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How to Switch to a Plant-Based Diet: Tips, Resources, and More for Trying Veganism

By Sophie Hirsh – Green Matters

People have been eating a plant-based diet for thousands of years, but the lifestyle has exploded and become more mainstream over the past decade. And thanks to innovative plant-based alternatives for meat, dairy, and eggs, eating vegan or plant-based is as easy as ever in 2019.

Eating a vegan diet is one of the best things we as humans can do for animals, for the planet, and for our personal health. So if you're interested in switching to a plant-based lifestyle, read on for some of our best tips on making the transition easy, plus answers to every question you may have about eating plant-based.

What Is a Plant-Based Diet?

A plant-based diet is one that focuses on eating plant foods, and excludes animal products such as meat, dairy, and eggs. On a plant-based diet, there are so many foods you can eat, including fruits, vegetables, mushrooms, beans, lentils, nuts, seeds, and grains. If you're less

concerned with eating whole foods, and more focused on eliminating animal products, you can also eat things like bread, pasta, chocolate, potato chips, popcorn, and oil on a plant-based diet.

Is a Plant-Based Diet Vegan?

A plant-based diet is essentially the portion of a vegan lifestyle that applies to food. Someone who is plant-based mainly just follows the diet portion of veganism by eliminating animal-based meat, dairy, and eggs from their diet, and often focuses on eating whole foods as much as possible.

In addition to not eating any animal products, someone living a vegan lifestyle typically does not participate in any other behavior that harms animals, such as buying clothes [made from leather](#) or using [cosmetics that were tested on animals](#). Additionally, a vegan will not eat honey, gelatin, lanolin, or other animal byproducts, but someone on a plant-based diet may just focus on only eliminating meat, dairy, and eggs. It's all a spectrum, and any steps you take to consume less animals is a positive thing all-around.

How to Switch to a Plant-Based Diet

If you're interested in switching to a plant-based lifestyle, there are endless different approaches to transitioning your diet to one filled with more plants. Below, we've compiled a few different steps and approaches that can help make the process enjoyable, easy, and affordable. Keep in mind that you're not meant to employ *every* tip on the following list — just try whatever technique calls out to you.

Ask Yourself: What Is My Motivation?

The three most common motivations for eating more plants are: the animals, the environment, and personal health. It can be helpful to do a little more research about how eating [animal products affects the environment](#), how a [plant-based diet can reverse a variety of illnesses](#), and about the cruelty behind the [animal agriculture industry](#). Once I learned about the unnatural and inhumane treatment of animals on [factory farms](#) (not to mention, how [factory farming](#) is [bad for humans](#) as well as animals), I no longer wanted to support it with my dollar.

Basically, if you are steadfast in your "why," it will be easy to eat plant-based. A great way to do this research is by [watching documentaries](#).

Watch Vegan Documentaries or YouTube Videos

So many documentaries about the vegan lifestyle are available to watch on Netflix or other streaming sites. If you want to learn more about how eating animal products affects animals, check out *Earthlings* or *Dominion*; to see the effect of animal agriculture on the environment, check out *Cowspiracy*; and to learn more about how animal products can affect your health, watch *What the Health* or *Forks Over Knives*. There are also entertaining educational videos on YouTube, such as Gary Yourofsky's *[Best Speech You Will Ever Hear](#)*, James Wildman's *[101 Reasons to Go Vegan](#)*, and Erin Janus' *[Dairy Is Scary: The Industry Explained in 5 Minutes](#)*.

Make an Easy Pantry Swap

It's easy to find vegan alternatives for staple foods in most grocery stores these days. As you run out of certain products, consider picking up a vegan replacement next time you're at the supermarket. For example, swap out butter for a dairy-free margarine, or a vegan butter by [Earth Balance](#) (the foil wrappers and paper box are both recyclable) or [Miyoko's](#) (the paper box is recyclable and the wrappers are compostable).

Other easy swaps include picking up a [non-dairy milk](#), such as almond, soy, rice, cashew, or hemp; buying meat replacements like the [Beyond Burger](#) or [Impossible Burger](#) instead of beef; buying [veggie broth](#) instead of meat-based broth; and buying non-dairy ice cream from brands like [Ben & Jerry's](#) or [So Delicious](#) (yes, non-dairy ice cream totally counts as a staple food).

Start With One Meal a Day

Diving into a plant-based diet overnight is certainly possible — but for most people, it's more sustainable to make changes slow and steady. A great way to get started is by eating one vegan meal every day, [such as breakfast](#). Once you've nailed mornings, move onto vegan lunch, and so on.

Replace One Thing at a Time

Another technique is transitioning away from one animal product each week (or every two weeks, or every month, or whatever time frame works for you). Every Monday, try replacing one animal product in your diet with

an alternative. But instead of thinking "I'm going to stop eating eggs this week," think, "I'm going to make tofu scramble, or another vegan egg recipe, or try the Just Egg or the Vegan Egg this week."

Focus On What You're Adding to Your Diet

Instead of having the mindset that you're *not* eating meat, dairy, and eggs, try taking on the mindset of, "Look at all these things I *can* eat!" Before I went vegan, I thought eating plant-based would be too restrictive, since I would have to cut foods out of my diet. But when I focused on all the great new foods and dishes I could try, I soon found that transitioning to veganism actually expanded my palette. I never feel restricted, because there are thousands of foods I can eat without hurting any animals.

Try Faux Meat Replacements

There's no need to forgo your favorite foods or flavors on a plant-based diet. Check out our ultimate guide to meat replacements and vegan cheeses to help make the transition easier.

Many animal product replacements out there taste pretty darn close to their animal-based counterparts. Especially once you have some distance from animal foods, the vegan versions will taste even better. That said, when you try these foods, don't expect them to taste *exactly* the same — while some do, many others are more like 80 to 90 percent there. And even if you don't think the replacements taste as good, ask yourself: What's more important — momentary taste, or the life of an innocent animal?

Treat Yourself to a Great Vegan Restaurant

If there is a vegan restaurant in your area, treat yourself to a decadent meal to give yourself a taste of how good plant-based food can be. And if you don't live near a great restaurant with vegan options, so many fast food and fast casual chains have the Beyond Burger or Impossible Burger these days, such as Burger King, Carl's Jr., Panda Express, Dunkin' Donuts, and Chipotle.

Plant-Based Diet Meal Plans

Is a Plant-Based Diet Healthy?

According to the [American Dietetic Association](), well-planned vegan and vegetarian diets are "appropriate for individuals during all stages of the life cycle, including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, and adolescence, and for athletes." You can get every nutrient your body needs on a vegan diet, although doctors always recommend [supplementing the essential nutrient B12](), which you can do through vitamins or foods fortified with B12. Animals do not naturally produce B12 (bacteria in the soil actually produces it); instead, livestock are are supplemented with B12, and the nutrient then carries over to the humans who eat animal products.

Is a Plant-Based Diet Good for Diabetes?

Plant-based diets can also [reverse chronic diseases]() like [heart disease, type 2 diabetes](), and high blood pressure; not to mention, eliminating animal products from your diet can help reduce your risk of the aforementioned diseases; prevent cancer; and clear up things like digestive issues and acne. All of these effects can be even greater for those eating a whole food plant-based diet.

What Is a Whole Food Plant-Based Diet?

In a complete 180 from Burger King, there's the whole food plant-based diet, which focuses on eating whole foods such as fruits, vegetables, grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds, and limits things like sugar, [oil](), and processed foods. A whole food plant-based diet can be an effective and healthy way to prevent or reverse disease and lose weight.

Is a Plant-Based Diet Better for the Environment?

A study by the [University of Oxford]() found that [eliminating animal products from your diet]() is the best way to improve your environmental footprint. "A vegan diet is probably the single biggest way to reduce your impact on planet Earth, not just greenhouse gases, but global acidification, eutrophication, land use and water use," Joseph Poore, lead researcher on a study, told *The Guardian*. "It is far bigger than cutting down on your flights or buying an electric car."

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