

Vegan/Paleo Article questions:

What is a typical vegan breakfast, lunch and dinner for you?

A day in the life of a healthy plant-based diet is filled with vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, fiber, phytochemicals, chlorophyll etc. Here are just a few of the options you'd get at my house. An organic vegetable juice or blended green smoothie, pecan encrusted French toast, seed pancakes, tofu scramble, sprouted grain bread (or gluten free bread) with almond butter or avocado, oatmeal with berries, millet porridge with peaches etc. For lunch and dinner, veggies are always the main players at the center of the plate. Salads, sautés, steamed veg with tasty sauces would accompany a slice of vegetarian lasagna or bean soup, a burrito, falafel or vegetarian Sheppard's pie, perhaps a tempeh Reuben with sauerkraut or a hearty root vegetable stew. The options are endless.

Why did you choose to eat this way? Can you touch on what you see as the key benefits (nutritional, ethical, aesthetic, etc.) of vegan eating?

I was diagnosed with an incurable cancer. After thoroughly researching many diets, and consulting top functional medicine doctors, the vegan diet was the best plan to reduce inflammation, boost the immune system, and increase longevity. It contains all the necessary nutrition (including more than adequate amounts of protein and calcium) without any dangerous growth hormones or carcinogens. As I began to connect the dots beyond just my health, a compassionate plant-based diet became the corner stone of my activism and my spiritual practice. This way of living doesn't contribute to suffering – cellular suffering (caused by poor diet, lifestyle, and environmental factors), animal torture and suffering, and planetary suffering (caused by the factory farm system). I choose to put my precious energy towards health and peace.

What appeals to you most about this way of eating?

Quite honestly, I feel healthier, have more energy, better blood work, I don't get colds, and I no longer struggle with my weight. In the beginning of my diagnosis I was very symptomatic. Since changing my diet, (reducing stress and exercising more) the quality of my life has improved dramatically. Cancer aside, my body was breaking down. I had lots of "isms" and issues that I learned to live with – at 30 years old – terrible allergies, chronic bronchitis, infections, eczema, irritable bowel syndrome, high cholesterol and a host of other problems. All that changed when I changed what I put on my plate.

What do you think is generally misunderstood about the vegan approach to eating?

People worry that they can't get enough protein and calcium if they aren't eating and drinking animals. So let's talk protein. First of all, we eat way too much of it in the US today – more than double our needs. This leads to all sorts of health problems. And, all protein is not created equal – animal is not as healthy as plant. We get hung up on the misbelief that we must get a “complete protein” from a single source. The word “complete” is what throws us off. While mammal flesh is technically complete – meaning it contains all the essential amino acids – it's also complete with a host of problems. The fedex guy is a complete protein but that doesn't mean you should eat him. Eating a varied plant-based diet, on the other hand, provides plenty of protein in a safe and easy to digest form. As for Calcium, proper consumption isn't just about what you eat and drink it's about what you keep (or absorb). Acidic milk products leach calcium from your bones, teeth, tissues etc. It shouldn't come as a shock that the countries with the highest rate of hip fracture and osteoporosis also consume the most dairy.

What is your opinion of a Paleo diet? What do you see as the potential pros and cons?

In general, I'm not in favor of the meat-heavy, fermented food-free, bean-free, and grain-free Paleo diet. However, the resurgence of this diet has some pros and cons. It discourages the consumption of dairy, sugar, and alcohol, all of which cause excess inflammation in the body which is likely to blame for a whole host of chronic diseases, including cancer, diabetes, and heart disease. Even the avoidance of wheat may not be a bad idea as it also causes inflammation and often digestive, skin, and other intolerance issues.

But, avoiding power-packed grains like quinoa, and protein-, antioxidant-, and fiber-rich beans and lentils and instead choosing meats and fish (void of fiber, antioxidants, and powerful phytochemicals) means you're ingesting more saturated fat and cholesterol, growth hormones, pesticides, heavy metals, too many omega-6 fatty acids, antibiotics, and thousands of modern manmade chemicals now found in our environment (as compared to 10,000 years ago).

In addition, fermented foods such as tempeh, miso, sauerkraut, and natto-- which are not allowed on a Paleo diet offer incredible natural probiotics and help the blood to be more alkaline which is an important part of proper

immune function and disease prevention.

Did you ever consider or experiment with Paleo eating? If so, how and why? What was your experience with it?

No. I made the choice not to follow the paleo diet based on the fact that I am a cancer patient, with an already compromised immune system. People with chronic disease, should avoid animal products or consume them in moderation at best – even the organic variety. These products create inflammation in the body and are highly acidic. Your body is a delicate ecosystem. Like most environments, pH balance is a crucial component to health. The acid alkaline balance affects everything from ocean life, to soil, blood, even cancer cells. Our bodies will do anything to remain in an alkaline state. Too many acid substances (meat, dairy, sugar, processed foods, coffee, soda, drugs, chemicals) rob our bodies of minerals, strain our kidneys, create congestion, inflammation, constipation, and stress our immunity. An alkalizing plant-based diet is the safest most effective choice. Not just for patients but also for anyone interested in prevention.

Now, I know not everyone wants to go vegan. But if you choose to include animal flesh and fluids in your diet, do your homework. Know where your food comes from. Be brave enough to see how it got to your plate, because how it got there can affect your health. In addition, I would recommend reducing your consumption to no more than 2-3 times per week and choosing from the certified humane seal of approval. Not only because the animals are treated better, though they still get slaughtered. But because the humane seal guarantees that no chemicals, drugs or hormones have been used. However, this doesn't mean that there aren't significant amounts of hormones naturally present in the animal's body.

How do you respond to Paleo critics who say that many vegan diets, absent all animal products, are inherently unhealthy and simply not the way people were meant to eat, evolutionarily speaking?

Time and again, research points to a plant-heavy diet for weight control, diabetes prevention and reversal, heart disease prevention and reversal, and even cancer prevention and survival. This diet is so full of life-giving nutrients, fiber, antioxidants, and low in modern toxins and chemicals that it is clearly the healthiest way to go. A study that just came out yesterday showed that African American vegetarians had a 53% lower risk of diabetes and vegans had a 70% lower risk compared to meat-eaters: <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/237103.php>

What would you say to critics who say that vegan diets are too reliant on meat/dairy/egg substitutes < many of which are highly processed < and therefore not very healthy?

Oh, I totally agree that processed foods are unhealthy. No matter where they come from. But processed foods are totally unnecessary. People often use them when transitioning because they are afraid to give up the idea and texture of chicken, beef etc. But real food is the only food that will truly serve us. We don't need meat or a meat-like substance at the center of our plate. Plants contain all nutritional value we need.

And, what would you say to critics who say that vegan diets are too grain-based and therefore do not lead to optimal health?

Whole grains (rather than refined and processed grains) offer disease-fighting protection that is still not completely understood. Harvard's Nurses Health Study which evaluated the diets of over 75,000 women showed a drastic reduction in coronary heart disease among women who had the highest intake of whole

grains: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10479204>

Refined grains act like sugar in the body and are not recommended.

However, along with legumes, nuts, seeds, a wealth of vegetables and fruits, whole grains such as quinoa, brown rice, kamut, amaranth, and others are filling, offer quick energy, are simple for our bodies to digest, and are a key component to a healthy diet.

What are the challenges of subscribing to a vegan diet in today's world?

There are several. We're busy people and plant-based meals can take more time to prepare. But we're worth the investment; trust me. It's also harder to find options when dining out or traveling. However, once you know how and what to order it becomes quite simple. Another problem can be cost. Meat is subsidized, broccoli isn't – and that's a big problem that has major ramifications. Subsidies create 99-cent hamburger. High fructose corn syrup rules while obesity epidemics, diabetes, and cancer flourish. If we're going to halt or reverse the rising threat of chronic disease we need to change that. We need to vote with our forks rather than digging our graves with them.

If a conventional eater was to lean vegan, or begin embracing a more moderate version of the vegan diet what would that look like?

As I mentioned earlier, choose the humane seal and reduce your consumption to 2-3 times per week. Get creative and curious and buy some cookbooks. A plant-based diet has come along way from the hemp-a-fied 70's. This isn't your hippie mom's granola. You'll find amazing culinary geniuses pioneering cutting edge (and mouth watering) cuisine.

What are the typical mistakes conventional eaters make as they begin experimenting with a vegan approach to eating?

You hit the nail on the head with the processed foods question. Fake stuff is still fake. Eat real food. Eat plants. The core of the words "vegan" or "vegetarian" is vegetables! You gotta eat them to benefit from them.

And, last question: Any great resources (books, films, websites, etc.) on vegan diets that you'd like to share with us?

Must see movies: Forks over Knives, and Food Inc. Must read books: Becoming Vegan, The China Study, anything written by Neal Barnard MD, oh and Crazy Sexy Diet! Must read blogs: The Bitchin' Dietician, Crazy Sexy Life.