

More Plants: For the Health of It

Plant-based diets are all the rage, and for good reason! The more wholesome, nutrient-dense plant foods we eat, the greater our chances of living a life free of chronic disease. To reap the benefits, you do not have to go all-in and adopt a vegan diet or even a vegetarian diet. But do be picky. Not all plant-based or vegetarian diets are made up of wholesome foods.

Don't Focus on What to Avoid

Some people have deplorable plant-based diets. Instead of eating beans, tofu, fruits, vegetables, nuts, and whole grains, they fill their plates and bellies with protein bars, chips, cookies, crackers and other animal-free but highly processed or nutrient-poor foods. They're missing out on the thousands of important health-boosting compounds found in foods of plant origin. Each fruit, vegetable, nut, grain, and legume has a unique array of disease-fighting phytochemicals. To make the most of your plant-centric diet, eat a variety of food groups and a variety of foods within each food group.

Basic To-Dos for Wholesome Plant-Based Eating

- *Eat fruits and vegetables at every meal and snack.* Aim for a variety of types and colors, including the oft-ignored white and brown produce.
- *Eat a protein source at each meal.* Vegan sources include soymilk, tofu, beans and lentils. Eggs, milk, cheese, cottage cheese, and yogurt are good protein sources for those with a more liberal vegetarian diet. Even omnivores can benefit from plant-centric



eating. Enjoy small amounts of your favorite fish or other meats surrounded by fruits, veggies, legumes, and grains.

- *Make most of your grains whole.* Whole wheat breads, cereals, crackers, and pasta are certainly good choices, but you have so many more options. Experiment with farro, wheat berries, barley, oats, corn, quinoa and others. Eat whole grains at most of your meals.
- *Talk to a registered dietitian nutritionist to individualize your diet.* Depending on the type of plant-based diet you opt for, you may be at risk for certain nutrient deficiencies such as vitamin B12, calcium, and others. Work with a skilled dietitian to safeguard your health.

Focusing on tasty wholesome foods is not only healthful, it's more fun than simply avoiding a long list of animal products. There's a lot to choose from. So choose lots and enjoy!

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