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## How to Get Some of the Benefits of a Vegan Diet Without Actually Going Vegan

Eating kind of like a vegan can give you a healthier heart, lower cholesterol, awesome poops—and you don't have to part with your bacon.



From the omnivore's perspective, going vegan seems like an insurmountable task. A lot of sacrifice, a lot of discipline, a lot of explaining your choices to friends and family, and a lot of scrabbling around to get the macronutrients, minerals, and vitamins that ordinarily, you'd automatically get from animal products.

But a growing body of research suggests that making the change to a **plant-based diet** is worth the trouble given the health benefits it's likely to impart. I'm talking **lower cholesterol**, a lower risk of **cardiovascular disease**, a higher resting **metabolic rate**, improved management **of type 2 diabetes**, the reduction of **osteoarthritis** and **rheumatoid arthritis** symptoms and a slew of other outcomes besides.

Still, it seems like a lot of work, right?

Well the good news is that you don't have to commit yourself to a vegan diet, or even a vegetarian one, to realize some of these proven benefits. Just apply these following four principles to give your health and wellbeing a boost.

Increase your fiber intake

A diet that's abundant with vegetables, grains, legumes, fruit, nuts, and seeds is going to pack a lot of fiber, something that most Americans don't consume **nearly enough** of. "Fiber regulates your entire system," says Niket Sonpal, New York-based gastroenterologist and professor of clinical medicine at Touro College. Sonpal explains that fiber clears out our intestines and helps keep us to feel fuller for longer periods of time, curbing our impulse to binge and snack.

"Fiber also helps regulate your blood sugar," he says. "Adding more vegetables like broccoli; snacking on almonds and fruits like pears, blackberries, and oranges; and eating more lentils and beans will add fiber which will help with digestion and excretion which is always a good thing." **Research** published in the *Journal of Nutrition* showed that increasing intake of dietary fiber significantly reduces the risk of gaining weight and body fat—independent of physical activity and dietary fat intake.

And then there are the awesome poops. So do like the vegans do, and add more weight-shedding fiber to your diet. Susan Tucker, a nutritional counselor and founder of Green Beat Life (a nutrition-counseling practice in New York City) suggests that you fill half **of your dinner plate** with vegetables, a quarter with a starch, and the remaining quarter with protein. "For any meal or snack, always up the fiber content," she says. "You may find yourself with fewer cravings and skipping the snacks."

## Avoid cholesterol-rich foods

Vegans don't eat animal fats, processed meats, cheeses, and non vegetable-based oils. This means that they steer clear of cholesterol-rich foods. While the scientific consensus on the ills of dietary cholesterol has softened over the years, the **2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans** still strongly recommends eating as little dietary cholesterol as possible. It makes mention of studies and trials that have produced strong evidence that healthy eating patterns that are low in dietary cholesterol can reduce the risk of heart disease in adults.

Roughly 30 percent of our calories should come from fats, says New York City-based registered dietician Keri Glassman. The good fats she prescribes are all vegan: Monounsaturated fats (such as olive oil, peanut oil, flaxseed oil, nuts and avocado) and polyunsaturated fats and essential fatty acids (including safflower, sunflower and sesame oils, seeds, nuts, flax and hemp). Instead of eating a fried egg on toast, Tucker says, have a slice of toasted sprouted-grain bread with mashed avocado and a dash of lime. Rather than snacking on an ounce of cheese, try an ounce of nuts.

## Pump up the volume

Most plant foods, especially vegetables, provide more volume than animal foods, says Matt Ruscigno, a vegan of 19 years, is a registered dietician, expert in the field of vegetarian nutrition, and the co-author of ***The No Meat Athlete***. In other words, you can eat more food for fewer calories.

“I work with a lot of athletes who are new to veganism. Many are confused by this and end up not eating enough,” he says. The best way to get the benefits of vegan diets is to eat way more vegetables. For vegans, Ruscigno recommends not five servings per day, but five per meal.

“When you begin to incorporate more vegetables into your diet, you begin to realize you can eat more food while consuming fewer calories,” Sonpal says, confirming Ruscigno's theory. “This is a great way of losing weight but keeping your body full of the nutrients it needs to thrive.” Sonpal says that something as simple as subbing in zucchini, eggplant, bell peppers, sliced cucumber, olives, cauliflower for rice and potatoes meal sides can really make a huge difference in how you feel.

## Cast a wide nutritional net

Meat, fish, eggs, and dairy have been a part of most humans' diets for a long, long time. There's a good reason: All of these food groups are packed with the protein, vitamins, and minerals our bodies need. Vegans have to cast a wider net for essential nutrients. As a consequence, they tend to eat more colors of the rainbow and try new ingredients to make nutrient-dense meals. Tucker's challenge for those of us not ready to say goodbye to cheese, bacon and ice cream? Be as adventurous as a vegan. "Get a wide variety of colors from plant sources into your diet, via fruits, vegetables and legumes, or replace that weekly burger with a quinoa-black-bean burger," she says.

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