

Plant-Based Nutrition 101

What is Plant-Based Nutrition?

Plant-based nutrition is a philosophy that regards the body as a whole and promotes the growth and consumption of natural foods, urging maximum intake of fresh, raw, living produce with minimal use of cooking and other forms of processing. The diet incorporates a healthy balance of preferably organic fruits, vegetables, sprouts, seeds, nuts, algae, grasses, flowers, sea vegetables, grains, and legumes.



This dietary lifestyle is optimal in providing the necessary elements needed for humans to thrive, including vitamins, minerals, fibers, enzymes, oils, proteins and carbohydrates in bio-available form. Perhaps the single most essential nutritional substance in a plant-based diet is chlorophyll, which transforms sunlight into proteins, starches and sugars. Its molecules are identical to human hemoglobin; therefore, it is immediately assimilated upon consumption.

The History of Plant-Based Nutrition

Eating a plant-based diet has a rich and diverse history. Many cultures and civilizations around the world have been eating plant-based and raw diets for years. Their diet is largely regarded as a key contributor to longevity and health.

Some of our great thinkers, peacemakers and teachers in the past 2500 years have eaten predominantly plant-based diets. Among them are Buddha, Socrates, Leonardo da Vinci, Gandhi and Einstein. 2400 years ago Hippocrates stated, "Let thy food be your medicine, and medicine be thy food." Mahatma Gandhi was called to become vegetarian in 1931 and his focus was a precursor to the ideas of the Vegan Society in 1944. The term "vegan" was coined in England in 1944 by Donald Watson, co-founder of the British Vegan Society, to mean "non-dairy vegetarian." The society also opposed the use of eggs as food. In 1951, the society clarified the definition of "veganism" to mean "the doctrine that man should live without exploiting animals."

During the vast majority of our existence on this planet, the original diet for humans consisted primarily of vegetables, fruits and nuts. Many cultures today and throughout time have sustained themselves with plants, seeds, grains, roots and fruits. The diet of early humans provided little starch and no refined sugar or salt. Plant-based foods such as fruit, vegetables, nuts, vegetable oils and whole grains are important components of traditional diets in Mediterranean and Asian regions. Skeletal remains of ancient humans show us that our dental structure has changed very little over millions of years and indicates that our dental structure was designed to eat fruit, nuts, seeds, and greens.

Known Effects/Benefits of Adopting a Plant-Based Diet

Research supports the idea that plant-based foods protect us against disease, while animal-based foods, which are high in fat, cholesterol and protein, promote disease. Some of the many health benefits of a plant-based diet include reduction of cardiovascular disease, lowered risk of prostate and other cancers and prevention of diabetes, obesity and diseases related to the bone, kidney, eye and brain. A plant-based diet can also afford us longer lives. Quality of life is also sure to improve as we look and feel younger, have more energy and maintain a healthy weight with ease.

Tips for Transitioning to a Plant-Based Diet

- Go slowly enough to make your new diet a “norm” in your life.
- Establish connections with outside support. A friend or acquaintance who is already committed to this lifestyle can certainly make the transition easier. There are probably fun, monthly potlucks in your area. You can meet new friends, try a variety of raw, vegan foods and share recipes. Meetup.com is a great resource for finding like-minded acquaintances. Community resources may also be of help.
- Be sure to get adequate nutrition so that your body does not crave the foods you are leaving behind.

Here are some important foods and their benefits:

- Green juices made from cucumber, celery, and sprouts such as sunflower (complete protein – contains all of the amino acids) and sweet clover. To mix things up, try spinach, oregano or parsley. Experiment to your liking.
- All Greens are a very important part of any plant-based diet, so enjoy a wide variety of green leafy salads, leafy sprouts or other forms of greens, such as spinach pâté.
- Sea Vegetables are an important source of minerals, especially iodine. Try kelp in salad dressings or sprinkled on your food as a seasoning. Dulse, when dried to a crisp texture, makes a great crunchy snack.
- Algae can be taken as a drink or supplement. It has a balanced profile of vitamins and minerals and provides free radical protection.
- Fermented Foods such as sauerkraut and kimchi can be made from cabbage with other vegetables added. Fermented foods contain important digestive enzymes and probiotics which contribute to a healthy intestinal track. These friendly bacteria keep the body operating at an optimal level.
- Drink plenty of water throughout the day, except at mealtimes. Allow 30 minutes before and 90 minutes after meals when drinking water. Your digestive juices work better undiluted, and your body will receive the desired nourishment you require.

Focus on getting your diet up to about 80% of live plant food on your plate. When shopping, the cart must also be mostly plant foods. Buy leafy greens, a variety of sprouts, cucumber, celery, and red or yellow pepper.

Some additional helpful hints: Make a smoothie using a blender or juice using a juicer. There are many interesting “un-cook” books about raw foods on the market. There are support groups, such as “meetup groups,” all over the world that can be located on the internet and notices at local health food stores.

While the focus of this article is on the consumption of plant-based foods, it must be noted that human health is not dependent on diet alone. One should additionally focus on mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing. Therefore, important health considerations, beyond diet, include: daily exercise, adequate rest and sleep, attention to positive thoughts and a practice of meditation.

The process can and should be FUN, so please start this process today, your body will thank you!

Source

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