



RDN Resources for Consumers:

Eat More Plant-based Meals

Interest in plant-based foods is skyrocketing as more people become concerned about their health, the environment, and animals raised for food.

A recent survey found that 52% of Americans are choosing more plant foods, such as non-dairy milks, meat alternatives, and vegan products than they did previously. (1) Sales of plant-based foods are up 20% and the plant protein market is forecasted to reach \$5 billion annually by 2020.(2)

Eating predominantly plant-based foods is associated with beneficial health outcomes such as lower cholesterol, lower blood pressure, and reduced risk of many chronic diseases.(3) Changing eating habits can be challenging, but these tips will help you make these changes permanent, and delicious, so you can reap the rewards.

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

Have you eaten peanut butter and jelly sandwiches? Oatmeal with nuts and fruit? Stir-fry with vegetables? You are already eating plant foods! Start by expanding these meals and increasing the fruits, vegetables and beans you currently eat. Make other meals more plant-based by adding your favorites.

Replace or 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 legumes like soy, tempeh or beans or choose from a plethora of 'vegan meats' that mock the taste and texture of chicken, beef or pork. Exchange cow milk for a plant milk such as soy, almond, oat, hemp, or cashew. Many alternatives exist; try a few to find the ones you like. Check the nutrition label for calcium and protein content as levels vary.

You don't have to give up all of your favorite animal foods immediately.

If you love pepperoni pizza, suddenly removing it from your diet may seem like a sacrifice. 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. Trust that your taste buds will adjust and with it, your preferences.

Explore familiar – and unfamiliar – grocery stores and ingredients.

Health food shops, grocery stores and international markets carry a variety of plant-based foods like plant milks, vegan meats, interesting produce, a myriad of spices, and a variety of products you may be unfamiliar with. There are many types of soymilks, rices, grains, vegetables, fruits, nuts and seeds and even more ways to eat and prepare them. Make time to try new foods and different preparation methods. Have fun with this.

Stock your kitchen with healthy plant-based whole foods.

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 bean dips with baby carrots, lightly steamed cauliflower, or apple slices makes snacking easy and healthy.

Find recipes and cookbooks that you like and make the time to cook.

Skip the gourmet cookbooks (unless you are a gourmet chef, of course) and choose those most similar to your cooking style. Today there is a wide selection of plant-based cookbooks that cater to a variety of tastes and styles. Find the ones that speak to you. The internet has millions of vegan recipes (see below for our favorites). There's no better way to control what food you eat than to prepare meals at home.

Involve the people around you.

Cook, shop and plan with friends and family. Kids can be involved with simple tasks around shopping and preparation. Invite friends over for a plant-based 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 plant-based eaters and vegans.

Most will be enthusiastic and super excited to share their favorite foods, recipes, and restaurants. There are many types of vegans and plant-based diet adherents with varying food preferences, so talk to as many as possible. Look for local plant-based and vegan meet-ups and groups on the internet and in-person.

Stay informed on nutrition.

Read about plant-based nutrition from reliable sources (see 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 foods like breakfast cereals, nutritional yeast, some plant milks, vegan meats, protein bars and powders. Verify on the nutrition label.

A registered dietitian nutritionist can help you develop a healthy vegetarian eating plan that meets your needs. To find an RDN in your area, visit <https://vegetariannutrition.net/find-a-registered-dietitian/>

References

References for this resource are available at <http://vndpg.org/rd-resources/plant-based-meals>

Cooking and Preparation Tips

Save time. While dried beans and fresh produce may be ideal, don't hesitate to use canned beans and frozen fruits and vegetables. This saves time and is most often healthier and cheaper than eating out.

Become familiar with a variety of grains. Pasta and rice are common, but rice noodles, quinoa or barley add variety. 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. Beans are not fruit, but they sure are magical. Soy is a traditional staple, 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 and chew them thoroughly to ease digestion.

Fruits and vegetables are good for you. Most meals should include 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. Most vegetables can easily be sautéed with garlic and onions and served over pasta with marinara sauce or added to rice and beans.

Nut butters have an astounding number of uses. They can be added to breakfast foods, fruit or used as a base for plant-based sauces and dressings. Nuts and nut butters contain healthy fats, are nutrient-dense and low-cost.