

BMA

Nutrition Newsletter



“Plant-based diet does not have to mean Vegan”

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## Plant-based Diets Done Right

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Eating more vegetables is a very common health message and we hear it so often that we may forget why it is preached so frequently. Multiple documentaries, books and social media messages about the benefits of a vegan diet have been circulating recently but instead of touting the benefits of a high vegetable diet, the messaging is more about not eating meat. While some may be intrigued and even try the jump to veganism, others think that the challenge is too extreme. I would personally and professionally prefer that the messaging would be more about how important it is to eat 50-75% of our diet from plants, versus the never-ending debate about the inclusion or exclusion of meat. You can be an omnivore and still obtain optimal health.



These five tips can give you new ideas of how to increase your intake of vegetables, fresh fruits, whole grains, legumes and other plants to gain the benefits of a plant-based diet without going vegan.

**TIP#1- Aim to make ½ of your dinner plate non-starch vegetables.** While this may sound easy enough it is rarely accomplished without a bit of planning. Including vegetables at dinner is common but before you serve yourself the protein and starch, fill up at least half of the plate with salad or cooked non-starch vegetables such as broccoli, cauliflower, zucchini, mushrooms, etc... You can also do this at hot food bars by filling the large portion with vegetables and the two small compartments with protein and a whole grain or starch.

**TIP#2- Snack like a squirrel!** Fresh fruits and nuts are both plants and this naturally sweet and salty combination is not only filling but packed with antioxidants and minerals like zinc and magnesium. ¼ cup of mixed nuts and one serving of fresh fruit is less than 200kcal. Try a wide variety of nuts like walnuts, pecans, Brazil nuts, pistachios, almonds and tiger nuts along with whatever fruit is in season for a calorie controlled, plant-based snack that is packed with fiber and nutrients.

**TIP#3- Check your portion of protein and make sure it fits your needs.** Protein is essential to life, but that does not mean more is always better. If you eat protein in excess, you will store it as fat (just like you do with excess carbohydrates and fat). Protein portions at meals should be between 3-6oz and comprise 20-30% of your daily calorie goal. Everyone's protein needs vary depending on age, athletic goals, health status and other factors, but do not think of it as non-caloric. It does contain calories, so portion control and eating for your needs is important. Check with your doctor or registered dietitian to figure out what your specific target amount of protein should be.

**TIP#4- Pack and consume a bag of raw vegetables daily.** Snacking is not a bad thing, but it is easy to consume a large number of calories from highly processed snack foods like crackers, granola bars and chips. I recommend packing a container of raw vegetables and challenging yourself to finish them by the end of the day. Raw carrots, celery stalks, sliced bell peppers, cherry tomatoes, and broccoli and cauliflower florets are great options and tend to keep well in the refrigerator. If the thought of chopping vegetables every week prevents you from pursuing this then consider purchasing a vegetable tray from the grocery store and challenge yourself to finish it within four to five days. Raw vegetables are easy, portable and provide a great crunch and can be paired with any meal or snack throughout the day.

**TIP #5- Always consider vegetables are your base.** In my opinion, the base of the "food guide pyramid" should consist of fresh vegetables since plants should really be the foundation of all our meals. There has been a huge increase in fast-casual restaurants like Cava, Chipotle, and Poke where you can

build a bowl full of different healthy ingredients. I strongly encourage my patients to build the base of the bowl with either mixed greens or mixed vegetables and use proteins, healthy fats and high fiber carbohydrates like beans and lentils as toppings. Not only will this increase the fiber and nutrient content of the meal it will also help control the calorie content of the meal. Eating a lot of vegetables is also very filling so always think of vegetables as the foundation of your meals and you will be rewarded by feeling fuller and healthier!

*In Health & Happiness,  
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