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IMPORTANT NOTICE

It is strongly advised that all persons seek advice and guidance from a competent medical doctor regarding and prior to embarking on a vegetarian dietary lifestyle change. This is particularly true for pregnant women or mothers who are breast feeding infant children, senior citizens, growing children, and/or any individual who is suffering from or being treated for any disease or health disorder.

This guide is not intended as and may not be construed as an alternative to or a substitute for professional dietary counseling or medical services and advice.

This guide is presented with the sole purpose to inform the reader of the vegetarian (vegan) lifestyle and of dietary choices that the reader may wish to make. The authors, publishers, and distributors of this guide have made every effort to ensure the validity, accuracy, and timely nature of the information presented here. However, no guarantee is made, neither direct nor implied, that the information in this guide or the techniques described herein are suitable for or applicable to any given individual person or group of persons, nor that any specific result will be achieved. The authors, publishers, and distributors of this guide will be held harmless and without fault in all situations and causes arising from the use of this information by any person, with or without medical supervision.

Nourishing Our Body - Nourishing Our Spirit

Many times our choice to become vegetarian isn't only for health, environmental, or economical reasons, but also spiritual. There is a heartfelt connection between vegetarianism and the deeper side of nourishment. We must learn to nourish ourselves not only physically, but also spiritually.

The subject of nutrition is not simply a question of the food we eat at meals. Besides nutrients, foods contain scents, colors and invisible particles that attract pure light, light that is so essential for our joyful life and well-being. The choice we make is therefore always of consequential significance.

Grains, fruits and vegetables naturally grow and flourish in sunlight, and you could deduce they are actually their own form of light. In order to develop the qualities of the heart, we must eat not only peacefully, but consciously. Therefore it makes sense to consume food that is nourished by sunlight.

As a result, our emotions and our essence are illuminated and nourished as well.

It's long been said that your body is your temple and everything that enters that temple has a direct result in who we become. Therefore, when we choose to nourish our bodies with healthful, nutrient-dense plant foods from the earth, we are in turn nourishing our souls, our spirit, and our being. The quality of your food and its physical properties not only transforms our emotions and mind, but can actually change your appearance and personality.

By focusing our diet on fresh fruits and vegetables that are in season and organically produced, we are in turn connecting with nature and learning to live in harmony with it. By committing and devoting ourselves to a vegetarian lifestyle, we've also committed to nourishing our souls and our inner well-being. You can't ask for a more perfect health food than that!

You Are What You Eat

You've certainly heard the expression many times, "You are what you eat." Have you ever really thought about what it means? And do you think about it when you're making food choices?

In some ways, we do become what we eat, literally. Have you ever seen an example of your blood plasma after eating a fast food hamburger? What was previously a clear liquid becomes cloudy with the fat and cholesterol that's absorbed from eating a high-fat hamburger.

And when you think about it, we also become what we don't eat. When we switch from eating meat to a vegetarian-based diet, we become less fat, less prone to many types of cancers. Our cholesterol can improve. When we're leaner and eating fewer animal products, then many other health and fitness issues are reduced. The incidence of Type II diabetes is reduced.

Blood pressure falls into normal ranges. When you're healthier, you're taking fewer medications. Even if you have a prescription drug benefit in your health plan, you're still saving money with fewer co-payments on medications.

If you have a family history of high cholesterol or high blood pressure, then it's particularly incumbent on you to revise your eating habits. Moving towards a more vegetarian diet has been shown statistically to reduce the incidence of so many of the diseases of industrialized countries. Vegetarians are statistically healthier than omnivorous persons; they're leaner and live longer.

Isn't it time to think about what you want to be and to eat accordingly? Do you want to be sluggish and fat? Do you want the risk that goes with eating animal products, with their high fat content? Or do you want to look like and be what vegetarians are? Leaner and fitter with a longer anticipated lifespan. It's never too late to change what you're doing and increase your chances for a longer, fitter life.

Humans Did Not Always Eat Meat

Do you ever think about how far we've diverted from the path of our pre-historic ancestors and their eating patterns? Consider how the earliest humans evolved, and what they ate. They were hunter-gatherers and did not evolve with the characteristics of carnivores. Humans aren't made to tear animals apart and eat their flesh. When you look at carnivorous animals, such as wild cats, you can see their teeth are designed to rip and tear, not chew.

Humans evolved from vegetarian creatures. Even our digestive systems are not particularly suited to eating meat. Eating meat is a relatively recent development in human history, most likely born of opportunity and necessity. Perhaps earliest man observed carnivores eating meat, and if they couldn't find any of the natural foods they were used to eating, such as vegetables, berries, nuts and grains, then they might have assumed that eating meat would at least sustain life.

But initially we emulated the creatures we evolved from, herbivores like apes. Even to a prehistoric mind, apes would have looked similar to man, walking primarily upright, with arms and hands. We naturally would have foraged for our food, eating roots and berries, fruits and nuts. We would have watched the apes peeling bananas, or crushing nuts on stones to get at the meat of the nut.

We would have been living more moment-to-moment, constantly foraging for food. Hunting, after all, requires thought and planning. Eating meat requires preparation and most importantly, fire. Until man discovered fire, he was primarily vegetarian, living in what was the natural order of things. Vegetarian eating is a more natural way of eating, in addition to being healthier. It's a way that's in balance with the planet, and doesn't seek to dominate it and conquer it.

It must have felt unnatural at first, to eat animal flesh. After all, we're not so far removed from animals ourselves. Perhaps it even felt cannibalistic. There might not have been that much intellectual distinction between humans and other animals.

When humans were pure vegetarians, they were living in harmony with the earth and with the other creatures co-habiting the planet with them. Their closest animal relatives, apes, were vegetarians. Eating the products of the earth, like plants, grains and fruits that they could gather and eat would have seemed the natural order of things.

But necessity is the mother of invention. Prehistoric men who lived in frozen geographies, or who lived in an area that became devastated by fire, would have eaten anything to survive. Just like the soccer players whose plane crashed in the mountains of Chile, and were forced to eat the flesh of other players who died in the crash, earliest man at some point had to make the choice for survival, and that could have consuming meat for the first time and changing human history – and health – forever.

We can imagine that men first ate meat that had been charred or cooked by virtue of being caught in a natural forest fire.

They might have subsequently eaten raw meat, if necessary, but we can also imagine that our earliest digestive systems rebelled against eating raw meat.

Imagine having eaten raw foods and vegetables for eons, and all of a sudden, incorporating meat products into your system. You may have heard friends who were vegetarians tell stories of trying to eat meat and becoming violently ill afterwards.

Biologists will tell you we're really not designed to eat meat, but we adapted to it. However, in the timeline of human history, eating meat is a relatively recent evolutionary development.

Traditional Meat

How did our family traditions become centered around eating meat? Think about it. When we think of Thanksgiving, we think of turkey. If we eat pork, then New Year's celebrations often revolve around pork and sauerkraut. At Christian Easter, the traditional meal is ham. And in the summer, we wait for that first hamburger or steak on the grill.

How did that happen to a species that was designed to eat vegetables and fruits, nuts, berries and legumes?

We can imagine that eating meat was initially an opportunistic event, born of the need to survive. The taste of cooked meat, plus the sustained energy that came from eating high-fat meat products made primitive sense even to earliest man.

Initially, finding cooked animal meat, from a forest fire, would have been cause for celebration. It's something everyone in a clan would have participated in eating together. When man learned to hunt and moved to a hunting orientation, rather than a hunter-gatherer orientation, he would have done this in groups.

They would have had to hunt in teams, and killing an animal for food would have been a group effort. Hunting and killing an animal meant food not just for the individual, but for the clan, and would have been cause for celebration when the hunters brought the food home.

If they brought the animal back to the clan, it would have taken a group effort to skin the animal and tear or cut the meat from the carcass. Everyone would have participated in this, and subsequently, shared in the rewards of their work.

It's easy to see how, once we didn't have to hunt for meat, but could buy it, the need for gathering and celebration was deeply ingrained in our natures. We celebrate the seasons and life's events with family and friends, and because those early celebrations involved eating meat, that tradition has continued to modern times.

Why Switch to Vegetarianism

If you've eaten meat and animal products your whole life, you might think, why switch to a vegetarian diet? You've lived your whole life eating eggs, hamburgers, hot dogs, poultry, so why switch now?

There could be many reasons to switch. Start by looking in the mirror. Are you at a healthy weight? Do you look and feel good most of the time? Do you wake up energized? Or do you wake up tired and sluggish?

How is your general health? Is your blood pressure within a healthy range? Are your cholesterol and blood sugar ranges normal? If they're not, consider what you're eating on a daily basis.

How do you feel after eating? Do you feel energized, as if you've fed your body what it needs? Or are you tired and dragged out? Do you often need a nap after eating? Is that what food is supposed to do for us, make us tired and sleepy?

Not really. Food should nourish and feed the body and leave us energized and refreshed. The human body is a machine and needs fuel that keeps it running in peak condition. When we're fat, with high blood pressure, Type II diabetes, high cholesterol and other unhealthy conditions, it's like a car engine that hasn't been tuned or isn't running on the optimal type of gasoline it needs to run efficiently.

Your body is the same way. It needs the right kind of fuel to run at peak efficiency, and when you're eating high-fat meat, or meat that's been fed antibiotics throughout its life, that's simply not the kind of fuel the human body evolved to run on.

Try eating vegetarian for a week or a month. See if you don't feel different, more mentally acute and more physically fit and energized. At least reverse the portion sizes you've been eating, and make meat more of a side dish, if you can't stop eating meat altogether. Even that change can make a big difference in your overall health and well-being.

PETA

People have different motivations for eating a vegetarian diet. For many people, it's a health issue. They need to reduce their weight, bring down their blood pressure and cholesterol, manage their blood sugars. A vegetarian diet helps them do this.

For others, it's also moral and ethical decision not to eat animal products. Through the centuries, we've become accustomed to thinking of man as superior to all other animals on the planet. We use animals for food, clothing, shoes, belts or other accessories. We use them for scientific experiments. We discount their place on the earth and consider that animals are here to serve us and our needs.

PETA stands for People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, and is an organization devoted to changing that mindset among humans. They are against using animals for food or for clothing, especially for what they consider the needless or particularly inhumane use of animals, such as killing or trapping them for their fur.

They are passionate about their cause. In their own words, PETA believes that animals have rights and deserve to have their best interests taken into consideration, regardless of whether they are useful to humans. Like you, they are capable of suffering and have an interest in leading their own lives; therefore, they are not ours to use for food, clothing, entertainment, experimentation, or any other reason.

We are supposedly an evolved society. But how evolved can a society be that thrives on the suffering of animals? In his excellent book, *When Elephants Weep*, author Jeffrey Masson explores the emotional lives of animals and presents compelling evidence for it. As a species, we must begin to re-evaluate our place on this earth and where we fit in relation to every other creature that inhabits it. PETA believes this as well and is a passionate advocate for the rights of animals.

The Environmental Costs of Factory Farming and Ranching

Long ago, eating meat was a good source of nutrition, since the use of hormones, pesticides and mass production methods was as yet unheard of. A family raised and processed their own livestock. Every morning the large golden eggs were plucked from the chicken's nests, which were lovingly cared for and fed healthy pesticide-free grains..

Today's factory farms use everything, but in the process they leave behind an environmental toll that generations to come will be forced to pay. Raising animals for food requires more than half the water used in the United States each year and one-third of all raw materials, including fossil fuels. This industry is the greatest polluter of our waters and is directly responsible for 85 percent of soil erosion. Our country's meat addiction is steadily poisoning and depleting our land, water and air.

Of all agricultural land in the United States, 87 percent is used to raise animals for food. That's 45 percent of the total land mass of the United States.

Methane is one of four greenhouse gases that contribute to global warming. The world's 1.3 billion cows produce one-fifth of all methane emitted into the atmosphere.

Raising animals for food causes more water pollution in the United States than any other industry because animals raised for food produce 20 times the excrement of the entire human population- 230,000 pounds every second.

Of all raw materials and fossil fuels used in the United States, more than one-third is used to raise animals for food.

Rain forests are being destroyed at a rate of 125,000 square miles per year. The primary cause of deforestation is raising animals for food.

Coupled with the inhumane treatments of animals that are raised for human consumption, the costs of raising and processing these animals for human consumption is becoming too high. Make a commitment to reduce or eliminate meats from your diet, and learn to live from the plant foods the environment naturally provides. The animals and your conscience will be better for it.

Caged Chickens and Hormones

If most of us thought about the conditions in which chickens used for meat and eggs are raised and slaughtered, we'd become vegetarian on the spot. Egg-laying chickens can be raised in cages with 6 chickens to a cage, each chicken getting only 67 square inches of space for its lifetime.

Unless they're certified and labeled as being free-range or organic or natural, they might have been fed growth hormones to get them to slaughter faster, and antibiotics to combat the diseases which come from being raised in cramped and less-than-clean conditions.

And consider what the recommendations are for cleaning up after touching poultry? It's recommended to clean surfaces with bleach to remove bacteria, and to wash your hands thoroughly after touching a chicken.

Do you really want to put something into your body that requires bleach to clean up after? Something that needs to be cooked to specific temperatures to be sure you've destroyed any bacteria that could make you sick?

Chickens and turkeys have become so mass-produced and injected with antibiotics and hormones that there's no taste to it anymore, so why bother? Even the most humanely treated chicken has either been stunned in a salt-water brine before being beheaded. In John Robbins excellent book and video, *Diet for a Small Planet*, he shows us pictures of chickens being grabbed in groups by the neck and thrown into cages. Can you really consider eating a chicken with that vision in your head?

Any means of mass-producing animals for human consumption is by its very nature unhealthy and cruel for the animals, and unhealthy for humans as well. Even if you're of the opinion that man is a natural hunter, how natural is it to eat an animal that's been raised in captivity and fed a diet of hormones and antibiotics?

Cow Slaughterhouses

Even if you don't eat meat, you might think drinking or using milk is part of a vegetarian diet. We all have images of farmers pumping milk by hand, and it seems a natural part of life and a benign use of the cow. But we don't really think much about it at all, do we?

Do you know how a cow raised for producing milk lives its life? Like most animals used for mass consumption, a milk cow lives in cramped and often filthy conditions. It is fed hormones to stimulate its reproductive processes, because that's what a mother's milk is for – to feed its baby.

As soon as a calf is born though, it's taken from its mother. A male calf often goes to a terrible fate to be raised for veal; a female calf often has the same fate as its mother.

Often the cows mourn for their babies. They'll be seen bellowing for them and looking for them. Mass producing milk for human consumption has disrupted the natural order of things.

The cows are fed hormones to continue to stimulate milk production. The electric pumps are painful to the cow's udders. With the hormone stimulation, cows are forced to produce 10 times more milk than they would ordinarily.

When their milk-producing days are over, the cows are then slaughtered for ground beef. It also takes enormous natural resources to feed and water all these cows. The water table is being depleted to sustain this enormous industry. And the waste produced by all these large animals is having a detrimental effect on the environment.

We really don't need to consume milk after a certain age. Why would we continue to support this industry that's built on animal suffering? To really top it off, humans are not meant to drink cow milk. Calf's are meant to drink cow milk and we humans are meant to drink human milk. Our bodies were not designed to digest the proteins in cow milk – so why bother? Especially when you can get more calcium from a green, leafy vegetable?

Veal

There are few issues that make a more compelling argument for a vegetarian diet than that of veal and how it's produced. While the meat industry is, by its very nature cruel and inhumane, the veal industry is the worst.

Baby calves are taken from their mothers, often at just one day old. They're kept in pens that prevent movement, to keep their muscles soft.

To produce the pale, soft veal that is so highly prized by gourmets, the calves are fed a liquid that's deficient in iron and fiber that creates an anemia in the animal.

The confinement in which they live for their short lives creates a significant level of chronic stress for the animal and they're subsequently given much higher levels of medications that can be harmful to humans. The confinement makes them weak, often unable to stand. We treat criminals who have committed the most vicious crimes imaginable more humanely than we treat innocent calves.

Why would anyone want to consume meat that's delivered to the table infused with the suffering of animals? What culinary experience can ever be worth it when you know what the animal, especially a calf, has to go through?

At age 20 weeks, the calf is then slaughtered. All the meat we eat has been mass produced and slaughtered. Their life is inhumane and their death is inhumane, in addition to which it's becoming less and less healthy for us to eat. Veal is the premier example of this industry. Changing to a vegetarian diet not only is a much more healthy way to eat, it's way of living in balance with the earth. It may have been one thing centuries ago to hunt for meat because it was a means for survival. Today's mass-produced meat industry is nothing like that and is more a cause of illness and poor health than it is for survival or nutrition.

Turkeys

The consumption of turkeys in the U.S. has escalated through the years. It's no longer eaten primarily at Thanksgiving and Christmas, but throughout the year. The process of mass-producing turkeys for human consumption is as barbaric, if not more so, than the process of mass-producing chickens.

Turkeys are kept in cramped, dark spaces to discourage the naturally aggressive behaviors that occur when an animal is kept confined without space to roam and feed freely.

They're overfed to the point where their legs can't support the weight of the breast tissue. And this animal which normally has a 10-years life span is generally slaughtered at about 2 years of age.

Unhealthy and overcrowded conditions mean that disease amongst commercial turkeys is widespread, resulting in approximately 2.7 million turkeys dying in their sheds every year.

Foot and leg deformities, heat stress and starvation caused by the inability of immature birds to find the feed and water troughs are commonplace. Ulcerated feet and hock burns are common - caused by continual contact with litter contaminated by urine and feces.

Can you really sit at dinner on your next holiday and look at a roasted turkey the same way? Turkeys come with the same recommendations for cleanliness and cooking that chickens do. You have to be sure they're cooked to a specific temperature to ensure that any disease-causing bacteria are completely killed. You should clean up any counter space with bleach, again to kill all bacteria.

It makes a compelling case for switching to a vegetarian diet, doesn't it? Suddenly, the jokes about vegetarian dinners, with nut loaves and vegetables, instead of meat, seem to make more sense, not only from a health standpoint, but from a humane issue as well.

Why do we persist in eating in such a way that makes us unhealthy and is inherently bad for us? For your next holiday dinner, consider the possibilities of an all-vegetarian menu. So much of the dinner is vegetable-based to begin with; it's a small change to replace turkey with a plant-based main course as well.

Pig Farming

Many people reject eating pork and other meats derived from pigs for religious reasons or health reasons.

When people start eating a more vegetarian diet, red meat is usually the first thing they eliminate from their diets. When they do, various health indicators generally start to improve, such as their cholesterol levels and blood pressure readings. Health is one of the most compelling reasons to eat vegetarian, but the inhumane treatment of the animals mass-produced for human consumption is another reason many people are rejecting a carnivorous diet.

Pig farming follows the same processes that chicken farming and other animal farming employ. The pigs are kept in small crates with limited movement. They're overfed so they can be slaughtered more quickly. Their living conditions can be dirty and they're fed growth hormones to stimulate weight gain and antibiotics to ward off diseases that are the results of their living conditions.

They're forced to live in unnatural conditions and they exhibit signs of chronic stress that other animals produced for human food do. They chew on the bars of their cages or worry with their water bottles excessively. Their limited range of movement prevents the rooting behavior that's natural for a pig.

The pigs pay an extremely high price to feed us. And we pay a high price for eating pork and other red meat. We're basically not made to eat meat. Our teeth weren't developed to rip and tear meat. We evolved from herbivores and it's still the better way for us to eat. When we eliminate red meat and other meats and animal products from our diet, we get healthier – more lean and fit, less tired and sluggish. And there's the added psychological benefit of knowing that we're not contributing to the suffering of innocent animals.

Fish and Mercury

Many people think if they just eliminate red meat and poultry from their diets, their eating healthier. This is partly true, but there are hazards to eating fish and seafood as well. The harm that humans have done to the environment has had a direct effect on the fish and seafood we eat.

There are elements of fish and shellfish are an important part of a healthy diet. Fish and shellfish contain high-quality protein and other essential nutrients, are low in saturated fat, and contain omega-3 fatty acids. A well-balanced diet that includes a variety of fish and shellfish can contribute to heart health and children's proper growth and development. So, women and young children in particular should include fish or shellfish in their diets due to the many nutritional benefits.

However, nearly all fish and shellfish contain traces of mercury. For most people, the risk from mercury by eating fish and shellfish is not a health concern. Yet, some fish and shellfish contain higher levels of mercury that may harm an unborn baby or young child's developing nervous system. The risks from mercury in fish and shellfish depend on the amount of fish and shellfish eaten and the levels of mercury in the fish and shellfish.

Therefore, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are advising women who may become pregnant, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and young children to avoid some types of fish and eat fish and shellfish that are lower in mercury.

Is this anyway to eat? In fear of what unhealthy elements are lurking in the food we eat? Eliminating red meat and eating a more vegetarian diet is an excellent start on the road to more healthy eating. Eliminating fish and seafood is one of the final steps towards eating a complete vegetarian diet and the health benefits that are your reward for making that change.

Animal Suffering

What are the reasons we eat food? That might seem like a silly question, because we eat to feed our bodies, first of all. Many of us also obtain an emotional gratification when we eat, and most of us are omnivores, meaning we eat everything, including meat and poultry.

There are many compelling reasons to move towards a vegetarian diet, many of them health-related. But many people refuse to eat meat because of the inhumane treatment of the animals that are mass-produced to feed the population.

Animal farming on the scale that it needs to be to satisfy U.S. consumption is grotesquely cruel. When you eat meat, you're eating the flesh of an animal whose life has been artificially shortened by overfeeding it to get it to a slaughterhouse earlier.

They're kept in small pens and cages, where they endure chronic stress. If they bear their young live, their babies are taken from them, sometimes a day after they're born. They're fed growth hormones and antibiotics and kept from the natural behaviors and actions that characterize the normal life span.

Pigs aren't allowed to root. Calves are kept immobile. Chickens are kept in cages, their beaks seared off with a burning hot knife to thwart aggressive behaviors that are the result of unnatural confinement.

Do you really think the flesh of the animal is separate from its spirit and its energy? The agony and stress they endure in their shortened lives infuses every cell of their bodies. Consider that depression and stress can make humans ill, can infect our muscles and organs. Is an animal so very different? We don't need meat or milk for survival. We're no longer a hunting society; we're merely a consuming society.

Isn't it time we all started thinking differently of what we consume to nourish our bodies? We're evolved from herbivores, and yet we've veered off our own evolutionary path. One can make a case for hunting and eating meat when it's the only means for survival. But that's no longer the case and our options are plentiful.

Different Types of Vegetarians

Many people think of vegetarians as one homogeneous group that just doesn't eat meat.

But nothing could be further from the truth. There are different categories of vegetarians as diverse as the reasons for going vegetarian in the first place.

A vegetarian is generally defined as someone who doesn't eat meat. But someone who is vegetarian could conceivably eat dairy products such as milk, eggs and cheese. A lacto ovo vegetarian doesn't eat meat, fish or poultry, but does consume eggs, milk or cheese. A lacto vegetarian consumes milk and cheese products, but doesn't consume eggs.

A vegan is someone who doesn't consume any animal product or by-product, including dairy food. They eat only vegetables, fruits, nuts, grains and legumes. They also don't use animal products, such as leather. Vegans also don't use white sugar because it's often processed with a substance derived from animal bones that whitens the sugar.

There are other categories within the vegetarian community.

Fruitarianism, for example, eat only fruit. Their rationale is that fruits, including fruits such as tomatoes, are self-perpetuating and don't need to be planted to create the food source. They consider it a way of eating that's most in balance and harmony with the earth, the most natural.

All of the above will eat cooked vegetables, fruits and legumes. There is also a growing movement towards eating only raw or living foods. This based on the assumption that cooking food processes most of the nutrients out of it, and to get all the nutritional value, vitamins and amino acids from food, it's best consumed raw, or juiced. If cooked at all, it should only be cooked to slightly over 100 degrees, so the nutrients are still retained.

The more restrictive you become with your diet, however, the more educated you need to become to be sure you're getting all the necessary proteins and vitamins that you need to maintain good health, especially muscle and heart health.

Vegetarians and Heart Disease

No matter what your reasons for eating a more vegetarian diet, there's no denying the obvious health benefits that are derived from the elimination of red meat from your diet. On average, vegetarians have lower levels of the blood fats, cholesterol and triglycerides than meat eaters of similar age and social status have.

High levels of blood fats are associated with an increased risk of heart disease. Lacto-ovo vegetarians, those who eat eggs and dairy products, which contain cholesterol-raising saturated fats and cholesterol, have higher cholesterol levels than do vegans, as those who abstain from all animal foods are called. But even among lacto-ovo vegetarians, cholesterol levels are generally lower than they are among meat eaters.

Researchers have found that older men who eat meat six or more times a week are twice as likely to die of heart disease as those who abstain from meat.

Among middle-aged men, meat eaters were four times more likely to suffer a fatal heart attack, according to the study. As for women, who are partly protected by their hormones and generally develop heart disease later in life than men do, the risk of fatal heart disease has been found to be lower only among the older vegetarians.

In a 1982 study of more than 10,000 vegetarians and meat eaters, British researchers found that the more meat consumed, the greater the risk of suffering a heart attack.

Though eliminating meat from the diet is likely to reduce your consumption of heart-damaging fats and cholesterol, substituting large amounts of high-fat dairy products and cholesterol-rich eggs can negate the benefit.

To glean the heart-saving benefits of vegetarianism, consumption of such foods as hard cheese, cream cheese, ice cream and eggs should be moderate. And the introduction of more vegetables, fruits and raw foods will definitely enhance the benefits of abstaining from eating meat.

Vegetarians and Cancer

You might have a general idea that eating a vegetarian diet is more healthy for you. But do you really know how much less the incidence is of certain types of cancers among vegetarians?

Vegetarian diets—naturally low in saturated fat, high in fiber, and replete with cancer-protective phytochemicals—help to prevent cancer. Large studies in England and Germany have shown that vegetarians are about 40 percent less likely to develop cancer compared to meat-eaters.

In the U.S., studies of Seventh-Day Adventists, who are largely lacto-ovo vegetarians, have shown significant reductions in cancer risk among those who avoided meat. Similarly, breast cancer rates are dramatically lower in nations, such as China, that follow plant-based diets. Interestingly, Japanese women who follow Western-style, meat-based diets are eight times more likely to develop breast cancer than women who follow a more traditional plant-based diet. Meat and dairy products contribute to many forms of cancer, including cancer of the colon, breast, ovaries, and prostate.

Harvard studies that included tens of thousands of women and men have shown that regular meat consumption increases colon cancer risk by roughly 300 percent. High-fat diets also encourage the body's production of estrogens. Increased levels of this sex hormone have been linked to breast cancer.

A recent report noted that the rate of breast cancer among pre-menopausal women who ate the most animal (but not vegetable) fat was one-third higher than that of women who ate the least animal fat. A separate study from Cambridge University also linked diets high in saturated fat to breast cancer.

One study linked dairy products to an increased risk of ovarian cancer. The process of breaking down the lactose (milk sugar) evidently damages the ovaries. Daily meat consumption triples the risk of prostate enlargement. Regular milk consumption doubles the risk and failure to consume vegetables regularly nearly quadruples the risk.

Vegetarians avoid the animal fat linked to cancer and get abundant fiber, vitamins, and phytochemicals that help to prevent cancer. In addition, blood analysis of vegetarians reveals a higher level of "natural killer cells," specialized white blood cells that attack cancer cells.

Bowels and Stomach Digestion

Many of the health benefits derived from a vegetarian diet have to do with creating a healthy environment in the bowels and stomach. Our digestive systems, from prehistory on, were designed to metabolize vegetable matter, more than animal products.

Fruits, vegetables, legumes and nuts provide the kind of dietary fiber our digestive systems need to function properly. The Western diet that's high in processed and refined flour and sugar, and in animal products that are laden with hormones and antibiotics, are actually anathema to our insides.

When the digestive system doesn't function and work as it's intended to, that leads to opportunistic diseases or changes in the DNA of cells in the stomach and colon. And there are more practical considerations as well. When we don't get enough of the fiber we need, we incur a host of digestion and elimination problems, such as constipation and hemorrhoids that are a result of straining.

These diseases and syndromes are much less evident in a vegetarian population than in a meat-eating population.

Other diseases of the bowel that occur less frequently in a vegetarian population include irritable bowel syndrome, and chronic ulcerative colitis, mostly likely due to the increased fiber content in a vegetarian diet. And of course a diet that's higher in dietary fiber that comes from a vegetarian diet will decrease the likelihood or risk of colon cancer.

When you consider the risks that come with a diet that includes meat and animal products, and the benefits that come from a vegetarian diet, does the prospect of a steak or burger or bacon really sound that good to you? Doesn't it at least make sense to reverse the portion sizes and proportions of meats to vegetables and side dishes? In other words, if you must continue to eat meat, then make meat your side dish, or just incidental to your meal, such as in a stir fry. Increasing the proportion of fruits and vegetables in your diet can only be good for you.

Weight

Think about it, have you ever seen a fat vegetarian? Probably not. In fact, for most of us, vegetarian is almost synonymous with lean and healthy, isn't it? And when you start any diet, what's the first thing the experts tell you? Generally it's to increase the amounts of vegetables you're eating and to eat limited amounts of meat, especially high-fat red meat and pork.

And what happens when you resume your old eating habits? Generally the weight will come right back on. Even the greatest will-power can't overcome the unhealthy effects of eating high-fat meat.

When you eat a diet that's higher in dietary fiber, that's primarily if not totally vegetarian, you're naturally healthier. You're feeding your body and getting it the nutrition it needs to run efficiently.

You have more energy and stamina; you wake up more easily and more refreshed. It's easier to exercise, because you're not so weighed down by digesting the high fat and excessive protein that comes from eating a carnivorous diet.

Many diets fail because we think of them as depriving ourselves of food we love. The trick is to change that thinking. There are so many compelling reasons to eliminate meat from our diet, so why not forget about losing weight? Focus instead on eating healthier, or eating in a way that's in balance with the earth, and that doesn't need to subsist on the suffering of animals. You'll probably find you'll start to lose weight without even thinking about it!

And when you do lose weight, so many other health risks can fall by the wayside as well. You'll find your blood pressure falls into a healthier range and your risk for Type II diabetes can decrease. You'll look better and feel better and probably never go back to your old ways of eating!

The Benefits of a Vegetarian Diet to Diabetics

Diabetics must choose any food they eat very carefully, as each food choice they make has a profound impact on their overall health on a meal-to-meal basis. Diabetes affects people of all ages, both genders, from all walks of life and backgrounds. Untreated, it can cause wounds to heal slowly, infections take longer to cure, blindness, and kidney failure. Diet is one of the most important ways of controlling diabetes, and a vegetarian lifestyle with its emphasis on low fat, high fiber, and nutrient-rich foods is very complementary.

Affecting more than 30 million people worldwide, this disease inhibits the body from properly processing foods. Usually, most of the food we eat is digested and converted to glucose, a sugar which is carried by the blood to all cells in the body and used for energy. The hormone insulin then helps glucose pass into cells. But diabetics are unable to control the amount of glucose in their blood because the mechanism which converts sugar to energy does not work correctly.

Insulin is either absent, present in insufficient quantities or ineffective. As a result glucose builds up in the bloodstream and leads to problems such as weakness, inability to concentrate, loss of co-ordination and blurred vision. If the correct balance of food intake and insulin isn't maintained, a diabetic can also experience blood sugar levels that are too low. If this state continues for a prolonged period of time, it can lead to coma and even death.

Though incurable, diabetes can be successfully controlled through diet and exercise, oral medications, injections of insulin, or a combination. Instead of counting calories diabetics must calculate their total carbohydrate intake so that no less than half their food is made up of complex carbohydrates. Many diabetic vegetarians have discovered that as a result of their meatless diet, they've had to use insulin injections less, which gives them a feeling of power and control over their disease.

Osteoporosis

You know that eating a vegetarian diet can decrease the incidence of heart disease and certain types of cancers. You also know that it can make you leaner and healthier. But so many of the health studies are done on men? What about women and the impact of a vegetarian diet on their health as they age?

Diets that are high in protein, especially animal protein, tend to cause the body to excrete more calcium, oxalate, and uric acid. These three substances are the main components of urinary tract stones. British researchers have advised that persons with a tendency to form kidney stones should follow a vegetarian diet.

The American Academy of Family Physicians notes that high animal protein intake is largely responsible for the high prevalence of kidney stones in the United States and other developed countries and recommends protein restriction for the prevention of recurrent kidney stones.

For many of the same reasons, vegetarians are at a lower risk for osteoporosis. Since animal products force calcium out of the body, eating meat can promote bone loss.

In nations with mainly vegetable diets (and without dairy product consumption), osteoporosis is less common than in the U.S., even when calcium intake is also less than in the U.S. Calcium is important, but there is no need to get calcium from dairy products.

We continue to consume meat, while at the same time downing calcium supplements and prescription drugs to prevent osteoporosis, that often have drastic side effects. And most experts agree that calcium supplements are inferior to calcium derived from natural food sources. Doesn't it make more sense (and cents) to get your calcium from eating a healthier diet?

What are some good vegetarian sources of calcium? Orange juice, for one. Dry beans, such as black-eyed peas, kidney beans and black beans are another good source, as are dark leafy vegetables such as broccoli and kale. Tofu is also a good source of calcium.

Transition Family

If you're considering moving to a vegetarian diet as an adult, you probably want to pass on this good nutrition and improved way of eating to your family as well. In fact, it's your responsibility as a parent to nurture your children and help them develop physically, mentally and spiritually.

But that can be hard to do, especially in a culture where our children are bombarded with messages from fast food restaurants in the media. How do you teach kids to resist the siren song of Ronald McDonald? There isn't a plate of vegetables on the planet that's going to look as good to them as a Happy Meal!

You have to start slowly to change not only your own eating patterns, but your family's as well. Like any other dietary endeavor, it starts at the grocery store. Begin stocking the refrigerator with healthy snacks like apples and carrots. Exchange good, chewy brown rice for white rice and processed side dishes, which are so high in fat and sodium. Make meat portions smaller and smaller and start incorporating more vegetables and grains in your family dinners.

Don't make changes all at once. If you do give in and stop at a fast food restaurant, get fruit or yogurt in addition to or part of that meal. Make the changes so gradual that they'll never notice their diets are changing. Kids are usually very sympathetic about animals, and it's not too early to talk to them about eating in a way that isn't cruel to animals.

You'll be doing them a favor that will last them a lifetime. With childhood obesity at epidemic levels in the U.S., you will be setting up your children for lifelong eating habits that will help ensure a long and healthy life.

Detoxification

When people talk about detoxification and cleansing the body of harmful toxins, it's often seen as a fringe element of vegetarians. People really don't like to think about harmful toxins building up in their colons or in their arteries, but it's often a by-product of a carnivorous diet. A diet that's high in fat and processed foods tends to slow down our digestive systems, and our elimination processes are also interrupted.

This can allow harmful bacteria and toxins to accumulate and can create a general feeling of sluggishness, as well as a host of digestive disorders, such as irritable bowel syndrome or colitis. When we begin eating a more healthy vegetarian diet, we start to get more dietary fiber into our systems, and all of a sudden, our digestive systems start to work better,

When you eliminate high-fat meat and processed foods from your diet, then much of your body's energy is freed from the intense work of digesting these foods. Everything becomes clearer – your blood, your organs, your mind. You start to become more aware of the toxic nature of the food you'd been eating before.

Toxicity is of much greater concern in the twentieth century than ever before. There are many new and stronger chemicals, air and water pollution, radiation and nuclear power. We ingest new chemicals, use more drugs of all kinds, eat more sugar and refined foods, and daily abuse ourselves with various stimulants and sedatives. The incidence of many toxicity diseases has increased as well. Cancer and cardiovascular disease are two of the main ones.

Arthritis, allergies, obesity, and many skin problems are others. In addition, a wide range of symptoms, such as headaches, fatigue, pains, coughs, gastrointestinal problems, and problems from immune weakness, can all be related to toxicity. When you start a vegetarian eating plan, your body eventually cleanses itself of the harmful effects of these toxic foods.

Eliminate Red Meat

If you're thinking of changing to a vegetarian diet, how do you start? Do you just start shopping in the produce aisle of the grocery store? You might have some anxiety attached to this change as well, and this is understandable.

Try to think of this as adding to your dietary habits, rather than a drastic change. If your diet has consistently included red meat, perhaps you can start substituting other foods for the red meat. Or eliminate the most processed and high-fat meats first, such as bacon and hamburgers.

Certainly try to eliminate fast food burgers, which have such a high fat and sodium content. If you think you'll miss the taste of bacon in the morning, try substituting a turkey or vegetable-based bacon substitute.

It won't be the same, but you won't be giving up the foods you're used to all at once.

If you've had a health scare and feel the need to change everything at once, make sure you include a lot of variety in the foods you buy as you begin to discover new flavors and textures that you'll like to replace the ones you're used to eating. If you don't need to make a dramatic change all at once, you'll have a much greater chance of long-term success if you take it slow.

Reduce the amount of red meat that you eat on a weekly basis, even if it means substituting pasta with marinara sauce for meat just one night a week. Increase the amounts of fruits and vegetables you eat. Start with raw vegetables at night before dinner so you're not so hungry when you get to the main meal. Start reversing the proportions of meat and vegetables and make meat a side dish, with vegetables and grains your main course.

We're creatures of habit and resistant to change. This is why so many diets fail, because we make drastic changes to facilitate dramatic results, quickly. This is a decision and a change you want to make for a lifetime. Make it a natural and gradual change and you can look forward to many more years of healthy living.

Eliminate Poultry

If you haven't been eating a vegetarian diet for years, and want to make the shift, it's best to do so gradually, in stages. A good way to start is to eliminate red meat and substitute fish or poultry for the red meat you've been eating. While it's not eating more vegetarian, you're at least eliminating the biggest offender in disease-enhancing foods, red meat.

After you've successfully eliminated red meat, then start reducing the amount of poultry you eat. While it's not as bad for you as red meat, because it's not as high in fat, it's still meat that's been raised on a farm in terrible, cramped and inhumane conditions.

Poultry is so laden with growth hormones and antibiotics that's it's nothing like a chicken or turkey that we might have hunted for food centuries ago.

Chickens are raised in horrible conditions, overfed and then slaughtered. In the grand scheme of things, it's just as detrimental to our physical and spiritual health as eating red meat. It's also fairly easy to eliminate poultry from our diets because let's face it – it's like eating wood pulp, it's so tasteless. All the antibiotics and abnormal living conditions have processed any natural flavor that poultry ever had in the first place.

Add more fish and seafood, if you're not quite ready to replace poultry with grains and vegetables and legumes yet. While there is risk in eating fish and seafood, because of the high levels of mercury they contain, it's a better alternative to poultry and red meat. This may be as far as you ever get in moving towards vegetarianism, or at least eliminating meat from your diet.

Give yourself time to get used to this. You won't miss poultry for a minute. We usually eat chicken and chicken breasts because it's lower in fat and calories, but it's also lower in any kind of nutritional value.

When we're not getting essential proteins and vitamins, we're still starving our bodies, regardless of how healthy we think we're being. Eliminating poultry is one of the most positive steps you can take towards a healthy diet and a healthy planet.

Eliminate Seafood

It's actually pretty easy to eliminate red meat and poultry from our diets. When you give any thought whatsoever, the reasons are so compelling to stop eating them. Your reasons may be physical, because you need to lower your cholesterol or blood pressure. You may want to reduce your risk of cancers that may run in your family, and eliminating red meat from your diet is an important way to do this.

You may also find that the way we mass-produce meat and poultry for consumption in this country is repugnant to you. If we really thought about the way meat and poultry is raised, we'd never eat the stuff again. We're consuming flesh that's been produced from enormous pain and suffering. Even the smallest life has value on this earth; mass producing these animals to slaughter and eat them degrades their lives and degrades our own in the process of eating them.

It might feel like it's carrying things too far to eliminate something as elemental as a shrimp or a scallop. But think about what we dump into the ocean where this food comes from. All our waste and trash gets hauled into the ocean, if it doesn't go into a landfill. Think of the millions of gallons of oil that have been dumped from oil tanker accidents.

Think of the impact that the erosion of the ozone layer in the atmosphere has had on every living thing on the planet. There are toxic levels of mercury in fish and seafood, so much so that if you're a woman contemplating getting pregnant, you most definitely shouldn't eat fish. Your risk of producing a baby with birth defects is extremely high if you do.

It can be hard to let go of fish and seafood, because this has a similar texture to red meat and poultry. It's flesh after all, even though it's marine flesh. It might take longer to eliminate fish and seafood from your diet, but keep at the effort.

If you've been realizing the benefits of eating more vegetarian, then it's really a small step to take to eliminate this last piece of animal flesh from your diet. Imagine how good you'll feel about yourself and what you're doing for the planet when you make that last step and eliminate all meat and animal products from your diet.

Got milk? Reasons Not to Grab for the Glass

Many Americans, including some vegetarians, still consume large amounts of dairy products, but here are several strong reasons to eliminate dairy products from your diet.

Milk has long been praised as a 'weapon' in the war against osteoporosis, but recent clinical research shows that it actually is associated with a higher fracture risk, and there's been no protective effect of dairy calcium on bone. Increasing your intake of green leafy vegetables and beans, along with exercising have been shown to help strengthen bones and increase their density.

Dairy products are also a significant source of fat and cholesterol in the diet, which can increase your risk for cardiovascular disease. A low-fat vegetarian diet that eliminates dairy products, as well as adequate amounts of exercise, proper stress management and quitting smoking not only will help prevent heart disease, but could also reverse it.

Ovarian, breast, and prostate cancers have been linked to dairy product consumption. According to a recent study by Daniel Cramer, a Harvard doctor, when excessive amounts of dairy products are consumed and the body's enzymes are unable to keep pace with breaking down the lactose; it can build up in the blood and affect a woman's ovaries. Another recent study showed that men who had the highest levels of IGF-I, (insulin-like growth factor) which is found in cow's milk, they were at four times the risk of prostate cancer compared to those men who had the lowest levels of IGF-I.

In addition, milk may not provide a consistent and reliable source of Vitamin D in the diet. Milk samplings have been found to have inconsistent levels of Vitamin D, and some have been found to have as much as 500 times the indicated safe level. Excess Vitamin d in the blood can be toxic and can result in calcium deposits in the body's soft tissues.

Milk proteins, milk sugar, fat, and saturated fat in dairy products may pose health risks for children and lead to the development of chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and formation of plaques in the circulatory system that can lead to heart disease.

By choosing to consume a nutrient-dense, healthful diet of grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes, and fortified foods including cereals and juices, you can help meet your body's calcium, potassium, riboflavin, and vitamin D requirements easily and simply, without the added health risks from dairy product consumption.

Flipping the Switch to Vegetarianism

If you've made the commitment to becoming vegetarian yet finding it difficult to make the transition in your diet and your lifestyle, here's some suggestions on how to make the switch a smoother ride.

Start out with committing to be a vegetarian for three days per week for the first couple of weeks. Start substituting ingredients in your favorite dishes to make them truly meatless.

Throw in mushrooms to that marinara sauce to take the place of meatballs, or try some textured vegetable protein (TVP) in that lasagna recipe. Making simple replacements in your tried and true recipes can inspire you to stay on the vegetarian track once you see how delicious they can be.

Next, commit to five days per week for the next two weeks. Study the natural foods aisle at your local grocer, or make it a point to introduce yourself to the local health foods store.

Treat yourself to a few new vegetarian products and try them in your next meal. The internet can be a great source of vegetarian recipes. And don't limit yourself to being vegetarian only at home; most all restaurants offer delicious vegetarian entrees, so be sure to try them. You may even find inspiration for your home cooking by doing so.

Now all that's left to do is add two more days on your week, and you'll be a converted vegetarian all week long! After all, you've been doing it for a month now; you've become a seasoned rookie in the game. Take pride in your accomplishments, because not only have you made positive changes in your lifestyle and eating habits, but for the environment and animals as well.

Remember it's not about being perfect; every animal-positive change you make to your diet has a great effect. By rewarding yourself for each vegetarian choice you make, and you'll be motivated to continue in the right direction.

Variety Adds Vitality to your Vegetarian Meals

Probably one of the most perplexing thoughts a person has when they transition to vegetarianism is keeping their diet filled with a variety of fun, diverse, and nutrient-dense foods.

It can sometimes feel like you're cutting many options out since you're no longer consuming meat, and it may seem you're losing even more options if you've also decided to cut dairy and eggs from your diet as well. With a little creativity, planning, and forethought, you might be surprised how much variety you can achieve with your new vegetarian diet – perhaps even more than your meat-eating days!

There are some simple substitutions you can experiment with and use as substitutions in your favorite meat recipes.

Tempeh, which is cultured soybeans with a chewy texture; tofu (freezing and then thawing gives tofu a meaty texture; the tofu will turn slightly off white in color); and wheat gluten or seitan (made from wheat and has the texture of meat; available in health food or Oriental stores) are all great items to start with.

Milk and other dairy products can also be easily replaced with vegetarian-friendly items. Try soy milk, soy margarine, and soy yogurts, which can be found in health food or Oriental food stores. You can also make nut milks by blending nuts with water and straining, or rice milks by blending cooked rice with water.

A good way to introduce beans to the diet is to use them instead of meat in favorite dishes, like casseroles and chili. Because of their many health benefits, beans should be eaten often. Some great examples are chickpeas, split peas, haricot, lentils (red, green or brown), and kidney beans.

Many nuts and seeds are available both in and out of the shell, whole, halved, sliced, chopped, raw, or roasted. Cashews, peanuts, walnuts, almonds are some easy-to-find favorites. Sunflower and sesame seeds are excellent choices for spicing up salads and other vegetable dishes.

And don't worry that you'll have to give up your favorite Mexican, Italian, or other favorite dishes now that you're vegetarian. Many of them can still be enjoyed and only require slight variations. Some popular and easily convertible dishes include: pasta with tomato sauce, bean burritos, tacos, tostadas, pizza, baked potatoes, vegetable soups, whole grain bread and muffins, sandwiches, macaroni, stir-fry, all types of salad, veggie burgers with French fries, beans and rice, bagels, breakfast cereals, pancakes, and waffles just to name a few.

The freezer sections of most big grocery stores carry an assortment of vegetarian convenience foods such as veggie bacon, burgers, and breakfast sausages.

So get in the kitchen and let your creativity lead the way! You'll probably be pleasantly surprised just how much more variety your diet will have as a result.

Lazy Vegetarians Who Choose the Wrong Carbs Risk Health

We've all been there. We've just come in from a long day at work and the last thing on our minds taking the time to prepare a healthy, nutritionally sound vegetarian meal. But choosing a refined or enriched carbohydrate over the beneficial carbohydrates that a solid, well-balanced vegetarian diet offers defeats the purpose of your decision to live a vegetarian lifestyle, and that's for optimal health. Consuming refined carbohydrates presents different hazards to your health.

The over-consumption of refined carbohydrates and sugars can result in excess insulin in the bloodstream. In the presence of excess insulin, glucose, the blood sugar, is converted to triglycerides and stored in the fat cells of the body.

According to one study, consuming refined grains may also increase your risk of getting stomach cancer. The research found that a high intake of refined grains could increase a patient's risk of stomach cancer.

In addition, refined sugars and carbohydrates have been implicated as a contributing factor in increased gallbladder disease, according to a recent study. It showed a direct link between the amount of sugars eaten and the incidence of gallbladder disease.

Another study looked at the role carbohydrates play in the incidence of heart disease. The researchers noted that as carbohydrate consumption increased, so did the level of triglycerides in the blood of the participants. Diets low in fat and high in carbohydrates not only dramatically raised triglyceride levels but significantly reduced levels of HDL, the "good" cholesterol.

And lastly, refined white sugars increase the rate at which your body excretes calcium, which is directly connected to your skeletal health. Simply put, as your sugary and refined carbohydrate intake increases, your bone density decreases.

So don't be lazy! Do your body right and take the time to prepare a nutrient-dense and delicious vegetarian meal. Your body, and your conscience, will thank you for it in the long run.

Proper Planning Prevents Problems

Special care must be taken when planning a vegetarian diet to ensure proper amounts of nutrients are included daily. Nutrients such as protein, iron, calcium, zinc and vitamins B-12 and D can all be easily incorporated into your vegetarian lifestyle with the proper planning. Here are some guidelines to consider when you are planning your weekly shopping trip and organizing your weekly menu.

Plant proteins alone can provide enough of the essential and non-essential amino acids, as long as sources of dietary protein are varied and caloric intake is high enough to meet energy needs. Whole grains, legumes, vegetables, seeds and nuts all contain both essential and non-essential amino acids. Soy proteins, such as soy milk and tofu, have been shown to be equal to proteins of animal origin.

Vegetarians may have a greater risk of iron deficiency than non-vegetarians. Dried fruits and beans, spinach, and brewer's yeast are all good plant sources of iron.

Vitamin B-12 can be found in some fortified breakfast cereals and soy beverages, some brands of brewer's yeast as well as vitamin supplements. Read the labels of other foods carefully; you might be surprised what food is B-12 fortified.

As a vegetarian, it's essential that you have a reliable source of vitamin D, in your diet. Exposure to ultraviolet (UV) light stimulates your body produce its own vitamin D. Daytime outdoor exercise and working in your garden are both great alternatives for obtaining this important nutrient.

Those who don't have the opportunity to get out and soak up the sun might want to consider adding a supplement to their diet.

Recent studies suggest that vegetarians absorb and retain more calcium from foods than their non-vegetarian counterparts. Vegetable greens such as spinach, kale and broccoli, and some legumes and soybean products, are good sources of calcium from plants.

Zinc is imperative for growth and development. Good plant sources include grains, nuts and legumes. However, zinc daily zinc requirements are actually quite low. Take care to select a supplement that contains no more than 15-18 mg zinc.

Vegetarians may have a greater risk of iron deficiency than non-vegetarians. Dried beans, spinach, enriched products, brewer's yeast and dried fruits are all good plant sources of iron. When eaten alongside a fruit or vegetable containing high amounts of vitamin C, your body more willingly absorbs the needed iron, so be sure to team these two vital nutrients up as much as possible when meal planning.

Vegetarian Diet for Optimal Personal and Environmental Health

It's been well documented through the years that vegetarians are healthier than people who eat meat. Vegetarians are less likely to be [obese](#), or to have [high blood pressure](#), [diabetes](#), [rheumatoid arthritis](#), or [colon cancer](#). They are also less likely to die from [heart disease](#). Vegetarians have lower blood pressure even when they eat the same amount of salt as meat eaters and exercise less. Many studies show that vegetarians have less instances of colon cancer, due in large part to the differences in the bacterial flora that is present in the colon.

There are many factors in the vegetarian diet that contribute to better health. Vegetarians consume two to three times as much [fiber](#) as do meat-eaters, which has been shown to reduce [cholesterol](#) and blood glucose levels, and protect against colon cancer.

They also consume more [antioxidants](#), which are found in a wide variety of plant foods and protect cells from oxygen-induced damage and reduce the risk for heart disease, arthritis, cancer, and other diseases.

Vegetarians eat more isoflavones than do meat eaters. These compounds, found mostly in [soy foods](#), are a type of phytochemical. Research shows that isoflavones may reduce the risk for [prostate cancer](#) and may improve bone health.

Vegetarians also consume much less saturated fat and cholesterol than do meat eaters, resulting in significantly lower levels of blood cholesterol, decreased instances of heart disease and possibly for [diabetes](#) and [cancer](#). And, since vegetarians do not eat meat, they are not exposed to heme [iron](#), a type of iron found in meat that may increase the risk of heart disease and cancer.

And lastly, vegetarianism is not only optimally healthy for your body, but your environment and the planet's animals. It allows you to live more harmoniously with the world around you, which improves mental and emotional health accordingly.

The Special Needs of the Pregnant Vegetarian

It's apparent that your nutritional needs increase when you are pregnant. However, you only need approximately 300 more calories than normal during this time, so it's imperative that you make wise food choices and eat nutrient-dense food.

A good start is to ensure that you're eating plenty of protein. Your need for protein increases about 30 percent during pregnancy, but most vegetarian women eat more than enough protein in their regular diets. Soy proteins, beans and legumes are wonderful vegetarian sources of protein.

You need to also step up your calcium intake. Each day you need to be eating at least four servings of calcium-rich foods like broccoli, calcium-fortified soy milk, tofu, and dark green leafy vegetables.

Sunlight stimulates your body to naturally produce vitamin D, and it's probably the easiest way to ensure you get an adequate amount each day. You only need about 20 minutes directly on your face and hands two to three times per week, when the sun is weakest. If you aren't able to get out into the sun, be sure to incorporate vitamin-D rich foods into your daily diet by choosing fortified cereals, or using a supplement.

Take a look at your iron intake, as it's a vital mineral during your pregnancy, especially the last half. Choose beans, dark green leafy vegetables, nuts and seeds, or fortified breads and cereals. You might also want to consider supplementing to ensure you get the required amount.

Vitamin B-12 is also an important nutrient during your pregnancy, but it's difficult to find in most plant-based foods. Select fortified cereals or soy milk, brewer's yeast, and consider a multivitamin with an adequate level to ensure your body gets the amount it needs.

And though zinc is difficult to come by in a strict vegan or vegetarian diet, the need for it increases during pregnancy. Whole grains and legumes are wise choices to obtain this nutrient, but you again may need to supplement to make sure you're getting what you need.

As long as you eat a good variety of nutritious foods that provide the right amount of calories for a healthy weight gain, you should have no problem getting the vitamins and minerals your body needs at this marvelous time. And though many women do choose to take a prenatal vitamin daily, they should not be a substitute for good nutrition. Develop a cooperative relationship with your healthcare provider who supports your vegetarian lifestyle, and consider consulting a nutritionist when necessary.

Sample Daily Menu for Pregnant Vegetarians

Though your nutritional needs increase now that you're pregnant, your pregnancy vegetarian diet shouldn't have to change all that much.

With some careful planning to ensure your caloric, vitamin, and mineral needs are met, you can still enjoy a rich variety of nutrient-dense delicious foods and help give your baby a nutritious jump-start.

Consider the following daily menu for ideas and inspiration.

Breakfast:

- 1/2 cup oatmeal with maple syrup
- 1 slice whole wheat toast with fruit spread
- 1 cup soy milk
- 1/2 cup calcium and vitamin D fortified orange juice

Snack:

- 1/2 whole wheat bagel with margarine
- Banana

Lunch:

- Veggie burger on whole wheat bun with mustard and catsup
- 1 cup steamed collard greens
- Medium apple
- 1 cup soy milk

Snack:

- 3/4 cup ready-to-eat cereal with 1/2 cup blueberries
- 1 cup soy milk

Dinner:

- 3/4 cup tofu stir-fried with 1 cup vegetables
- 1 cup brown rice
- Medium orange

Snack:

- Whole grain crackers with 2 Tbsp peanut butter
- 4 ounces apple juice

If morning sickness is giving you fits during your pregnancy, try eating low fat, high carbohydrate nutrient-dense foods. These are digested more quickly and stay in the stomach for less time giving less time for queasiness. Remember to eat often. Sometimes nausea is really hunger in disguise.

Be sure to drink juice, water, or soy milk if you can't eat solid food. Keep trying to eat whatever you can. If you're unable to eat or drink the appropriate amounts of foods or fluids for 24 hours or more, get in touch with your healthcare provider.

The Healing Effects a Vegetarian Diet on your Post-Baby Body

The breastfeeding vegetarian diet doesn't vary all that much from the pregnancy vegetarian diet. Protein recommendations are the same, vitamin B-12 recommendations are higher, and the recommendations for iron and calories are lower than during pregnancy. But the key in ensuring your healthy vegetarian diet is also helping you recover from the stresses of giving birth and taking care of your newborn is healthy fats.

Healthy fats and oils play active roles in every stage of the body's healing, building, and maintenance processes. In fact, they are as important to an active individual's body as amino acids, minerals, and vitamins. Healthy fats and oils help convert light and sound into electrical nerve impulses, remove potentially toxic substances from sensitive tissue, and provide strength to cell membranes.

The key is in balancing fats from a variety of foods. All foods that contain dietary fat contain a combination of fatty acids-the chemical building blocks of fat. Learning about the mixture of fatty acids in your diet will help you figure out how to choose foods with the good fats and avoid those foods that contain the bad fats.

For healthy fats, look to mono-unsaturated and polyunsaturated fatty acids. These can readily be found in a variety of vegetables, oils, and nuts, such as avocados, almonds, and olive oil. These help your body to resist attack from free radicals, which are specially formed types of atoms that can damage your body's cells when they react with DNA or cell membranes-better than other fats and thus are less prone to stick to your arteries.

Polyunsaturated fats occur in food either as omega-3 or omega-6 fatty acids. The key to eating healthy polyunsaturated fats is to maintain the right balance of omega-3 acids-found abundantly in flax, walnuts and canola oil-with omega-6 acids, found in vegetable oils such as corn, safflower and sesame.

What to Feed your Vegetarian Baby

It goes without saying that the earliest food for any baby, including a vegan baby, is breast milk. It benefits your baby's immune system, offers protection against infection, and reduces the risk of allergies. Be especially careful that you are getting enough vitamin B-12 when breastfeeding. Also, ensure your infant receives at least 30 minutes of sunlight exposure per week to stimulate the body to produce adequate amounts of vitamin D, since human milk contains very low levels.

The iron content of breast milk is also generally low, no matter how good the mother's diet is. The iron which is in breast milk is readily absorbed by the infant, however. The iron in breast milk is adequate for the first 4 to 6 months or longer. After the age of six months, it is recommended iron supplements are introduced.

Soy milk, rice milk, and homemade formulas should not be used to replace breast milk or commercial infant formula during the first year. These foods do not contain the proper ratio of protein, fat, and carbohydrate, nor do they have enough of many vitamins and minerals to be used as a significant part of the diet in the first year.

Many people use iron-fortified infant rice cereal as the first food. Cereal can be mixed with expressed breast milk or soy formula so the consistency is fairly thin. Formula or breast milk feedings should continue as usual. Start with one cereal feeding daily and work up to 2 meals daily or 1/3 to 1/2 cup. Oats, barley, corn, and other grains can be ground in a blender and then cooked until very soft and smooth. These cereals can be introduced one at a time. However, they do not contain much iron, so iron supplements should be continued.

When baby becomes used to cereals, fruit, fruit juice, and vegetables can be introduced. Fruits and vegetables should be well mashed or puréed. Mashed banana or avocado, applesauce, and puréed canned peaches or pears are all good choices.

Mild vegetables such as potatoes, carrots, peas, sweet potatoes, and green beans should be cooked well and mashed. Grain foods such as soft, cooked pasta or rice, soft breads, dry cereals, and crackers can be added when baby becomes better at chewing.

Sample Vegetarian Diet to Promote Healing

Fats are an essential part of any well-balanced diet, including a vegetarian diet. Fats are made of smaller units - called fatty acids. These fatty acids may be saturated, mono-unsaturated or polyunsaturated.

Saturated and mono-unsaturated fats are not necessary in a vegetarian diet as they can be made in the human body. However, two polyunsaturated fatty acids - linoleic acid (omega 6) and linolenic acid (omega 3) - cannot be manufactured by the body and must be provided in the diet.

Fortunately, they are widely available in vegetarian/vegan plant foods. Evidence is increasing that omega 6 (found in foods like vegetable oils such as corn, safflower and sesame) and especially omega 3 (found in flax, walnuts, avocados, almonds and olive and canola oil) fats are beneficial for a range of conditions, including heart disease, cancer, immune system deficiencies and arthritis.

Healthy fats and oils play active roles in every stage of the body's healing, building, and maintenance processes. In fact, they are as important to an active individual's body as amino acids, minerals, and vitamins.

Healthy fats and oils help convert light and sound into electrical nerve

impulses, remove potentially toxic substances from sensitive tissue, and provide strength to cell membranes.

The following vegetarian menu sample shows how easy it is for essential fatty acids to be a part of your every day vegetarian diet.

Breakfast:

1 bagel with 2 tsp vegan margarine, 1 medium orange, 1 cup Cheerios cereal, and 1 cup soymilk

Lunch:

Sandwich of hummus made with 3/4 cup chickpeas and 2 teaspoons tahini (a sandwich spread made from ground sesame seeds) on 2 slices of whole wheat bread with 3 slices of tomato and 1/2 sliced avocado

Dinner:

1 cup of cooked pasta with 1/4 cup marinara sauce, 1/3 cup carrot sticks, 1 cup cooked broccoli (frozen or fresh), and 1 whole wheat roll

Snack:

1/2 cup almonds, and 1 cup soymilk

40 – Variety is the Spice of your Vegetarian Child's Diet

Eating habits are set in early childhood. Choosing a vegetarian diet can give your child—and your whole family—the opportunity to learn to enjoy a variety of wonderful, nutritious foods.

Offer your child a wide variety of grains, fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, and soy products, keep it simple and make it fun, and they'll learn good eating habits that will last them a lifetime.

Children raised on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes grow up to be slimmer and healthier and even live longer than their meat-eating friends.

It is much easier to build a nutritious diet from plant foods than from animal products, which contain saturated fat, cholesterol, and other substances that growing children can do without. As for essential nutrients, plant foods are the preferred source because they provide sufficient energy and protein packaged with other health-promoting nutrients such as fiber, antioxidant vitamins, minerals and healthy fats.

The complex carbohydrates found in whole grains, beans, and vegetables provide the ideal energy to fuel a child's busy life. Encouraging the consumption of brown rice, whole wheat breads and pastas, rolled oats, and corn, as well as the less common grains barley, quinoa, millet, and others, will boost the fiber and nutrient content of a child's diet. In addition, it will help steer children away from desiring sugary sweet drinks and treats.

And though children need protein to grow, they don't need high-protein, animal-based foods. Different varieties of grains, beans, vegetables, and fruits supplies plenty of protein, making protein deficiency very unlikely.

Very young children need a bit more healthy fats in their diets than their parents. Healthier fat sources include soybean products, avocados, and nut butters. Parents will want to make sure their child's diet includes a regular source of vitamin B-12, which is needed for healthy nerve function and blood. Vitamin B-12 is abundant in many commercial cereals, fortified soy and rice milks, and nutritional yeast.

Growing children also need iron found in a variety of beans and green,

leafy vegetables and when coupled with the vitamin C in fruits and vegetables, iron absorption is enhanced.

Putting your Vegetarian Toddler on the Fast Track to Health

Though many people have the idea that feeding a toddler a vegetarian diet isn't safe, so long as parents take care to make sure that all the appropriate nutrients are met, it's actually quite healthy.

Some benefits to a lifelong, proper vegetarian diet include a lower risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity.

The main problem with vegetarianism and toddler nutrition is making sure your child gets enough nutrients and calories. Calorie consumption is important for ensuring your toddler has the energy he needs to play hard and grow.

It can be challenging to develop a well-rounded vegetarian toddler menu that provides enough protein and iron. Since toddlers already have such a small appetite, it can be difficult to get them to eat enough vegetables or beans to receive all of their nutrients. Therefore, it is important that vegetarian children are served nutrient-dense foods.

Soybeans and tofu are a great source of protein for adults and children over four. For toddlers, though, it shouldn't be used as their main source of protein. In this instance, compliment the tofu or soybeans that you serve with soymilk that has been fortified with vitamins and minerals. Not only will this help provide some protein, it will also help your toddler's nutrition by providing calcium, and vitamins A and D, which can often be hard to get in a vegan diet.

Iron can be found in many vegetarian-friendly foods.

Kidney beans, lima beans, green beans, and spinach are all excellent sources of iron. However, unlike iron derived from animal sources, iron from vegetables can be hard for your body to absorb properly. But serving a vitamin C rich food with those beans or spinach can make the iron easier for your toddler to absorb. Some great sources of vitamin C include tomatoes, oranges, broccoli, red peppers, and cantaloupe.

While it is possible to raise a healthy vegan, it can take a bit more work. You may need to supplement your toddler's diet to ensure they get all the nutrition that they need. Vitamin B-12 can be especially difficult for vegans to get enough of.

While vegetables contain some B-12 vitamins, the body does not easily absorb these. Your toddler's healthcare provider can help you decide on a B-12 suitable for toddlers.

A diet that does not allow for calcium can also be detrimental to your child's health. Calcium helps to make bones stronger and aids in proper growth and development. Choose soymilk that is calcium-fortified, but be sure it's also fortified with other nutrients that your toddler needs for good nutrition.

Sample Menu Items for your Growing Vegetarian Toddler

Vegetarian child. The term almost sounds like an oxymoron we've joked about through the years, like jumbo shrimp. The words just don't seem to go together! It's not as unnatural as it may sound.

Actually, kids are almost natural vegetarians. It's imperative that you offer your growing vegetarian child a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, grains, nuts, seeds, and soy based proteins to ensure they have the energy and nutrients needed to grow up strong, healthy, and happy.

Consider including items in your daily menu planning for a well

rounded, nutrient-dense healthy diet:

2.5-3 cups fortified soymilk

1/4-1/2 cup iron-fortified cereal

2-5 servings grains (1/2 slice bread, 1/4 cup cooked rice, pasta, quinoa, etc)

2-3 servings veggies (1/2 cup salad or raw veggies, 1/4 cup cooked veggies—bear in mind that the younger your child is, cooked vegetables might be easier for them to chew and digest, then introduce raw veggies as they grow older.)

2-3 servings fruit (1/2 fresh fruit, 1/4 cup cooked fruit, 1/4 cup juice)

2 servings protein foods (1/4 -1/3 cup cooked beans/lentils, a slice or so of calcium-fortified tofu, or peanut or almond butter – be sure that nut butters are fed to children who've been tested and shown not to have nut allergies; if you're unsure, wait until your child's healthcare provider has had the opportunity to test for such allergies in your child before trying them)

Vitamin B-12 source - nutritional yeast, breast milk, formula, fortified soy milks and cheeses

Vitamin D - sunlight, breast milk, formula, fortified soy milk

Omega-3 Essential Fatty Acids - flaxseed oil, freshly ground flaxseed

And here's some finger-food friendly options for your growing vegetarian toddler:

Fresh or frozen mango

Fresh or frozen peaches/nectarines/plums

Cubed avocado

Tofu (put in microwave or steam for 10-30 seconds)

Fresh or frozen peas

Pasta that is slightly overcooked

Cubed soy or rice cheeses

Canned beans- black, garbanzo, black eyed peas, or kidney

Toast, cut into little pieces

Ideas for Adding some Variety to your Vegetarian Lifestyle

When you're planning a healthy vegetarian diet, you're only limited by your imagination. It's important to incorporate a wide variety of whole grains, legumes, vegetables and fruits in different meals, including seeds and nuts. Variety is the spice of life, and it will help ensure your vegetarian diet is nutrient-dense, interesting, and fun! Aim for variety, even when you serve favorite entrees over and over again, by serving different side dishes, snacks and desserts.

Be creative in planning meals. Boost your consumption of beans and vegetables by eating these foods at lunch time rather than just for dinner. Make it a goal to serve a vegetable every day for lunch and two for dinner.

Plan a meal around a vegetable. A baked potato can be a hearty entree; serve it with baked beans, a sauce of stewed tomatoes or a few tablespoons of salsa. Or make a simple meal of sautéed vegetables and pasta.

Try new foods often. Experiment with a variety of grains such as quinoa, couscous, bulgur, barley, and wheat berries. Try fruits and vegetables that are popular in different international cuisines, such as bok choy. Accentuate the positive. Focus more on healthy foods that fit into a vegetarian plan instead of foods to avoid. If you're unsure how to include a new food into your vegetarian diet, ask the produce manager at your local grocer or health food store for ideas on how to prepare it. The internet can be a great resource for new recipe and preparation ideas. But be sure that you're building your menu on a strong plant food base. Make them the core of your diet.

Don't stress about getting enough protein. As long as calories are sufficient and the diet is varied, vegetarians easily meet protein needs. Grains, beans, vegetables, and nuts all provide protein. Vegetarians do not need to eat special combinations of foods to meet protein needs. However, it is important to be aware of fat.

Even vegetarians can get too much fat if the diet contains large

amounts of nuts, oils, processed foods, or sweets.

Tips for a Vibrant Vegetarian Holiday Filled with Variety

Planning a beautiful yet nutrient-dense, delicious holiday meal for both your meat eating and vegetarian guests can be a little daunting at first, but it can also bring out your creativity! Many side dishes you make can be easily made vegetarian, with little difference in taste.

The first step in planning accordingly would be to find out which of your guests are vegetarian, and what kind of vegetarian they are. Do they eat eggs or cheese?

If so, you'll have a few more possibilities. If they don't, that's okay, you'll still have plenty of options to work with. If you're new to the vegetarian lifestyle and aren't quite sure where to start, ask for some input or help from your vegetarian guests. They may have some great recipe ideas, shortcuts, or simple tricks of the trade they can share with you to make your holiday meal preparation go smoothly.

For instance, you can substitute vegetable broth for chicken broth, or simply leave the meat or meat drippings out of vegetables and soups. This will also cut down on the fat content. It's also very simple to divide some of the dishes, making one portion meatless, using the same vegetarian ingredients just mentioned.

Most importantly, keep in mind that the holidays are about peace, love, and understanding. With this in mind, please try not to be judgmental of what people you love choose to eat if you are not vegetarian yourself. Support your family member or friend's choice to eat vegetarian. Seize the opportunity to learn from them. Incorporate ideas from a vegetarian lifestyle into your own to ensure your family is eating a variety nutrient-dense, delicious fruits, vegetables, grains, seeds, and nuts at every meal.

Veggies on the Barbie

Whether you're expecting vegetarian guests, you've newly transitioned to vegetarianism yourself, or you'd just like to incorporate more meatless recipes to give some variety to your cookout menu, there are all kind of ways to prepare meatless options.

Before beginning, remember that most vegetarian foods are more fragile than meat, and do not contain as much fat. Therefore, clean and well-lubricated grill is essential to successfully grilling vegetables. It'd be a shame for those beautifully grilled peppers to stick to the grill!

Traditionally, vegetables have been considered a side dish in most meals, but at a cookout they can take center stage as the entrée. Almost any kind of vegetable is great for grilling. Complement your meal by serving them over pasta, rice or polenta. You can also make them into extraordinary sandwiches with a soy-based cheese and some freshly baked rolls or bread.

Cut the vegetables lengthwise into thin slices in the case of zucchini and eggplant, or into thick rings, in the case of onions, tomatoes and peppers. If you'd rather have your veggies in handy bite-size pieces for serving with pasta and the like, try using a special pan for the grill with small holes that keep the veggies from falling through the grill and being lost. And probably the easiest way to grill vegetables on the grill is shish-ka-bob style!

Don't forget to balance out those grilled vegetables with some fresh fruit salads, perfectly chilled and juicy. Watermelon, strawberries, grapes, and citrus fruits all complement one another well in a delightful fruit salad prepared with non-dairy whipped cream. Also use fruits to experiment with some fun smoothies and slushies for the kids – they're fun and better for them than sugary sodas.

Tips for a Tasty Vegetarian Thanksgiving

If you're hosting Thanksgiving at your house and are expecting vegetarian guests this year, don't worry about preparing one large meat eating meal, and another separate vegetarian meal. Most vegetarians do not require a 'meat equivalent' at Thanksgiving. Yes, traditionally Thanksgiving has largely about the food.

But more importantly it's about family, togetherness, happiness and peace. And if this is your first Thanksgiving after transitioning to a vegetarian lifestyle, try some of these ideas to incorporate healthy food preparation into your meal that your vegetarian guests, and you as host, will be thankful for this Thanksgiving:

- Bake some stuffing outside of the turkey.
- Make a small portion of vegetarian gravy.
- Keep cooking utensils separate to prevent "cross-contamination" between meat foods and vegetarian foods.
- When recipes are adaptable, use substitutions like vegetarian broth, soy margarine (the formulations without whey are suitable for vegans), soy milk, and kosher marshmallows which are made without gelatin.
- Use vegetable oils instead of animal fats for frying, and vegetable shortening like Crisco for pie crust.
- Read ingredients lists carefully on pre-packaged foods, being aware of terms like gelatin, whey, and "natural flavors" that can be animal-derived.
- Prepare plenty of vegetable and fruit side dishes, but leave them plain.
- Offer plenty of breads, beverages, fresh fruits, and non-gelatin desserts, which are suitable without modification for most vegetarians.
- Invite your vegetarian guest to prepare a "Tofurky" or vegetarian 'turkey equivalent' entrée to share with you the rest of your guests,

or if you're hosting Thanksgiving, prepare a small one. Your meat-eating guests might just be curious enough to want to try it!

- Ask your vegetarian guest for help, tips, or recipes that would complement their vegetarian choice. You may find that your guest offers to help out in the kitchen or bring a dish from home. Please don't take a dish from home as an insult to your cooking; take it as a desire to share traditions at Thanksgiving. Even meat-eating homes can benefit from a healthy, nutrient-dense vegetarian recipe idea any time of the year!
- Most importantly – make TONS of new, delicious (not overly cooked) vegetables that are perfectly in season like squashes, sweet potatoes, and green beans, etc.

Variety in Your New Vegetarian Diet

You've weighed your options carefully, studied the pros and the cons, and decided that the vegetarian lifestyle is right for you. But where do you start making the changes? Do you go 'cold turkey?'

Do you adopt a more gradual approach to transitioning to vegetarianism? However you choose to make the change, you can begin to achieve the health benefits of vegetarianism by significantly cutting down on the amount of meats consumed, and making vegetables, fruits, legumes, and whole grains the focus of your meals.

Choose whole-grain products like whole wheat bread and flour, instead of refined or white grains. Eat a wide variety of foods, and don't be afraid to try vegetables, fruits, grains, breads, nuts, or seeds that you've never tried before. Experiment and explore! You may discover a new favorite or two, and learn fresh new ways to liven up more traditional vegetarian dishes.

Many vegetarian foods can be found in any grocery store. Specialty

food stores may carry some of the more uncommon items, as well as many vegetarian convenience foods. When shopping for food, plan ahead, shop with a list and read food labels. And if you decide to eat dairy products, choose non-fat or low-fat varieties, and limit your egg intake to 3-4 yolks per week.

Becoming a vegetarian can be as easy as you choose to make it. Whether you enjoy preparing delectable, delicious meals or choose quick and easy ones, vegetarian meals can be very satisfying. If you get in the habit of keeping the following on hand, meal preparation time will become a snap:

- Ready-to-eat, whole-grain breakfast cereals, and quick-cooking whole-grain cereals such as oatmeal, whole-grain breads and crackers, such as rye, whole wheat, and mixed grain and other grains such as barley and bulgur wheat.
- Canned beans, such as pinto, black beans, and garbanzo beans
- Rice (including brown, wild, etc.) and pasta (now available in whole wheat, spinach, and other flavors) with tomato sauce and canned beans and/or chopped veggies
- Vegetarian soups like lentil, navy bean, or minestrone
- A wide variety of plain frozen vegetables, and canned and frozen fruit
- Fortified soymilks and soy cheeses, should you choose to not eat dairy
- A wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, which should be the core of any diet.

As you learn to experiment with foods and learn that a meatless diet doesn't have to lack variety, you'll find your decision for vegetarianism was not only wise, but easy and fun come mealtime.

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