

5 NUTRITION TIPS

For a Successful Vegan Transition

By Emma Levez Larocque, RHN



There are so many reasons to go vegan, and so much recent visibility around those reasons, that an ever-increasing number of people are trying the lifestyle out. Being vegan can have many health benefits, not to mention all the social, compassion and environmental benefits! But if you're going to go vegan, it's important to do it right to ensure it's a sustainable change that properly nourishes your body, mind and soul. Like any eating style being vegan can be unhealthy if you are not paying attention. Here are 5 tips for going vegan right, and making this a wonderful change that lasts for the rest of your life.

1

LEARN TO COOK

One of the biggest gifts that many people receive when they go vegan is a renewed interest in food and cooking. Many people, for whom cooking had become a chore, discover a whole new world awaiting them in the variety and textures of plant-based foods. If you have a new vegan as a friend on social media, you probably know what I'm talking about (cue the very long stream of food photos). This can be funny, but it's also a very good thing. For many people, cooking is a lost art. They don't have time to prepare food – it's too hard, it takes too long, it's too expensive. All of these excuses are just that – excuses. Healthy, delicious meals don't have to take long to make, and they are far cheaper than eating out every night – or even eating a more conventional omnivorous diet, especially if you focus on whole foods and skip the processed stuff. Once you've started, you'll realize it's not all that hard either. There are plenty of amazing vegan cookbooks and cooking blogs out there to help get you started. Dig in and let this be an exciting part of your transition!

2

MAKE FRIENDS WITH BEANS

If you're going to be vegan, you're going to have to look at your relationship with beans and legumes. For some people it's a no-brainer – they loved beans before, and they'll continue to love them now. For others

it's a major barrier. If this is you, get over your phobia. Beans and legumes are a **CRITICAL** part of anyone's diet, providing a rich source of fibre and nutrients aplenty. If you're struggling to lose weight, this friendship is even more important since research shows that consuming legumes regularly is a very important part of weight control (see *How Not to Die* by M. Greger M.D. pp. 108-9). Figure out what it is you don't like and tackle it. Try Smoky BBQ Baked Beans on Sweet Potato, or adding beans to your favorite soups. The key is adding plenty of flavor via your favorite herbs and spices (which also boosts nutrient content, I might add).

3

TRY NEW FOODS

This is a time of expansion and experimentation. Enjoy the process! Try everything – even if you think you don't like it. So much of food enjoyment is in the preparation; over-boiled vegetables of any kind may be YUCK while roasted or baked to perfection they are divine. So this goes back to tip #1...learn to cook and try new recipes. Take a plant-based cooking class if you can; join online vegan cooking communities, like the [**Vegan Mainstream Cookbook Club**](#), and seek out vegan food blogs for inspiration. Stock your pantry with herbs and spices – they are great sources of many important nutrients and will help to make the flavours of your food pop. Having said all this, avoid getting overwhelmed. Find your comfort level, and if that means trying one new food a week, then do that.

4

DO YOUR RESEARCH

You will always meet people who say, “I’d love to be vegan but it’s just not healthy for me,” or “I tried to be vegan, but I got really sick.” Many of us in the vegan community huff and brush those comments off. But the truth is that transitioning to a vegan diet is a major change from the way most North Americans eat, and if you aren’t doing it right – by including a good variety of whole, fresh foods and introducing some new foods into your diet – you may be putting yourself at risk of deficiencies. A vegan diet can be perfectly healthy – and is arguably one of the healthiest diets there is – but there is plenty of variety in what “vegan” looks like. A junk food vegan can be just as unhealthy as a junk food meat eater. If you’re transitioning, take some time to do your research, and make sure you are providing your body with the fuel it needs. There are LOTS of great books, websites and resources out there. Some of the best known include www.pcrm.org (Physicians

Committee for Responsible Medicine) and www.nutritionfacts.org – both sites are run by knowledgeable vegan doctors and will give you a good idea of what a healthy plant-based diet looks like. You may think, “I’m going vegan for the animals, I don’t care about all that stuff.” But think of it this way, you won’t be helping the animals much if a poor vegan diet makes you sick and you end up as one of those people who say, “I used to be vegan, but...”

5

LISTEN TO YOUR BODY

Many people find they feel absolutely amazing as they switch to a healthy plant-based diet. They lighten up, and they gain energy as they become less congested. A plant-based diet is naturally much higher in fibre than a traditional diet and everything starts to move and work better. But it’s especially important to listen to your body during times of transition. If you are not feeling good, you are likely missing an important component of your diet. Everyone has different

dietary needs according to their age, metabolism, activity level, genetics, etc, so it’s important not to default to, “well this is working for my husband/friend/sister so it should be working for me.” Be assured, however, that you CAN meet your needs on a vegan diet – remember, all nutrients originally come from plants – but for optimal health (just as with ANY eating plan) it is best to listen to your body and make sure it is getting what it needs. If you are concerned about your diet and making sure you are getting the best vegan diet for you, consider visiting a plant-based dietician or nutritionist for more information.



Emma Levez Larocque is a Registered Holistic Nutritionist and a Certified Plant-Based Chef. She has been vegan for 7 years, and veg for more than 20. She is passionate about sharing the benefits of plant-based eating and living with others, and working to make the planet a kinder, more compassionate place for all who share it.

Emma's Red-Green Salad

Ingredients:

- A layer of romaine lettuce
- A handful of purple cabbage, shredded
- A stalk of celery, chopped
- A couple of tbsp of raw pumpkin seeds, unsalted
- A couple of tbsp of dried cranberries

Served with a simple Tahini Dressing:

- ½ cup tahini
- ½ cup water
- 3 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- ½ - ¾ tsp sea salt (to taste)
- 1 ½ tbsp maple syrup

Put all the ingredients into your blender and blend til smooth. Add more water to thin if desired.



Tip! If possible, build salads plate by plate (rather than serving them up in a big bowl). This allows you to make each salad look amazing, and people – especially kids – are more likely to eat a salad that is served up, rather than being left to take it on their own when there are lots of decadent alternatives.