



# Plant-Based Nutrition

## Frequently Asked Questions & Concerns

### **Nutrition Concerns**

**Can a person get all necessary nutrients eating a plant-based diet?** Yes. Common concerns are iron, calcium and vitamin D. Iron is found in nuts, seeds and legumes. Calcium from dark green leafy vegetables and nuts and seeds, almonds are especially high in calcium. Fortunately, the calcium in plant foods typically has magnesium as well, so the calcium is more readily absorbed. It actually has a higher bioavailability than milk calcium. Vitamin D is a fat soluble vitamin, found in nuts, seeds, plant oils (and sunshine). Protein is not a concern with plant based diet, it is easy to achieve more than enough protein. Most Americans (USA) consume too much protein in their diet. Plant-based diets must be supplemented with vitamin B12, which can be found in microalgae, seaweeds and nutritional yeast (try RED STARR brand).

**If a person does not like a lot of plant choices, how can they be sure that they are getting a well-balanced diet?** Start with finding a couple of vegetables and cooking them tasty. Gradually advance to trying one new vegetable a week.

**What can a person use in place of dairy milk and yogurt?** Try using calcium fortified soy, rice &/or almond milk and soy or coconut yogurt in place of dairy. These are now available in most grocery stores.

**Can a person get a good balance of protein and carbohydrates if they have diabetes?** Yes. Try the plate method. Plate out half the plate as veggies (salad, greens), 1/4 plate as starch (potatoes, brown rice, whole wheat pasta, other grains), 1/4 plate as high protein grains (beans, peas, lentils, quinoa). Assuming 1/2 cup to 1 cup portions of grains/starch and maybe 1 cup to 2 cup portions of greens, based on energy needs, this will provide 45g to 80g of carbohydrate and 20-30g protein per meal.

**Will a plant-based diet raise a person's blood sugar?** This is highly dependent on personal insulin resistance, medication treatment, exercise plan, etc. Try larger portions of non-starchy vegetables and lower portions of starch. Using the plate method, this might be half your plate of mixed salad, 1/4 plate of cooked carrot or green beans, etc., and 1/4 plate

of high protein grains. This brings the total carbohydrate content down to 30-50grams instead of 45-80grams per meal. Ask your MD for a referral to meet one on one with a Registered Dietitian for help with meal planning.

### **Meal Planning/ Preparation/ Recipes**

**What if a person needs help getting started with cooking plant-based?**

Start with simple recipes using vegetarian cookbook and/or on-line references provided in the resource sheet.

**How can a person maintain a variety of foods?**

Try buying food in season. Be open to trying new fruits and vegetables.

**What if a person has a busy schedule?** Cook extra portions and eat leftovers on busy days, or freeze small portions and warm up the main dish, add fruit or salad to complete the meal. Try crock pot slow cooking, you can make one-pot meals while at work. Try cooking your beans while you sleep at night or at work.

**What if a person does not like to cook, plan, shop & prepare? How can they make the transition under these circumstances?** Try using canned beans instead of cooking them. Or instant rice dishes with seasoning packet. Try also salad-in-a-bag with prepared dressing. Gradually build cooking skills. Start with easy recipes and practice.

**Dietary changes would be much easier if plant-based dishes were tastier.** Start with modifying favorite recipes before branching out to unfamiliar foods. Try making spinach lasagna rather than meat lasagna, veggie pizza, chili and cornbread, etc.

**How often does a person need to shop to avoid food spoilage?** Shop weekly. Always have staples (beans, rice, quinoa, dried fruit, nuts and seeds), then buy seasonal fruit and veggies. Eat the fresh leafy greens first, and if you run out, then go to frozen fruit and veggies. Or maybe try a mid-week trip to pick up more salad greens. A great tip is to blanch fibrous vegetables (examples include broccoli, cauliflower and asparagus – **not** more delicate vegetables like lettuce) when you get home from the store. To blanch, bring a pot of water to a boil, turn off heat, put fibrous vegetables into water for 2-3 minutes, and then cool with ice water. This will make the vegetable bright in color, smaller in size and last twice as long in the refrigerator.



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**Can you suggest some good tasting plant-based recipes?** Try modifying some of your favorite recipes to be vegetarian like chili or lasagna. You can also refer to our vegetarian resource sheet.

**How much does following a plant-based diet cost?** A plant based diet is cheaper than eating out. Grains, nuts and seeds are often on sale and can be purchased in bulk. Try buying bulk items such as beans and rice in 10 or 20 pound bags at a wholesale place. Or buy them from bulk bins at a regular grocery store. Many dried seasonings, herbs and spices have a long shelf life.

### **Food Preferences**

**What if a person dislikes certain strong vegetables which overpower taste buds in an unpleasant way?**

Avoid food that you consistently dislike. Find a recipe with ingredients you know you like. That helps with taste, and the likelihood of eating it again

**What if a person loves cheese and it is hard for them to give it up?** You are not alone. A lot of people love cheese, too. Start with using less and getting accustomed to cheese as a flavor enhancer, not a main source of protein or meat replacement. There are some awesome plant-based cheeses out now, but they are more expensive. Try to make cashew or nutritional yeast "cheese" as a replacement.

**How can a person tackle food cravings such as salt, meat, cheese, sugar, pastries, butter, etc.?** Many food cravings disappear when eliminated from the diet, or cut down. Removing processed food and adding more nutrition is important. The body is not craving more food or calories, it craves nutrients. A plant-based diet fulfills body nutrients.

### **Common Support Concerns**

**What if using "Meals on Wheels"? Where does this menu fit in with the changes in choices?** Meals on Wheels have vegetarian choices. Many of them will have cheese as a main dish. Save half for another meal or share with a friend and then balance the rest of that meal with other veggies and fruits.

**"My significant other does the cooking." "My family and or children are not ready to change their eating habits but are willing to support my change."** Ask if they are willing to try eating plant-based for one

month or perhaps if they are willing to try a new plant-based dish once a week. Try easing new foods with familiar foods you know they love. For example, serve grilled Portobello mushroom burgers with sliced avocado in place of a cheeseburger. You may not get your family to completely adopt your new eating style. But, remember that every person is on their own personal journey. Check out our resource sheet for information on local support groups and websites.

### **Not Ready to Make the Change**

**I can't envision myself completely adopting a plant-based diet.** We are learning about healthy eating and incorporating more plant-based nutrition. There is no need to become a purist for vegetarianism, veganism, being the ultimate athlete, etc. Take a look at the big picture. Even replacing ONE meal or one day of meat per week, will result in improved health and have made less detrimental impact on the planet. Start slow and then do what is right for you and your family. One would agree that it is better to take a walk on the weekends only, rather than not walk or exercise at all, right? Some people do not walk, some do it occasionally, and some people love to walk or exercise every day, for an hour, or more. You get to choose how you want your life to be. Same goes for food.

**What if a person is not ready to make the switch to a plant-based diet at this point in their life?** Again, every person is on their own personal journey. We have some great health educators and classes on motivating change. Start with asking yourself what you want to do, what you want to change, and why. Write them down on paper, or record yourself talking. These are powerful self-reflection questions that give you your own personal answer to future change. How do we know how to begin a journey (eating healthy, exercising, taking meds, starting new hobbies, etc) unless we know where we are starting from? Please call our Kaiser Permanente, Health Education Center for an appointment with a Clinical Health Educator at 707-393-4167 or 707-566-5277.