



RD Resources for Consumers:

Eat More Plant-based Meals

More and more people have become concerned about their health, the environment or the animals that are raised for food and are eating more vegetarian meals.

According to a 2012 National Harris Poll* 47% of Americans eat at least one vegetarian meal a week and as many as 14 million adults consider themselves to be vegetarians. If you are interested in becoming a vegetarian or just adding more plant-based foods to your diet, this resource will help make that change easy, fun and sustainable.

Eat more of the plant-based foods you already eat.

Do you eat peanut butter and jelly sandwiches? How about oatmeal with nuts and raisins? You are probably already eating vegetarian foods and don't even realize it! Start by expanding these foods and meals. Add more fruits, vegetables or beans to the meals that contain animal products. Slowly make them more and more vegetarian.

Don't give up all of your favorite animal foods immediately.

If you love pepperoni pizza more than life itself, suddenly removing it from your diet may bring more gloom than boom. The most sustainable changes come when they are done over time. Make the easiest changes first and when those no longer feel new, move onto the more difficult ones.

Eliminate the animal foods you don't eat often.

You won't miss these so let them go first. Substitute plant protein for meat protein in recipes you already love. Try adding beans or choose from a plethora of 'fake meats' that mock the taste and texture of chicken, beef or pork.

Find recipes and cookbooks that you like and create time to cook.

Skip the gourmet cookbooks (unless you are a gourmet chef!) and go for the ones that are most similar to your cooking style. Today there is a wide selection of vegetarian cookbooks that cater to a number of tastes, style and type of vegetarian. And there's no better way to control what food you eat than to prepare it at home. The internet has millions of vegetarian and vegan recipes (see below for our favorites sites).

Explore familiar – and unfamiliar – stores.

Health food stores, grocery stores and ethnic markets carry a variety of plant-based foods like non-dairy beverages, meat alternatives, interesting produce and a variety of products that you've probably never seen before! There are many types of soymilk, rice, grains, vegetables, fruits, nuts and seeds and even more ways to eat or prepare them. Make time to try different products and the different preparation methods for each. Have fun with this!

Stock your kitchen with the healthy plant-based whole foods you want to eat.

If you do this, it will be harder to lapse into old ways. Form habits and prepare your environment so when you are busy and pressed for time you have healthy, plant foods available to eat. Canned or prepared soup and beans and pre-cooked grains stored in the fridge reduce preparation time. Foods like hummus and other non-dairy dips with baby carrots, lightly steamed cauliflower and broccoli, and apple slices makes snacking easy and healthy.

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Stay informed on nutrition.

Read about plant-based nutrition from reliable sources (see resource list below). If you are going strictly vegan (eliminating all animal foods) make sure you are getting a reliable source of vitamin B12, which is found only in fortified plant foods like breakfast cereals, breads, and some soy milks, meat analogues and energy bars.

Involve the people around you.

Cook, shop and plan with others. Invite friends over for a vegetarian feast. Involving friends and family with your dietary change makes it easier, more fun and more likely to last. Just like there are benefits of exercising with a friend or a group, eating is no different.

Find other vegetarians and vegans!

Most will be super excited to share their favorite foods, recipes and restaurants. There are many types of vegetarians with varying food preferences, so talk to as many as possible! Check out local vegetarian and vegan meet-ups and groups.

Nutrition Tips

Save time. While dried beans and fresh produce may be ideal, don't hesitate to use canned beans and frozen fruits and vegetables. It saves time and is still healthier and cheaper than ordering take-out.

Become familiar with a variety of grains. Pasta and rice are common, but have you tried rice noodles, quinoa or barley? Keep a number of these on hand and if you are pressed for time, start cooking them as soon as you get home. Then decide what you are going to eat with them.

Beans, beans, the magical fruit. Okay, so they aren't fruit but they sure are magical! Soy is popular with vegetarians, comes in numerous forms and can be prepared in an infinite number of ways. And don't forget about lentils, chickpeas, pinto and black beans, which should be included on a daily basis. Try adding chickpeas to pasta dishes or cooking your own pinto beans with onions and garlic for burritos. If beans are new to you, add them to your diet slowly to help with digestion.

Fruits and vegetables are good for you. Just because you are a vegetarian doesn't mean this is any less true. Every meal should have a fruit or vegetable. Find the ones you like best and always have them on hand. Broccoli and kale are nutrient-dense and easy to cook. They can easily be sautéed with garlic and onions and served over pasta with marinara sauce or added to rice and beans.

Nut butters are amazing. They can be added to breakfast foods, fruit and even as a base for plant-based sauces. Healthy fat, nutrient-dense and low-cost, nut butters can be a key component to your plant-based diet. Peanut is great but try others like almond, sunflower and sesame!

Online

VN DPG: vegetariannutrition.net

See our Resources on Vitamin B12, Soy, Calcium and other hot topics

International Vegetarian Union: ivu.org/recipes/

Vegetarian Resource Group: vrg.org/recipes

Veg Web: vegweb.com

Meatless Monday: meatlessmonday.com

Plant Based on a Budget: plantbasedonabudget.com

Books by Registered Dietitians

Vegan For Life - Ginny Messina and Jack Norris

The Idiot's Guide to Plant-based Diets - Julieanna Hever

Plant-powered Diet - Sharon Palmer

Appetite For Reduction - Isa Moskowitz and Matt Ruscigno

See vegetariannutrition.net for an ongoing list

* Poll: <http://www.vrg.org/blog/2012/05/18/how-often-do-americans-eat-vegetarian-meals-and-how-many-adults-in-the-u-s-are-vegetarian/>