

Beyond the Barracks: Structuring Wellness in Civilian Life



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Community: **Pillars**



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Ultra-Processed Foods: What Veterans Need to Know

Amy Anderson is a dietitian, mom of three, and a huge food enthusiast. For the past decade, she has been leading corporate nutrition programs, and now she is expanding her reach to the Military Connected Community to help YOU.

Amy has worked with thousands of people, ranging from one-on-one coaching to group classes and culinary demonstrations. Amy discovered her passion for helping moms alleviate the mental burden of mealtime with her signature program, The Meal Planning Bootcamp.



CONT. INSIDE ➡

MilitaryConnected.org is a nonprofit organization improving the military-connected community's transition experience through employer education, data driven research, and access to a network of job opportunities with military-ready employers.

The Vegetus Foundation is dedicated to helping Americans improve their quality of life through education on healthy living and has published the Nutrition Health Review since 1979. Learn more at nutritionhealthreview.com



LEARN MORE AT [MILITARYCONNECTED.ORG](https://militaryconnected.org)



Amy's nutrition beliefs are rooted in the principles of Intuitive Eating, which is a life-changing, self-care framework. By addressing her own food rules, ditching diet culture, and tuning back into her body's wants and needs, she finally learned to love food and her own body again.

Amy is using that confidence and passion to teach busy moms how to create positive mealtime experiences for the whole family through meal planning. We sat down with Amy to see if she could provide her expertise to some common considerations and questions from Veterans and parents:

Ultra-Processed Foods: How much consideration do you give ultra-processed when designing meals for individual or group clients?

You can't avoid them these days. There is always so much food marketing thrown our way that is unavoidable. I give quite a bit of thought to ultra-processed foods, but with a realistic and supportive approach. I understand my clients are getting bombarded with that same marketing and it may be hard to avoid some products on a busy schedule. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans highlight the benefits of nutrient-dense, whole foods—fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, beans/lentils and healthy fats—and we know that many ultra-processed foods are high in sodium, added sugars,

and unhealthy fats, while being low in nutritional value.

I meet people where they are. For busy families or individuals, ultra-processed foods may be a convenience. So I focus on progress over perfection: how can we build a balanced plate, even if part of it comes from a box or freezer aisle. It's not all-or-nothing. I help clients learn to read labels and pair processed items with whole foods to boost nutritional value.

Ultra-processed foods (sometimes called highly processed foods) are foods that have been altered to include fats, starches, sugars, salts and hydrogenated oils extracted from other foods.

Ultra processed: Chicken nuggets, hot dogs, chips, frozen meals, etc.

Minimally processed: Frozen fruits and frozen veggies, salted roasted nuts, whole grain breads.

Example of finding balance: Chicken nuggets with frozen broccoli and microwaved rice for dinner. Frozen pizza with a side salad so we are adding some whole food nutrition while still leveraging the convenience of ultra processed foods.

Can you talk about your path to becoming a dietitian? How does it differ from a nutritionist?

Absolutely. I became a registered dietitian (RD) by completing an accredited undergraduate program in nutrition and dietetics, I completed a 1,200-hour supervised practice internship, and passed a national board exam to earn my credentials. I also maintain ongoing continuing education.

The title "nutritionist" is not regulated, which means anyone can call themselves one—even without formal training. A registered dietitian, on the other hand, is credentialed and licensed to provide medical nutrition therapy. So when you're looking for someone to help manage conditions like diabetes, heart disease, or any nutrition need -including calorie and macros, it's important to know you're working with someone trained and credentialed.

You have a significant role in impacting the diets for large groups - what are some simple considerations for Veterans wanting to strengthen their diets?

Keeping things simple is important. For someone transitioning

Why Veterans Struggle With Civilian Careers podcast with Scott DeLuzio and Jon Safran May 1, 2025



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NUTRITION

their career or location, this is especially true. Some simple, effective strategies include:

- I highly recommend prioritizing protein (lean meats) color (from fruits and veggies) and fiber-rich carbs (from grains, veggies, beans) on the plate at most meals. Fiber is a nutrient 95% of us don't eat enough of.
- Like I mentioned earlier, you can eat these foods but consider what you can add to them, we call this nutrition by addition.
- Make small and realistic changes, if you are trying to eat healthier – add one small habit at a time.



Feeding our kids feels like a maze – how can parents educate themselves? Any sources you recommend?

I completely understand that feeling—it's overwhelming! Start with trusted, science-backed sources. My top recommendations:

- MyPlate.gov – Simple visuals and tips for all age groups. This replaced the food pyramid and is much easier to “digest.”

- HealthyChildren.org – Run by the American Academy of Pediatrics, it offers great nutrition advice that aligns with child development.
- ChooseMyPlate's Start Simple app – Great for quick wins and goal setting.

I also encourage parents to be curious, not perfect. Instead of chasing the “ideal” diet, focus on building habits like eating together, trying new foods, and encouraging kids listen to their hunger cues.

Amy's 5 Real-Life Nutrition Recommendations:

1. **Have a Plan**—A little prep at the start of the week can save you time, money, and stress. It doesn't need to be fancy — even jotting down a few meal ideas can make your week smoother.
2. **Plan One Family Meal**—You don't need to cook multiple meals. Try a “build-your-own” style dinner (like tacos, grain bowls, or pasta night) so everyone can customize their plate — and you only cook once.
3. **Start with What They Like**—Use familiar favorites as a base and make small, nutritious upgrades. Love pasta? Try adding a veggie-packed tomato sauce or mixing in lentil noodles for extra fiber.
4. **Add, Don't Restrict**—Instead of focusing on what to cut out, think about what you can add in — more fruits, veggies, fiber, and protein go a long way in boosting nutrition without battles at the table.
5. **Play the Long Game**—Nutrition is not all-or-nothing. Small changes add up over time. Progress, not perfection, is what truly matters — especially when feeding a busy family.

Flu-Fighter Garlic Soup



Nutrition Information

Calories: 196.6; Total Fat: 9.7g; Saturated fat: 1.2g; Unsaturated fat: 7.3g; Cholesterol: 0.0mg; Total Carbohydrate: 24.2g; Sugars: 5.2g; Dietary Fiber: 3.0g; Protein: 4.2g; Sodium: 650mg; Potassium: 207.9mg

- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 large onion (chopped)
- 5 cloves garlic (minced)
- 1 large carrot (chopped)
- 5 mushroom caps (chopped)
- 1/4 cup of chopped coriander
- 1/2 cup quinoa or lentils
- 1/8 teaspoon turmeric powder
- 6 cups water or vegetable broth To taste: salt and pepper

Directions:

Prior, boil 2 cups of water in a pot. When the water is finished boiling, add either the quinoa or lentils and let them simmer for the time recommended on their label.

1. In a medium- to large-size pot, heat oil for a minute and then sauté the onion and garlic while adding the turmeric powder and some pepper.
2. Add the carrots, mushrooms, and coriander, letting them cook for a few minutes.
3. Stir in the vegetable broth or water, along with the quinoa or lentils. Let simmer for 15 to 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add more pepper and salt if you chose.
4. Finally, add the kale or spinach. Let everything sit in the pot for a few more minutes before serving.

