

FIGHT DISEASE WITH DIET

Eat a whole food and plant based diet

The regular consumption of an animal protein based diet may be associated with many negative health benefits including a shortened lifespan, weight gain, diabetes and heart disease.

Flexitarians are people who consciously choose to reduce their meat intake for health but still occasionally enjoy animal based foods. This growing trend is evident in the popularity of the Meatless Monday initiative, a food sustainability drive, and other similar such social media driven trends. More and more people are choosing to eat this way not only due to its well documented health benefits but also due to the ethical and environmental impact of eating less or no animal protein.

WHAT IS A WHOLE FOOD PLANT BASED DIET?

A whole food plant based diet is based on fruits, vegetables, tubers, whole grains, and legumes; it excludes or minimizes meat, chicken, fish, dairy products, and eggs, as well as highly refined foods like bleached flour, refined sugar, and oil. It is essentially a vegetarian diet with emphasis on unprocessed, whole foods but with some flexibility.



ETHICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Our population is becoming far more conscious of food stability, sustainability and the environmental impact of food production. Meat and dairy production require large amounts of fertilisers, pesticides, fuel, feed and water. By-products in the form of greenhouse gases, toxic manure and other pollutants contaminate our air and water. Much has been written and calculated about the climate saving actions of eating less animal based foods, for example, if a family of four has a meatless meal a week for a year, its environmental impact is similar to taking their car off the road for five full weeks. Many people also often choose to avoid animal protein for ethical reasons.

THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF PLANT POWER

An important motivator for plant based eating is its many health benefits. Vegetarian style eating patterns have long been associated with improved health, lower incidence of disease, reduction in chronic medications and reduced mortality. Many large clinical research projects have looked at the diets of thousands of people in Europe and America and the incidence of disease, with the following common conclusions:

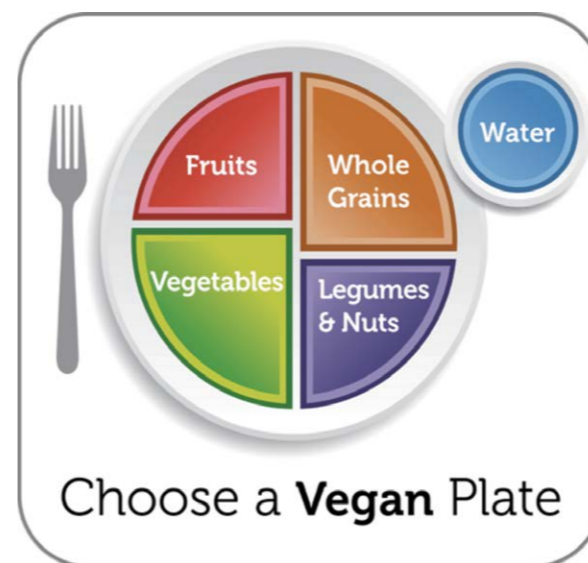
- **Type 2 Diabetes** has been linked to red meat consumption, further study has showed that when one serving was swapped for nuts everyday, the risk of developing type 2 diabetes was decreased by 21% and by substituting whole grains the risk was reduced by 23%
- **Heart Disease** benefits are seen in several large studies due to decreased inflammation, oxidative stress, blood pressure and LDL – cholesterol levels. There was a 34% decrease in ischaemic heart disease in vegetarians over 5 studies including 76 000 subjects. The Harvard research tracked 110 000 volunteers for 14 years and found that those eating 8 plus servings of fruit and vegetables a day were 30% less likely to have a heart attack or stroke compared with those that had 1.5 servings.
- **Cancer** - Vegetarians have a 12% lower overall rate of developing cancer. Specific cancers have been linked to an animal based diet such as oesophagus, stomach, pancreatic. The higher fibre plant foods may protect against cancers of the digestive tract.



- **Obesity** - The EPIC European study (520,000 volunteers) found obesity was less common in pescatarians and vegans. The plant based diet tends to be richer in fibre and is therefore more filling which results in fewer calories consumed.
- **Living longer** has been positively linked with those that closely adhere to a plant based diet.
- **Decreased inflammation and oxidative stress** has repeatedly been seen in those that eat more fruit, vegetables, whole grains, olive oil, nuts and red wine in moderation. Increased levels of oxidative stress and inflammation are associated with the development of chronic disease.
- **Gut / Immune system / microbiome** - a fibre rich plant based diet promotes healthy gut microbiota and has been linked to immune support and digestive health.
- **Alzheimers** - Adherence to a plant based, Mediterranean diet has been linked to a 48% lower risk of the disease.

WHERE TO START

The newly released American Healthy Eating for Vegans infographic is a representation of the perfect plant based eating pattern. This is the ultimate goal but may be a little extreme and a more moderated approach more realistic for you. This is not an all or nothing diet it can be tailored to meet your individual needs.



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START SLOWLY AND GRADUALLY CHANGE YOUR DIET. TRY THIS STEP WISE APPROACH:

- RED MEAT** – slowly reduce the amount of red meat you are eating, start with a Meatless Monday and then slowly expand this to more days in the week. Replace the animal protein with plant protein sources such as pulses, beans, soy and nuts. Start to experiment with different foods and new recipes.
- POULTRY AND FISH** – now remove poultry and then fish, you are now a vegetarian!
- EGGS** come next, reading labels becomes important as eggs are found in a lot of manufactured foods
- DAIRY** – Milk and cheese can be substituted with nut milks, soya milk and other plant milks. Dairy free cheeses are sometimes available through health food stores. At this stage you need to start to keep a careful eye on your micronutrient intake.
Calcium - ensure that the substitutes you are choosing are fortified with calcium or perhaps you need a daily supplement.
Vitamin B12 – all vegetarians should regularly be having a B12 supplement.

- WHOLE/ UNPROCESSED** – finally your focus should be on eating more whole unprocessed foods and reducing refined carbohydrates. Aim to make everything from whole ingredients that you have sourced yourself. If you have to use manufactured foods then read labels carefully and aim for items with very short ingredient lists. Focus on the following foods.
- Beans and Other Plant Proteins**
Dried beans, lentils, chickpeas, kidney beans
Soya protein from soya beans (edamame), tofu, tempeh, soya milks and yoghurt.
- Nuts and Seeds**
Include almonds, almond milk, walnuts, flax seed, chia seeds.
- Good Fats**
Olive oil, canola oil, avocado, nuts
- Green Leafy Vegetables**
These provide calcium, iron and many vitamins
Spinach, Kale, broccoli, cabbages
- Fruit and Other Vegetables**
Aim for variety and lots of colour
- Wholegrain Starchy Carbohydrates**
Aim for the brown, whole, fibrous variety.
Brown rice, oats, millet, barley, potatoes, sweet potatoes, quinoa (also a protein).

10 TIPS TO HELP YOU ACHIEVE A WHOLE FOOD PLANT BASED DIET

1. Start the day right – have a veggie breakfast.
2. Plan your meal around the plants not the meat.
3. Join the Meatless Monday Bandwagon
4. If you are eating meat, use it as a seasoning or flavouring and not as the main event
5. Create a plant based pantry – beans, wholegrains, pulses
6. Try 1 new vegetarian recipe a week.
7. Convert your favourite dishes from meat to plant.
8. Slow cooking works well.
9. Try plant based dairy alternatives
10. Read labels and watch the fat. Stick to foods with short ingredient lists.



WHATS STOPPING YOU?

There are a few reasons why you may worry that this way of eating is not for you:

- It requires more food preparation - yes and planning but what a small price to pay for longevity and better health. Start slowly and gradually it will become your way of life.
- How do you get enough protein and micronutrients out of this diet?

A badly planned plant based diet can cause micronutrient deficiencies. A broad spectrum vegan supplement will help you to cover this possibility. Be sure to include more of the following:

Protein – we don't need much, if a ¼ of your plate contains a plant protein source at every meal you will be getting enough. A well balanced plant protein diet can meet essential amino acid requirements.

Iron – found in fortified cereals and wholegrain products, dried fruits, beans and lentils, leafy vegetables, nuts and sesame seeds. Take these with a vitamin rich food to aid the absorption of the iron.

Calcium – try and use calcium fortified milk substitutes, include kale and pak-choy, sesame seeds, nuts and dried fruits. If you are at risk, then take a daily supplement.

Vitamin D – found in fortified soya milks and yoghurts and in the sunshine.

Vitamin B12 – is found in yeast extracts, soya products and some oat and rice milks. You may need to supplement this nutrient.

Omega-3 fats – found in oily fish, replace this vital nutrient by including sea vegetables in your diet or an algae derived DHA supplement

- You don't know how to cook pulses, wholegrains, tofu etc. – a good vegetarian cookbook will provide you with wonderful ideas on how to prepare these ingredients in many delicious ways, so spoil yourself.
- Foods are unfamiliar - yes and sometimes hard to come by, but once you have found your local supplier you will be on your way. Major supermarkets will always stock the store cupboard basics at very reasonable prices.

- Your family will rebel - they might, but soon they will be tasting what you have prepared, start slowly and their tastes will change too.

MENU IDEAS TO GET YOU STARTED

- Oats with flaxseeds, raw nuts, berries and cinnamon
- Stir Fry – any vegetables include leafy greens/ any vegetarian proteins/spices- turmeric, tamarind, sesame oil, coconut oil etc
- Scrambled crumbed tofu and vegetables
- Quinoa vegetable chilli – combine any pulses and beans with vegetables, a grain and chilli flavours
- Wholegrain pasta and vegetable or bean sauce and herbs
- Vegetable rich salads with seeds, nuts and balsamic dressing
- Smoothies – nut milks, berries, seeds, plant protein powders

DO IT NOW!

This diet requires some planning, label reading and discipline but the benefits far outway the effort required when it comes to tackling chronic disease. Your effort or adherence to the diet is directly proportional to the results you will achieve. A dietitian can help tailor your plant-based diet to match your individual needs and help ensure no nutritional deficiencies. Be aware that your need for certain chronic medications could decrease or be eliminated all together when you change to this way of eating. We urge you to make a start for your health and for our world, however small to start to decrease your animal protein intake and move towards a healthier whole food, plant based diet.

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