

HOW TO PICK THE PERFECT TOPPINGS

WHAT TO CHOOSE & WHY THEY MATTER



TOAST
SMOOTHIES
YOGURT
ICE CREAM
POTATOES
PIZZA
SALADS

WHY DO TOPPINGS MATTER?



If you've followed me on Instagram for any length of time, or checked out any of the recipe photos on my website, you know I LOVE toppings. Not only do they make food incredibly more beautiful by adding visual texture, contrast, and depth; but they also add different flavors and physical texture differences for the perfect eating experience!

Toppings provide an opportunity to add some extra nutrition to any number of dishes. In this guide, we'll cover: toast, smoothies, yogurt, ice cream, potatoes, pizza, and salads... but there are certainly other foods that can benefit from a good mixture of toppings. The sky's the limit!

I'll walk you step-by-step through each food and cover how to assemble that perfect dish: whether it's to take a pretty picture, or to add some extra nutrition to an unbalanced meal... or both!

HOW TO PICK HEALTHY TOPPINGS



Most people probably think of some not-so-healthy options when it comes to "classic" toppings. Think about your typical pizza or ice cream toppings. Well, I'm here to open your mind a little bit and provide you with a whole new world of options!

On the next page, you'll find a complete list of all of my favorite toppings; every category, every option, and even some of my preferred brands. But here are a few of the criteria and things I consider when picking healthy toppings:

1. Does it add any nutritional value? Protein, antioxidants, fiber, etc.
2. Does it have added sugar? and if it does, how much?
3. Will it enhance the visual appeal of the food?
4. Will it improve the taste of the meal/dish?
5. How much does it cost?

MY ABSOLUTE FAVORITE TOPPINGS

Nut Butters

Peanut butter
Cashew butter
Almond butter
Pistachio butter

Favorite brands:
Crazy Richard's
Betsy's Best
Trader Joe's

Seed Butters

Sunflower Seed Butter
Pumpkin Seed Butter

Favorite brands:
88 Acres
Betsy's Best
Trader Joe's

Other spreads

Mashed avocado
Medjool date paste

Herbs

Mint
Basil
Rosemary

Yogurts

Plain
Vanilla
Coconut
Berry
Cherry

Favorite brands:
Siggi's Dairy
Fage
Annie's Homegrown

Cheeses

Cream cheese
Goat cheese
Feta cheese
Parmesan cheese
Mozzarella cheese

Granolas

Lark Ellen Farm
Purely Elizabeth
Essential Living Foods

Fresh Fruit

Berries
Apples
Bananas
Medjool dates

Nuts

Almonds
Cashews
Pecans
Brazil nuts
Macadamia nuts
Coconut
Cacao nibs
Trail mixes (no added sugar)

Dried Fruit

Raisins
Mulberries
Cherries
Blueberries

Raw Vegetables

Carrots
Broccoli
Cauliflower
Bell Peppers

Protein/Energy Bars

Natural Delights
Square Bar
RX Bar
Larabar
KIND Bar
Health Warrior

WHAT CAN YOU PUT TOPPINGS ON?



While the possibilities for foods that can have toppings on them are endless, I'll keep it to some of my favorites (and most eaten!):

- Toast
- Smoothies
- Yogurt
- Ice Cream
- Potatoes
- Pizza
- Salads

On the next several pages, I'll walk you through exactly how I decide what topping to put on each type of food, how to arrange your toppings, and what toppings will make it as visually appealing, tasty, and nutritious as possible!

TOAST



Start with your spread:

Regardless of what type of bread you use for toast, odd are it's mainly carbohydrate. So, to keep things nutritionally in check, I like to start with a spread that's free of added sugar, or very low in added sugar, and high in protein. Some of my favorites are: peanut butter, almond butter, mashed avocado, plain yogurt, or cream cheese.

Pick a fruit or vegetable:

Next, pick your favorite fruit or vegetable to add. If you're going for a sweeter toast, go with fruit; and if you're wanting something savory, go with a vegetable. Think about fun ways to slice or chop your fruit/vegetable. Like the strawberries in the picture above... slicing them vertically with the leaves still attached creates great color contrast and makes them much more visually appealing.

Add some crunch:

Whether you're having sweet or savory toast, now's the time to add some visual and texture contrast! Seeds and nuts work great. You can also use toasted oats, coconut, or a low sugar granola. If you haven't added too much sugar in your other toppings, you can even try dried fruit or chop up your favorite protein bar.

And then we drizzle:

Adding a drizzle of any liquid or spread, gives that perfect (visual) finishing touch. You can find great squeeze bottles at the grocery store or dollar store usually. All-natural nut butters (at room temperature) or plain yogurt are perfect!

SMOOTHIES



Start with some crunch:

Pick something crunchy that is a different color than your smoothie. Color contrast, like that in the image above, helps make food more visually appealing, and let's face it... pretty food just tastes better! Some great options are nuts, seeds, low sugar granolas, dried fruit, your favorite breakfast cereal, etc.

Add some fruit:

I like to add some fresh or frozen fruit at this point. Usually, the same fruit as the main ingredient in my smoothie. Just another way to get some extra added-sugar free nutrition in.

Consider layers:

Smoothies, especially if they're the super thick kind, are great for layering. If you feel like making the effort, make two smoothies, each a different color; or make one smoothie and a batch of my Coconut Chia Pudding, and layer the two in a clear glass.

Think about what you're missing:

Smoothies can be pretty high in carbohydrate, if you're not careful. It's important to include a protein source and/or veggies when making your initial smoothie. Once you've added the above toppings though, consider what's missing. Do you need more protein, more fat, maybe some more fiber? Think about what could add some extra nutrition and round out your smoothie!

YOGURT



Toss the added sugar:

Before we can even get to the toppings, it's important to pick a yogurt with no added sugar (aka, plain yogurt)... or one with very little sugar. (My favorite lower sugar yogurt brand is Siggi's Dairy.) Choosing a yogurt with little-to-no added sugar allows us a little more freedom when picking toppings.

Pick a fruit... or two:

Now that we have a good solid low sugar base, we can add a little natural sweetness. Some of my favorites are fresh berries, medjool dates, bananas, and kiwi. Think about both flavor and color! The color of fresh fruit will really pop on a bowl of white yogurt... which helps you enjoy your food even more. Once you've decided on a fruit... or two, cut or slice it if needed: slice bananas, strawberries, grapes; chop up medjool dates, apples, pears, etc.

Get a little nutty... or seedy:

This is what I like to call the "crunch factor". I love texture variety in my foods, so naturally, I want something hard and crunchy in my yogurt. Nuts and seeds are a great way to add flavor, healthy fat, and more (plant-based) protein.

Go big or go home:

If you're just having a snack, I'd stop after picking your nuts or seeds above. If your yogurt bowl is a meal, then we have a little room left for your favorite protein bar, either chopped up or leave it whole for a little dipping action, and add a quick drizzle of nut butter! (see Toast for more discussion on that perfect drizzle)

ICE CREAM



Think about sugar:

At first glance, ice cream and yogurt may seem very similar when it comes to toppings... but, they're not. With yogurt, it's very easy to find a low-sugar or no-sugar version. But with ice cream, not so much. Regardless of how "healthy" your ice cream is, it's almost guaranteed to have a good dose of sugar in it. And even though it may be a "healthier" sugar, or a natural form of sugar... it's still sugar. So, for our toppings, we need to look at lower sugar options.

Crunch, crunch crunch:

Believe it or not, it's actually super easy to find added sugar free toppings. You can do any and all kinds of raw or roasted nuts. Almonds, pecans, cashews, pistachios... and the list goes on. There's also unsweetened toasted coconut (which you can do in about 45 seconds under the broiler)... and even cacao nibs (which are basically just unsweetened chocolate).

Get your swirl on:

Think about your favorite flavor of ice cream. What is it? Odds are it has some sort of swirl-y whirl-y goodness in it (and if it doesn't?... let's just pretend it does!) Think homemade chocolate sauce, peanut butter, almond butter... you can even get a little wild and crazy with a dose of my homemade green pistachio butter (it makes for the perfect pop of color if you went with vanilla or a lighter color of ice cream!)

POTATOES



Plant or animal protein:

Just like we did with toast, when it comes to potatoes, the most important topping is the protein. Potatoes and sweet potatoes are loaded with antioxidants, minerals, and good-for-you complex carbs... but they're kind of lacking in the protein department. So we need to pick that first: beef, chicken, eggs, Greek yogurt, nut butter, beans, bacon, sausage. etc. For more visual appeal, try to keep things grouped together as shown in the picture above.

Veggie or fruit, savory or sweet:

Generally, if I'm doing a white potato, I keep it savory and will pick a vegetable at this point; but for sweet potatoes, I tend to lean towards fruit (in spite of the picture above). Regardless, pick 1-2 of either and go for it. You can make your decision based on flavor and/or color.

That extra little something:

Now for that finishing touch. What else do you want to add? If it's a savory potato, think about other veggies, like onions and peppers, or maybe beans, nuts, or avocado. If it was a sweet potato, what about dried fruit, cinnamon, granola, or seeds?

PIZZA



Who needs cheese?

Just like we did with toast, we first need to think about our base when it comes to pizza. And while tomato sauce and cheese are the easy and most frequent choice, they don't have to be! You can use pesto, cream sauce, even nut butter (if doing a fruit pizza). And, quite honestly, cheese isn't necessary. (Don't get me wrong, I LOVE a good cheese pizza, but let's try to think outside of the box.) You can use nutritional yeast (a vegan alternative that gives a cheese-y flavor without the grease), or even extra pesto and/or nuts.

Eat the rainbow:

Yep, now it's time to think about all those fruits and vegetables... what would go best on your pizza? Try to think outside the box again. The usual bell peppers, mushrooms, and onions are great. But what else could you add?? Try green beans, beets, kale, tomatoes, sweet potatoes, brussel sprouts, and I could keep going. But you want to know my absolute favorite fruit to put on pizza?? Medjool dates! Whether you're doing a sweet or savory pizza, they are perfect for creating that ultimate pizza experience.

Now, think about protein... if you want to:

With everything pizza has going on, you don't have to pick a protein... but you can, if you want to. Plant protein, meat, or additional cheese...go for it if you'd like, but feel free to stick with just those fruits and veggies too!

SALADS



The ultimate blank slate:

Salad, unlike any of the other foods we've talked about, is the ultimate macronutrient blank slate. While it's loaded with vitamins and minerals (micronutrients), it isn't a significant source of carbs, protein, or fat.

Pick a fat... any fat:

All those micronutrients, specifically the fat-soluble vitamins, need... you guessed it... FAT! In order for your body to absorb them, they need a little fat. So you can go with nuts, seeds, avocado, whatever plant based fat floats your boat! (And don't worry, we'll get to dressing at the end.)

Chicken and veggies... and fruit... and steak...

Salad does not have to be boring! Filet mignon anyone? (Also, a good source of fat.) Really anything is fair game: potatoes, roasted veggies, veggie burgers, meat, etc. Pick what you like. But whatever you do, absolutely don't think "O, THAT doesn't go on salad!" Anything can go on salad!

Crunch crunch crunch...

Let's look past croutons... they're great, but there are so many other options. Crackers, pretzels, cheese crisps... anything that crunches.

The finishing touch:

While there are some great pre-made dressings out there, the easiest and cheapest dressing is likely waiting to be made by you in your own kitchen!

ABOUT ME



I'm Mary Ellen Phipps, the registered dietitian nutritionist behind Milk & Honey Nutrition. I have expertise in family nutrition, family meal planning, corporate wellness, adult weight management, adult diabetes, management, metabolic syndrome, and sports nutrition

I grew up in Sugar Land, TX, received my Bachelor's degree in Nutrition Sciences from Baylor University in Waco, TX; and my Master's of Public Health degree in Epidemiology from The University of Texas School of Public Health in Houston, TX. I currently live in the Houston-area with my husband and two daughters.

I love helping people feel confident in their nutrition choices. I can help you feel healthy and confident about the food you're eating. Milk & Honey Nutrition is here to make healthy eating realistic, efficient, and affordable for busy individuals, families, and businesses. Browse my website to see what I have to offer or shoot me an email at maryellen@milkhoneynutrition.com for more information. I'd love to chat more about your food and nutrition goals!