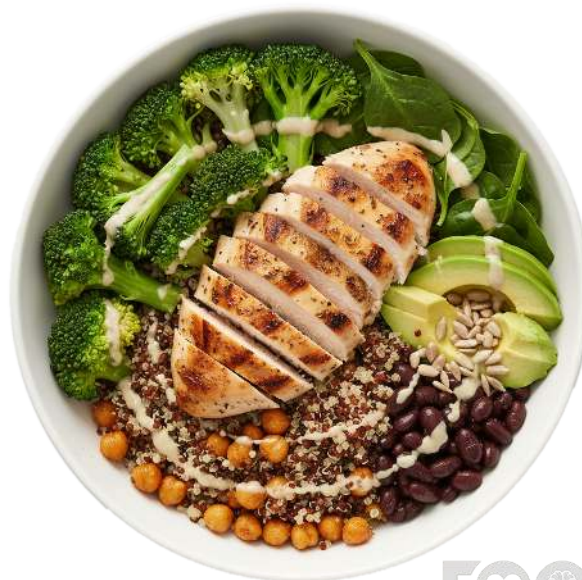
1. Cook quinoa per packet instructions. Allow to cool slightly.
2. Arrange spinach as the base of your bowl.
3. Add quinoa, then arrange the tomatoes, cucumber, capsicum, olives and chickpeas.
4. Top with avocado and a generous dollop of hummus.
5. Drizzle with lemon juice and season with oregano, salt and pepper.

Dietitian Tip: Chickpeas combined with quinoa provide all nine essential amino acids: a complete protein from entirely plant-based sources.

High Protein Chicken Bowl

The classic. Simple, versatile, and seriously filling.

PREP TIME	COOK TIME	SERVES	DIFFICULTY
10 min	20 min	2	Easy



When in doubt, make this one. It works as a weeknight dinner, a meal prep staple, or a quick lunch. Lean chicken, brown rice, and plenty of vegetables hits all five steps of the Bowl Method.

Ingredients

- 200g chicken breast or thigh
- 1 cup cooked brown rice
- 1 cup broccoli florets, steamed
- ½ cup edamame or peas
- 1 carrot, grated or julienned
- 2 tbsp natural yoghurt
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tsp garlic powder, 1 tsp paprika
- Fresh parsley, salt and pepper

Method

1. Season chicken with garlic powder, paprika, salt and pepper.
2. Cook in a non-stick pan 4–5 min each side. Rest 5 min then slice.
3. Steam broccoli until just tender. Toss with lemon juice.
4. Arrange brown rice as the base, add broccoli, edamame and carrot.
5. Top with sliced chicken, a dollop of yoghurt and fresh parsley.

Dietitian Tip: Chicken thigh is slightly higher in fat than breast but richer in iron and zinc, and far harder to overcook. For meal prep, thighs hold up better when reheated.

Asian-Inspired Tofu Bowl

Plant-based, flavour-packed, and utterly satisfying.

PREP TIME	COOK TIME	SERVES	DIFFICULTY
15 min	20 min	2	Easy



Crispy baked tofu, vibrant greens, and a punchy sesame dressing. This bowl proves that plant-based eating never has to be boring.

Ingredients

- 300g firm tofu, pressed and cubed
- 1 cup cooked brown rice or soba noodles
- 1 bunch broccolini or bok choy
- 1 cup shredded red cabbage
- 1 carrot, ribboned
- 2 spring onions, sliced
- 1 tbsp sesame oil, 2 tbsp tamari
- 1 tsp fresh ginger, 1 tsp garlic, minced
- Sesame seeds to serve

Method

1. Preheat oven to 200°C. Toss tofu in half the tamari and sesame oil.
2. Bake 20 min until golden and crispy.
3. Whisk remaining tamari, sesame oil, ginger and garlic into a dressing.
4. Blanch broccolini for 2 min. Drain well.
5. Arrange rice, then add vegetables and crispy tofu.
6. Drizzle with dressing, finish with sesame seeds and spring onions.

Dietitian Tip: Pressing tofu before cooking is the key to getting it crispy. Wrap in paper towel, press with a heavy pan for 15 minutes to remove excess moisture.

Mexican Bowl

Bold, hearty, and ready in 25 minutes.

PREP TIME	COOK TIME	SERVES	DIFFICULTY
10 min	15 min	2	Easy



Protein from two sources (lean mince and black beans) with a rainbow of fresh toppings. A crowd pleaser the whole family will love.

Ingredients

- 150g lean beef or turkey mince
- ½ cup tinned black beans, drained
- 1 cup cooked brown rice
- ½ cup corn kernels
- ½ cup cherry tomatoes, halved
- ½ avocado, diced
- ¼ cup natural yoghurt or light sour cream
- 2 tbsp fresh salsa
- 1 tsp cumin, 1 tsp smoked paprika
- Fresh coriander and lime to serve

Method

1. Brown mince over high heat. Add cumin and paprika, cook 1 min.
2. Add black beans and stir to warm through. Season to taste.
3. Warm corn in the same pan.
4. Arrange brown rice, then top with mince and bean mixture.
5. Add corn, tomatoes and avocado.
6. Finish with yoghurt, salsa, coriander and a squeeze of lime.

Dietitian Tip: Using half meat and half legumes reduces saturated fat while keeping costs down. The beans add fibre and plant-based protein that mince alone cannot provide.

Plant-Based Power Bowl

Completely plant-based, completely delicious.

PREP TIME	COOK TIME	SERVES	DIFFICULTY
15 min	25 min	2	Easy



Roasted chickpeas, edamame, and quinoa deliver all essential amino acids from entirely plant-based sources. Proof that you do not need meat for a protein-packed, satisfying bowl.

Ingredients

- 1 cup cooked quinoa
- 1 cup tinned chickpeas, drained
- ½ cup edamame (shelled)
- 2 cups baby spinach or mixed greens
- 1 medium beetroot, cooked and sliced
- ½ cup shredded red cabbage
- ¼ cup pumpkin seeds
- 2 tbsp tahini, juice of 1 lemon
- 1 clove garlic, 1 tsp maple syrup

Method

1. Preheat oven to 200°C. Toss chickpeas with olive oil, salt and smoked paprika.
2. Roast 20–25 min until crispy.
3. Whisk tahini, lemon juice, garlic, maple syrup and 2 tbsp water into a dressing.
4. Arrange quinoa, layer on spinach, beetroot and cabbage.
5. Top with chickpeas, edamame and pumpkin seeds.
6. Drizzle generously with tahini dressing and serve.

Dietitian Tip: Roasted chickpeas keep for up to three days in an airtight container. Make a double batch and use them as a high-protein snack or salad topper.

Everyday Budget Bowl

Maximum nutrition. Minimum spend.

PREP TIME	COOK TIME	SERVES	DIFFICULTY
10 min	20 min	2	Easy



Eating well does not have to cost a lot. This bowl uses affordable ingredients (brown rice, tinned tuna, frozen vegetables, and a boiled egg) to deliver a nutritionally excellent meal for under \$4 per serve.

Ingredients

- 1 cup cooked brown rice
- 1 × 185g tin tuna in springwater, drained
- 1 cup frozen mixed vegetables, cooked
- 1 hard-boiled egg, halved
- ½ cup tinned kidney beans, drained
- 1 tbsp olive oil, 1 tbsp lemon juice
- Salt, pepper and dried herbs to taste

Method

1. Cook brown rice, or use microwave rice.
2. Cook frozen vegetables per packet (microwave or boil 3–4 min).
3. Hard boil egg: place in cold water, bring to boil, cook 7 min. Peel.
4. Arrange rice as base. Add vegetables, kidney beans and tuna.
5. Halve the egg and place on top.
6. Drizzle with olive oil and lemon juice. Season generously and serve.

Dietitian Tip: Tinned fish is one of the best-value sources of protein and omega-3 fatty acids available. Opt for tins in springwater rather than brine to keep sodium lower.

Meal Prep Mastery

Work smarter, not harder. Set yourself up for a week of great bowls.

The secret to eating well consistently is not willpower. It is preparation. Spending 30 to 45 minutes on the weekend to batch cook a few staples means building a bowl on a busy weeknight takes about five minutes.



Batch prep your components and mix-and-match all week.

Your Weekly Prep Routine

Cook your base

Cook a large batch of brown rice, quinoa or barley. Portion into containers. Keeps 4–5 days in the fridge.

Prep your protein

Bake a tray of chicken, hard boil a batch of eggs, or portion tinned fish. Aim for 3–4 portions ready to go.

Roast your vegetables

Roast a big tray of whatever veg needs using. Capsicum, zucchini, pumpkin, and sweet potato all reheat well.

Prep your extras

Wash and chop raw salad. Rinse tinned legumes. Mix a jar of dressing or tahini sauce.

Batch Prep & Storage Reference

Component	How to prep	Fridge	Freeze?
Brown rice / quinoa	Cook in bulk, portion into containers	4–5 days	Yes
Roast chicken	Season + bake 35 min at 200°C	3–4 days	Yes
Hard-boiled eggs	Boil 7 min, cool, keep in shell	5 days	No
Roast vegetables	Toss in oil, roast 25 min at 200°C	4 days	Yes
Cooked legumes	Rinse tinned, store in container	4 days	Yes
Tahini dressing	Whisk and jar	2 weeks	No

Storage Tip: Most cooked grains and proteins keep for 4 to 5 days in airtight containers. Label each container with the date so you always know what is fresh. Freeze extras in single-serve portions for the weeks you are short on time.

Smart Staples & Shopping

Stock your pantry with these essentials and you can always build a bowl.

You do not need expensive ingredients to eat well. A well-stocked pantry built around Bowl Method staples means that even on a rushed weeknight, a nutritious meal is always within reach.



Your Bowl Method starter pantry.

Your Bowl Method Pantry

Hearty bases

Brown rice, quinoa, wholegrain pasta, oats, barley, pearl couscous

Protein staples

Tinned tuna, salmon or sardines; tinned chickpeas and lentils; frozen edamame; eggs

Healthy fats

Extra virgin olive oil, tahini, mixed nuts and seeds, almond butter

Flavour makers

Cumin, paprika, turmeric, garlic powder, dried oregano, low-sodium soy sauce or tamari, balsamic vinegar

Fridge & freezer

Frozen mixed vegetables, frozen edamame, natural yoghurt, hummus, lemons

The Bowl Method: Quick Reference

BUILD A BOWL

Savoury Edition



5 Make It Flavourful

- Herbs and spices (fresh, frozen, dried, squeeze tube)
- Lemon or lime juice
- Miso paste
- Mustard
- Apple cider vinegar
- Red wine vinegar
- Balsamic vinegar
- Nutritional yeast
- Seaweed flakes/nori

4 Make It Satisfying

Add healthy fats:

- Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- Nut or seed based oil
- Grapeseed oil
- Walnuts
- Almonds
- Pine nuts
- Pecans
- Pumpkin seeds
- Sunflower seeds
- Sesame seeds
- Avocado
- Tahini
- Hummus
- Tzatziki

3 Make It Filling

Choose one:

- ~100g serving of cooked lean meat or poultry
- ~150g of tinned fish or a fillet of fresh white fish
- ~150g shellfish
- ~100g salmon, ocean trout, sardines, mackerel or other oily fish
- 170g tofu
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup legumes, chickpeas or lentils
- 3 fafafels
- 2 slices or 40g reduced fat cheese

2 Make It Colourful

Add 3+ different vegetables to make up 1/2 bowl:

- Rocket
- Spinach
- Lettuce
- Cabbage
- Cucumber
- Radish
- Tomato
- Carrot
- Capsicum
- Kale
- Cauliflower
- Broccoli
- Eggplant
- Beetroot
- Sweet potato
- Pumpkin
- Zucchini
- Green beans
- Artichoke
- Asian greens
- Asparagus
- Mushrooms
- Fennel
- Onion/Spring onion
- Peas/Snow peas
- Brussel Sprouts
- Squash

1 Make It Hearty

Add 1/2 cup:

- Brown, red, wild rice
- Basmati rice
- Mixed super grains
- Quinoa
- Farro
- Pearl barley
- Freekah
- Bulgur
- Millet
- Buckwheat
- Semolina
- Udon noodle
- Hokkein noodle
- Soba noodle
- Wholemeal pasta
- Pulse/Lentil pasta
- Sourdough
- Grainy bread
- Wholegrain wrap
- Sweet potato
- Potato

Your Next Step

The Bowl Method is just the beginning.

You have everything you need to start building better bowls today. Five simple steps. No calorie counting. No complicated rules. Just real food, balanced and delicious.

The First13 program takes this further: 13 weeks of guided nutrition, mindset, movement, and lifestyle coaching designed specifically for Australians who want to build sustainable healthy habits that last a lifetime.



Ready to go further? Join First13 and get 13 weeks of personalised nutrition and lifestyle coaching, live support from an APD-trained coach, a full recipe library, and a community of Australians on the same journey. Visit food.com.au to register your interest.



This guide was created by the food.com.au team as part of the First13 program.
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