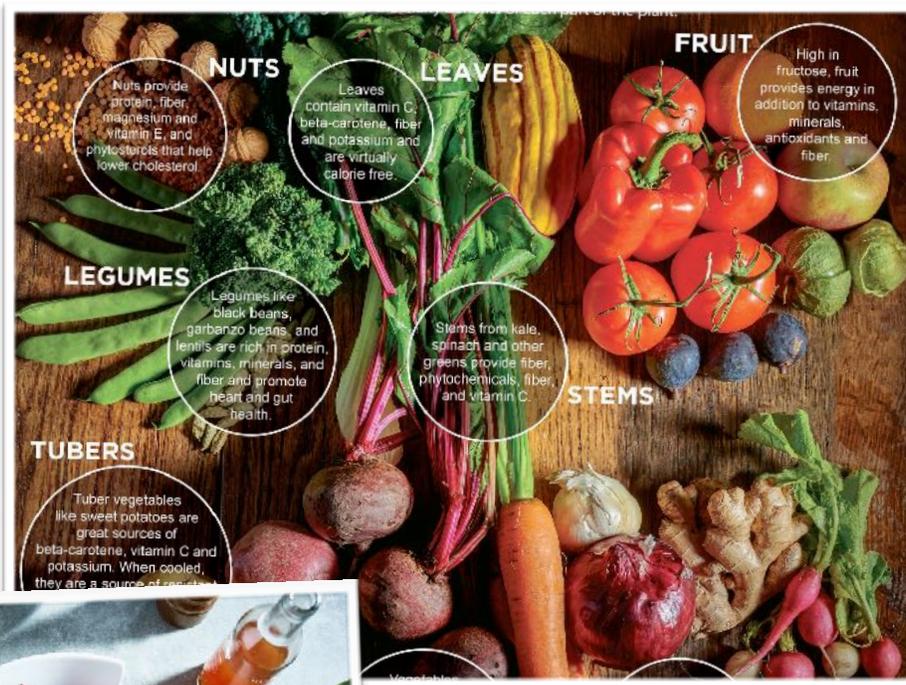


Plant Based Diet

Is it right for you?



Did you know that food is the number one cause of poor health in America today? American Cardiologist, Dr. Mozaffarian, has a few stats that he compiled in *Tufts Now* that will make your hair stand on end! Did you know that the US spends over \$3 trillion per year on healthcare, which is about \$1000 per person in the US and this exceeds the cost of food and other common necessities by single and double digits? The cost of heart disease alone is over \$200 billion annually in the US. Health care costs are crippling consumers and companies and they are a major obstacle to economic growth and corporate profit. The food system in the US itself is bent on *selling food* instead of *sustaining people*. There is a huge gap between what the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, our most up to date nutrition science recommendations, state is the most optimal eating pattern with what is manufactured and sold in the US. Food manufacturers and restaurants are wooing you with burgers, hot dogs, cookies, snacks, soda, fried food, butter, sugary delights, and burgers. PLUS the US government doles out billions in agricultural subsidies per year to finance the production of fast food according to Marion Nestle, PhD, RD, professor of NYU and prolific writer of the popular blog, *The Politics of Food*. By subsidizing

grain food, our government makes fast food very cheap. The corn feeds the cattle used for burgers and it makes oil for French fries and sweetens the soda.

While all of those statistics are mind boggling and there is little any one person or even company can do to fix the entire food system or health care costs, there is plenty a person can do to safeguard their health to lower their costs, improve their quality of life, and do their personal part to ensure the sustainability of our planet. How can one diet do all of this? It is simple. It is all about more plants and less cow.

The optimal eating plan for the prevention of obesity, cancer, and cardiovascular disease is truly plant-based. Dietitian Lisa Andrews, MEd, RD, summarizes the World Heart Federation recommendations, "Beef, bacon, butter, full-fat dairy, high-fat desserts, and sugary drinks may taste good, but if people continue to consume them on a regular basis, their cholesterol may increase and so will their risk for heart disease. Processed meat like bacon, sausage and lunch meat as well as pastries, candy, and

ice cream need to be cut out, too. To really reduce the risk for heart disease and need for cholesterol-lowering medication, a healthy, whole-foods, plant-based diet is the route to go.”

What is a plant based diet? The Harvard Health Letter has the best definition: “Plant-based or plant-forward eating patterns focus on whole foods primarily from plants. This includes not only fruits and vegetables, but also nuts, seeds, oils, whole grains, legumes, and beans. It doesn’t mean that you are vegetarian or vegan and never eat meat or dairy. Rather, you are proportionately choosing more of your foods from plant sources.” This type of diet can easily be the DASH Diet, Mediterranean Diet, Plant-Based Diet, or many other terms that are popular in the media and blogs. Even the USDA MyPlate is 3/4 plants. No matter how you try to spin this diet, it is made more from plants than animal protein.

It may seem a little overwhelming to start changing what you are eating. Most people find it hard to grocery shop and cook never mind have to think and plan what they are eating on a daily basis.

But it can actually be easy and fun to change your eating plan if you start one meal at a time.

Let's take breakfast. Are you consuming bacon and eggs? Why not try oatmeal and almond milk one day? Or make a smoothie with a plant-based milk and fresh fruits? If you purchase 4 or 5 items and keep them on hand a delicious plant-based breakfast based on whole foods is right at your finger tips.

Once you have mastered breakfast, let's move on to dinner. Now you might think we forgot lunch but an easy way to make a plant-based lunch is to have leftovers from dinner. So it makes sense to start with dinner.

For dinner you can make many plant-based meals that are delicious. Try chili or veggie burgers. Or make a veggie-rich spaghetti dish. Stir fry your favorite veggies with a little tofu. Do you have a family favorite recipe? Challenge yourself to reduce the meat so you only have a little bit for flavor. Or switch out the meat for beans or lentils.

Here is our favorite recipe for eggplant lasagna. The eggplant has a meaty, umami texture which easily replaces the meat in a traditional recipe:

Eggplant Lasagna

Ingredients:

1 eggplant
1 package of no-boil lasagna
1 26 ounce jar of low-sodium marinara sauce
1 carrot, sliced thin
1 clove of garlic, sliced thin
olive oil spray
1/2 cup of water
1 ounce grated parmesan cheese
Chopped parsley for garnish
Additional sauce if desired

Directions:

Layer this lasagna in a 2 pound loaf pan or a small casserole dish. Or double the recipe and put it in a larger casserole dish, about 12" square in size.

Slice the eggplant widthwise so you have slices that are thick and about the shape of the loaf pan. Discard the ends which are mostly skin.

Layer the lasagna like this:

- sauce
- pasta
- eggplant
- slices of carrots and garlic

Keep going with repeating this layer order until you end with eggplant on top then add a little olive oil and sauce. Add the water to the lasagna.

Bake the lasagna at 350 degrees for 50 minutes or until the noodles are tender when a fork is inserted into the pan.

Allow the lasagna to cool for 5 minutes then slice it in thick 1.5" slices.

Serve a slice with a little olive oil and chopped parsley on top.

Serve with heated marinara sauce if desired.

Lynn Grieger, RDN, CDE, CPT, CWC has these 6 tips for plant-based meals:

6 Tips for Healthful Vegan Meals

Vegans eat a plant-based diet that includes a variety of vegetables, fruit, grains, nuts, seeds, legumes, and oils. As in any type of healthy eating plan, choosing a wide variety of foods ensures that you will get the highest amount of nutrients. Use these 6 tips for healthy vegan meal planning:

Choose nutrient-packed whole grains. Try...

- Quinoa, a good source of all the amino acids we need for good health
- Amaranth, which is higher in protein than many grains and is also naturally gluten-free
- Buckwheat
- Oats and barley, which contain fiber that helps lower cholesterol levels
- Wild rice, a good source of protein, with twice the protein and fiber of brown rice (3)

Instead of protein foods from animals (such as beef, pork, chicken, fish or eggs) enjoy plant-based protein foods such as tofu, tempeh, edamame, legumes, nuts, seeds and nut butters.

Fill half of your plate with different colors of vegetables: red peppers or tomatoes, green broccoli or kale, orange carrots or butternut squash, yellow summer squash, white or brown potatoes and jicama, and blue or purple eggplant and onions. The different colors contain various amounts of phytochemicals that help promote good health.

Instead of dairy products, enjoy soy or almond milk fortified with vitamin B12, calcium and Vitamin D.

Choose fresh, dried, or canned fruit in its own juice for snacks and a sweet at the end of meals.

Instead of butter, use oils from plants and nuts such as olive, flax, canola or walnut oils.

The recommendations for a plant-based diet are very solid from a scientific basis. They are in agreement with the Dietary Guidelines for Americans, The American College of Cardiology, The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, The American Cancer Society, The CDC and many

other peer-reviewed health entities. And recent research from the Adventist Study found that vegans were the only group with a healthy BMI! The fiber in a more plant-based diet also concurs with scientists studying the microbiome. And according to the Environmental Working Group, a plant-based diet is much easier on the environment. While it might be hard for busy folks with no culinary skills to prepare a lot of foods, there are plenty of plant-based foods in the freezer section of the grocery store and recipes for delicious meals abound online. It just takes a little bit of courage and time and it will become easier as it becomes habit.

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