

A Plant-Based Diet for Beginners: What to Eat, Benefits, & How to Succeed

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SUMMARY

Eating a plant-based diet is one of the healthiest things you can do for your body and the environment. And as plant-based diets increase in popularity and acceptance, more and more people are turning to them. Curious about a plant-based diet? Discover what to eat and avoid, plant-based diet benefits for your health and the environment, and ways to implement it into your life for optimal success.

Are you ever confused by all the conflicting theories about what trendy diet is the best or healthiest? That's not an accident: The food industry makes the vast majority of its profits selling unhealthy junk. And the more confused we are, the more likely we are to throw up our hands and "go with the flow." So, they profit from reversals ("[Butter is Back](https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/26/opinion/bittman-butter-is-back.html) (<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/26/opinion/bittman-butter-is-back.html>)," "[Red Wine Fights Heart Disease](http://159.54.226.237/98_issues/980301/980301eat_smart_wine.html) (http://159.54.226.237/98_issues/980301/980301eat_smart_wine.html")) that contradict what we were told last year.

And in the age of online advertising and clickbait headlines, the media knows that "[Bacon is Actually the Fountain of Youth](https://cneatocracy.wordpress.com/2010/08/10/pork-the-fountain-of-youth/) (<https://cneatocracy.wordpress.com/2010/08/10/pork-the-fountain-of-youth/>)" will get a lot more attention than "Broccoli is Good For You."

It's easy to see why most people believe that we don't know much about food and health. Keto? Vegan? Mediterranean? Paleo? Atkins? Raw? "Aw heck, I'll just have a cheeseburger and a beer and call it a day."

The truth, very well hidden behind the noise and the marketing, is that nearly every serious scientist and research organization in the world [recommends](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/best-diet-for-humans/) (<https://foodrevolution.org/blog/best-diet-for-humans/>) a diet rich in whole plant foods that are minimally processed. We can argue about the details (oil or oil-free, the majority of calories from grains or from vegetables, [raw or cooked](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/raw-vs-cooked-vegetables/) (<https://foodrevolution.org/blog/raw-vs-cooked-vegetables/>)), but the basic idea, clearly [stated](https://michaelpollan.com/reviews/how-to-eat/) (<https://michaelpollan.com/reviews/how-to-eat/>) by Michael Pollan as "mostly plants" is pretty much irrefutable once you look at the evidence.

Why Have Plant-Based Diets Become Popular?

Plants are full of the richest sources of nutrients the human body needs in order to thrive. Fruits and vegetables, in particular, provide us with [antioxidants](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/what-are-antioxidants/) (<https://foodrevolution.org/blog/what-are-antioxidants/>), phytochemicals, [fiber](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/why-is-fiber-good/) (<https://foodrevolution.org/blog/why-is-fiber-good/>), enzymes, and essential vitamins and minerals. In other words, plant-based diet benefits come from all the good stuff our bodies need to be healthy and strong.

There's also an overwhelming amount of [research](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4991921/) showing that eating more plants and fewer animal products can help prevent or even reverse many of the worst chronic ailments of our time. And if that's not motivating enough, plant-based diets [benefit](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/may/31/avoiding-meat-and-dairy-is-single-biggest-way-to-reduce-your-impact-on-earth) the environment too. Eating in this way puts a dent in climate change and reduces the incidence of animal suffering and cruelty.

That's a lot of upsides, right?

It's no surprise then that interest in adopting a plant-based lifestyle has skyrocketed in the last few years. According to a recent food and health survey [conducted](https://www.foodbusinessnews.net/articles/13823-plant-based-diets-interest-confuse-consumers) by the International Food Information Council Foundation, over half of U.S. consumers are interested in learning more about plant-based diets. And sales of [plant-based meats](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/plant-based-meat-alternatives/) and dairy products are [growing](https://www.plantbasednews.org/news/us-plant-based-meat-sales-hit-670-million-skyrocketing-by-24) exponentially — even outperforming their animal-based counterparts in some cases. I know a lot of people kicking themselves that they didn't invest in Beyond Meat back in May of this year, given the massive gain in its stock price.

Are you curious about what exactly a plant-based diet is, how to get started, and how to make it stick? If so, you've come to the right place. We've created this handy plant-based diet beginner's guide, so you can have all the information you need, right at your fingertips.

What is a Plant-Based Diet?



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Eating a plant-based diet means getting most or all of your calories from fresh, whole plant foods that are minimally processed (or even better, not processed at all). Essentially, it is exactly what it sounds like — a diet made of mostly plants.

A plant-based diet can also be vegetarian or vegan, but these diets aren't necessarily outright plant-based. There are plenty of “junk food vegans” who might not eat animal products, but still consume a variety of processed foods.

To quote Michael Pollan, “If it came from a plant, eat it. If it was made in a plant, don't.”

What Can You Eat on a Plant-Based Diet?

When picturing what a plant-based meal looks like, fruits and vegetables probably come to mind. And they're an important part of just about any healthy diet. But you're not limited to these foods. There are a wide variety of plant foods to enjoy.

The major types of food typically eaten on a plant-based diet include:

- **Fruits** — Ex: Apples, berries, kiwis, mangoes, [avocado](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/avocado-health-benefits/), bananas, [jackfruit](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/what-is-jackfruit/), etc.
- **Vegetables** — Ex: [Onions](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/allium-vegetables/), broccoli, [beets](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/benefits-of-beets/), potatoes, [mushrooms](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/best-mushrooms-to-eat-longevity/), carrots, etc.
- **Whole grains** — Ex: Quinoa, millet, buckwheat, wheat, rice, [corn](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/corn-health-benefits/), etc.
- **Beans & legumes** — Ex: Black [beans](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/benefits-of-beans/), chickpeas, lentils, edamame, peas, etc.

- **Nuts & seeds** — Ex: Almonds, cashews, chia seeds, [flaxseeds](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/health-benefits-flaxseed/), walnuts, etc.
- **Herbs & spices** — Ex: [Turmeric](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/turmeric-health-benefits-genetics/), ginger, cinnamon, oregano, garlic, cayenne, etc.
- **Fermented foods** — Ex: Kimchi, sauerkraut, miso, natto, etc.

Eating across all these food groups will help you get an abundance of micronutrients from your food. Also, when choosing from each category, think “[eat the rainbow](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/eating-the-rainbow-health-benefits/).” Colorful plant foods are full of phytochemicals (a fancy word that just means “chemicals from plants) and antioxidants that are good for keeping different parts of your body healthy.

Another easy way to eat the healthiest combination of plant foods is by remembering an acronym coined by Dr. Joel Fuhrman: [GBOMBS](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/gbombs-healthiest-foods/). GBOMBS stands for: greens, beans, onions, mushrooms, berries, and seeds.

What Do You Avoid on a Plant-Based Diet?

When choosing to eat a plant-based diet, you’ll want to focus mainly on fresh foods. In a grocery store, that means primarily shopping the outer aisles. If possible, choose [organic](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/organic-food-prices/) foods as much as possible to avoid exposure to GMOs and [pesticides](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/pesticides-facts/).

For more information on pesticides in produce and guidance on the most important foods to buy organic, see our article [here](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/how-to-wash-vegetables-fruits/).

However, the main foods you should avoid on a plant-based diet are:

- **Most or all animal products** (Especially factory-farmed meat, [eggs](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/are-eggs-healthy/), & dairy products)
- **Refined sugars** (White sugar, cane sugar, high fructose corn syrup, chemical-based calorie-free sweeteners, etc.)
- **Highly processed vegetable oils** (Corn oil, cottonseed oil, sunflower oil, peanut oil, soybean oil, etc.)
- **White flour** (Especially [bleached white flour](https://www.organics.org/bleached-vs-unbleached-flour/) which is full of chemicals and heavy metals — and virtually devoid of nutrition)
- **Junk food** (Including most cookies, chips, crackers, snack bars, sweetened drinks, packaged foods, etc.)
- **GMOs** (The primary genetically engineered crops are corn, soy, canola, sugar beets, cotton, and alfalfa — plus a bit of apple, zucchini, and potato)

You’ll also want to pay special attention to nutrition labels. By reading labels, you can avoid ultra-processed and harmful ingredients. Packaged foods should have as few ingredients as possible. As a general rule, if you can’t pronounce an ingredient, or don’t know what it is, put the food back.

Many packaged foods are full of health claims like “all-natural” or “non-GMO.” But most of these phrases are branding tactics meant to mislead consumers into thinking a product is healthy. This is called “greenwashing.” To learn more about greenwashing and what seals and certifications you can actually trust, read our article [here](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/how-to-avoid-greenwashing/).

What About Gluten & Grains?

For most people, grains can be part of a healthy, plant-based diet. Some of my favorites are quinoa, millet, amaranth, buckwheat, oats, and teff. In many studies, whole grains have been [shown](https://www.todaysdietitian.com/newarchives/050113p44.shtml) to help fight heart disease, type 2 diabetes, cancer, and even obesity. But not everything is peachy in grain land.

Most of the grains eaten in the world today are sprayed with [pesticides](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/pesticides-facts/), and some crops, especially wheat, may even be treated with glyphosate as a desiccant (to dry the crop out before harvest). [Corn](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/corn-health-benefits/), unless it’s grown organically, is often genetically engineered. Then there’s rice, which, while popular, is often contaminated with a disturbing amount of [arsenic](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/arsenic-in-rice/).

For some medical conditions, like [autoimmune](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/autoimmune-disease-diet/) diseases, grains can also [cause](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4036413/) inflammation in the gut and contribute to symptoms. This is especially true with the gluten present in wheat. Although only about 1% of the world’s population [has](https://celiac.org/about-the-foundation/featured-news/2018/08/global-prevalence-of-celiac-disease/) diagnosed celiac disease, many more show signs of gluten intolerance with symptoms like headaches, joint pain, skin problems, seizures, and digestive issues. If you’re facing any of these symptoms, it can be helpful to go gluten-free for three to six months and see if they clear up.

While many people have jumped on the gluten-free bandwagon, that doesn't mean it's necessarily best for everyone. A few studies actually show health *benefits* from eating whole grain wheat products. (For more on this, see our article on gluten, [here](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/what-does-gluten-free-mean/) (<https://foodrevolution.org/blog/what-does-gluten-free-mean/>.)

If you're going to eat wheat, though, you might want to look for 100% whole wheat (since white flour doesn't do your body any favors!), and aim to make sure your grains are organically grown, so you can avoid glyphosate contamination.

Can You Get All the Nutrients You Need on a Plant-Based Diet?

As you begin your journey on a plant-based diet, you may start to get questions from friends and family. Any time you eat differently than the norm, you're bound to get some pushback.

It's like, you could eat fast food for every meal for 10 years and nobody will bat an eye. But trade a fried chicken meal for a green salad topped with sunflower seeds, and everybody suddenly worries about you shriveling up and wasting away.

You may hear, "Why are you eating that?" Or, "Why *aren't* you eating that?" But some of the most frequently asked questions you might encounter on a plant-based diet have to do with nutrients. "Where do you get your protein?" Or "Where do you get your calcium or iron?" And recently, the meat, dairy, and egg industries rolled out a new propaganda playbook at the [July 2019 meetings](https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/work-under-way/review-science/public-meetings/meeting-2) (<https://www.dietaryguidelines.gov/work-under-way/review-science/public-meetings/meeting-2>) of the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee of the U.S. government. Their goal? Scare people into eating lots of animal products for fear of choline deficiency.

Many people believe you can't get all the nutrients you need without animal products. But plants have protein, calcium, and iron in abundance, in addition to a host of other vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants. (And yes, many plants are abundant sources of choline.) In actuality, people these days are far more likely to be deficient in fiber than protein: Only 3% of Americans get their daily amount of recommended fiber. But that's not a problem when you're eating mostly plants!

Still, if you're wondering how much protein, iron, or calcium you really need, and what plant-based foods to get them from, check out the articles below.

- **Protein:** [Plant-Based Protein: What You Need to Know](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/plant-based-protein/) (<https://foodrevolution.org/blog/plant-based-protein/>)
- **Calcium:** [The Healthiest Way to Get the Calcium You Need + 9 Calcium-Rich Foods](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/calcium-rich-foods/) (<https://foodrevolution.org/blog/calcium-rich-foods/>)
- **Iron:** [The Truth About Iron + Why Plant-Based Foods Are the Best Way to Get the Iron You Need](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/iron-rich-foods/) (<https://foodrevolution.org/blog/iron-rich-foods/>)

Are Supplements Necessary?

No matter how you choose to eat, in the modern world, most diets are lacking in something. In the case of plant-based diets, there are a few nutrients that are especially important to pay attention to.

They are:

- Vitamin B12
- Vitamin D3
- Omega-3 fatty acids
- Vitamin K2
- Zinc

In the case of these nutrients, supplements *may be* necessary to avoid a deficiency.

For more on why you might need to supplement these nutrients and how much you may want to take of each, see our article, [here](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/supplements-vegetarians-vegans-plant-based/) (<https://foodrevolution.org/blog/supplements-vegetarians-vegans-plant-based/>).

Plant-Based Diet Benefits for Your Health



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Eating the right foods and getting the nutrients your body needs is essential to good health. And adopting a plant-based diet will put you on the fast track to health and vitality.

Rates of chronic disease are accelerating at an alarming rate. And it's happening in people younger and younger. Sadly, according to the [World Health Organization](https://www.who.int/nutrition/topics/2_background/en/) (WHO), by 2020, chronic diseases will account for almost three-quarters of all deaths worldwide. This includes diseases like cancer, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, Alzheimer's, autoimmune disease, and digestive disorders, among many others.

But thanks to the research of plant-powered pioneers like Dr. Dean Ornish, Dr. T. Colin Campbell, and Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn, we now know that most chronic diseases are lifestyle-related. And that [diet](https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/251689.php) is a stronger predicting factor in chronic disease than genetics. Many people are turning to a plant-based diet to not only prevent chronic disease, but also to slow its progression and, in some cases, even to reverse it completely.

Adopting a plant-based diet benefits many aspects of health, including the following:

Heart Disease

Following a plant-based diet has been shown to positively benefit those with cardiovascular disease. In Dr. Campbell's [China Study](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/9860369) research, he found that the more plant protein, legumes, and vegetables people ate, the less likely they were to die of coronary artery disease.

Dr. William Li also [found](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4315380/) that by eating more fruits and vegetables and less meat (particularly red meat) you can prevent damage to the cells that line and protect your blood vessels. In the last few decades, science has discovered that damage to this endothelial lining causes different types of heart disease and atherosclerosis.

For more on how a plant-based diet benefits heart health and what foods to eat to beat heart disease, check out our article [here](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/heart-healthy-foods/).

Type 2 Diabetes

Replacing animal protein with plant protein has a profound positive effect on people with type 2 diabetes. When researchers reviewed and analyzed the data from 13 randomized controlled trials, they [found](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4690061/) a decrease in three important markers of diabetic severity — hemoglobin A1c, fasting glucose, and fasting insulin — when switching from animal protein to plant protein.

Dr. Neal Barnard also conducted a [study](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2677007/) on the effects of a low-fat vegan diet on people living with type 2 diabetes. He showed that eating this way improved weight loss, blood sugar control, and triglyceride levels compared to the diet recommended by the American Diabetic Association.

While many people mistakenly believe that diabetes is caused by sugar alone, we are coming to [understand](https://ucdintegrativemedicine.com/2016/09/diet-diabetes-saturated-fats-real-enemy/#gs_5i2ao5) the role saturated fat plays in its development. When type 2 diabetics stop eating meat (a major contributing source of saturated fat), their blood sugar levels typically improve.

To find out the specific foods to eat and avoid for type 2 diabetes prevention (and reversal), read our article [here](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/how-to-eat-to-prevent-diabetes/) (<https://foodrevolution.org/blog/how-to-eat-to-prevent-diabetes/>).

Alzheimer's & Neurodegenerative Disease

Believe it or not, even Alzheimer's and neurodegenerative disease patients can benefit from a plant-based diet. While there are few [documented](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4931830/) (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4931830/>) cases of reversal, most are preventable. In fact, a comprehensive report [conducted](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/food-and-health/prevent-reverse-alzheimers/) (<https://foodrevolution.org/blog/food-and-health/prevent-reverse-alzheimers/>) by husband and wife team, Drs. Dean and Ayesha Sherzai concluded that over 90% of Alzheimer's cases are preventable.

Much of this prevention is achievable with lifestyle strategies, and whole foods plant-based nutrition is one of the most consequential strategies of all. Additional research has shown that this may be due in part to the brain-gut connection. A poor diet disrupts the gut microbiota, contributing to inflammation in the body and affecting the central nervous system and, ultimately, the brain. One study [found](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6326209/) (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6326209/>) that inflammation, gut dysbiosis, and leaky gut may contribute to the process of neurodegeneration in Alzheimer's patients.

For more on how diet affects Alzheimer's and brain health, check out this article by Dr. Michael Greger [here](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/alzheimers-disease-prevention-plant-based-food/) (<https://foodrevolution.org/blog/alzheimers-disease-prevention-plant-based-food/>).

Cancer

Did you know that plant-based diets can help prevent cancer too? A 2011 study in *Cancer Management and Research* [concluded](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3048091/) (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3048091/>) that plant-based diets (including vegan and vegetarian ones) are a useful strategy to reduce your risk of cancer. Specifically, the increased intake of plants, elimination of red and processed meats, and maintenance of a healthy body were attributed to a reduction in cancer.

Four plant foods that [show](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/prevent-cancer-tips/) (<https://foodrevolution.org/blog/prevent-cancer-tips/>) particularly potent anticancer effects are:

Nuts

A major study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* [showed](https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2013/11/eating-nuts-reduces-risk-of-death/) (<https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2013/11/eating-nuts-reduces-risk-of-death/>) that people who ate nuts significantly reduced their risk of cancer (and overall mortality) compared to people who ate few or no nuts. Additionally, the American Society of Clinical Oncology [released](https://ascopubs.org/doi/10.1200/JCO.2017.75.5413) (<https://ascopubs.org/doi/10.1200/JCO.2017.75.5413>) a report of more than 800 patients with stage III colon cancer. They found that eating nuts can make a significant difference in overall cancer survival. In the study, those who consumed about two small handfuls (about 2 ounces) of tree nuts per week had a 46% lower chance of cancer recurrence and a 53% lower chance of death than those who did not eat nuts.

Cooked Tomatoes

The cancer-fighting power of tomatoes may be attributable to lycopene, a cancer-starving antioxidant. Studies [show](https://cancer.ucsf.edu/docs/crc/nutrition_prostate.pdf) (https://cancer.ucsf.edu/docs/crc/nutrition_prostate.pdf) that men who eat two to three cups of cooked tomatoes twice weekly have a 30% lowered risk of prostate cancer.

Purple Potatoes

Once a food of the Incan kings, purple potatoes contain a natural chemical called [anthocyanin](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26383537) (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26383537>), which starves and kills cancer cells — and wipes out the dreaded cancer stem cells.

Mushrooms

Researchers from the University of Western Australia in Perth [conducted](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/how-to-fight-prevent-cancer-with-mushrooms/) (<https://foodrevolution.org/blog/how-to-fight-prevent-cancer-with-mushrooms/>) a study of 2,000 Chinese women. (About half had suffered from breast cancer.) The scientists reviewed the women's eating habits and factored out other variables that contribute to cancer, such as being overweight, lack of exercise, and smoking. They came to a startling finding about mushrooms. Women who consumed at least a third of an ounce of fresh mushrooms every day (about one mushroom per day) were 64% less likely to develop breast cancer. When those same women also drank green tea daily, they reduced their risk of breast cancer by 89%.

Obesity

Rates of obesity are at an all-time high around the world. In the U.S. alone, over 39% of the population is [suffering](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db288.htm) (<https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db288.htm>) from obesity. Eating a plant-based diet helps fight obesity, too.

A 16-week randomized clinical trial [showed](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6221888/) (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6221888/>) that a plant-based vegan diet contributes to a reduction in body weight, fat mass, and insulin resistance. And a study published in the *British Journal of Nutrition* [concluded](https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/british-journal-of-nutrition/article/crosssectional-and-longitudinal-comparisons-of-metabolic-profiles-between-vegetarian-and-nonvegetarian-subjects-a-matched-cohort-study/2905C5A7D1CAD779D8D33196A4641CEFF) (<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/british-journal-of-nutrition/article/crosssectional-and-longitudinal-comparisons-of-metabolic-profiles-between-vegetarian-and-nonvegetarian-subjects-a-matched-cohort-study/2905C5A7D1CAD779D8D33196A4641CEFF>) that each additional year of adopting a vegan diet decreased the risk of obesity by 7%. That's nothing to sneeze at.

Plant-Based Diet Benefits to the Environment



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Adopting a plant-based diet isn't just good for your health; it's also good for our planet. Cycling calories through livestock is much less efficient than eating them directly. It [takes](https://articles.extension.org/pages/35850/on-average-how-many-pounds-of-corn-make-one-pound-of-beef-assuming-an-all-grain-diet-from-background) (<https://articles.extension.org/pages/35850/on-average-how-many-pounds-of-corn-make-one-pound-of-beef-assuming-an-all-grain-diet-from-background>) about 12 pounds of grain or soy to produce one pound of feedlot beef. For pork, it [takes](https://stanfordmag.org/contents/can-vegetarianism-save-the-world-nitty-gritty) (<https://stanfordmag.org/contents/can-vegetarianism-save-the-world-nitty-gritty>) about seven pounds of feed to produce one pound of edible meat, and for chicken, about four. No wonder [80%](https://globalforestatlas.yale.edu/land-use/industrial-agriculture/soy-agriculture) (<https://globalforestatlas.yale.edu/land-use/industrial-agriculture/soy-agriculture>) of the world's soy crop and [70%](https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/coexistence-soybeans-factsheet.pdf) (<https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/coexistence-soybeans-factsheet.pdf>) of the grain grown in the U.S. is being fed to feed livestock.

Animal agriculture is, essentially, a protein factory in reverse.

Worldwide, about eight times as much land is [used](https://www.globalagriculture.org/report-topics/meat-and-animal-feed.html) (<https://www.globalagriculture.org/report-topics/meat-and-animal-feed.html>) to grow food for animals as is used to grow food for humans. Huge tracts of forest are being [cut down](http://www.fao.org/3/a-a0262e.pdf) (<http://www.fao.org/3/a-a0262e.pdf>) to make way for factory farms, areas for cows to graze, or fields to grow animal feed.

If the world, just hypothetically, went vegan, we'd [free up](https://josephpoore.com/Science%20360%206392%20987%20-%20Accepted%20Manuscript.pdf) (<https://josephpoore.com/Science%20360%206392%20987%20-%20Accepted%20Manuscript.pdf>) 75% of the globe's agricultural land — an area the size of the United States, Australia, the European Union, China, and India *combined*. That land could be used to grow food for a rapidly expanding human population, could be planted with trees or other vegetation to absorb carbon out of the atmosphere, could be returned to wildlife, or could be used for many other purposes.

Current practices in animal agriculture contribute significantly to global greenhouse gas emissions, too. And while CO₂ is one major factor, it isn't the only one. As National Geographic [puts it](https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/global-warming/methane/) (<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/global-warming/methane/>), methane, the gas that comes "...out of a cow's plumbing," is even more efficient than CO₂ at trapping heat. Twenty-eight times more powerful, to be exact. Not only that but in a world facing a potentially irreversible climate crisis, methane dissipates much more rapidly than CO₂. That means changing your diet today will reduce your carbon footprint immediately. According to an Oxford University [study](https://www.vox.com/2014/7/2/5865109/study-going-vegetarian-could-cut-your-food-carbon-footprint-in-half) (<https://www.vox.com/2014/7/2/5865109/study-going-vegetarian-could-cut-your-food-carbon-footprint-in-half>), going vegetarian or vegan can cut your carbon footprint in half.

More Resources

When you commit to eating more plants, and fewer animal products, you're reducing your carbon footprint and [contributing](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/food-and-climate-change/) to a more stable global climate. You're also helping to build a world with more forests and less [animal cruelty](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/food-and-animals/video-factory-farming-animal-abuse/), with less topsoil erosion and more [water](https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/freshwater/food/) for future generations.

For more information on the effects of factory farms and the ways a plant-based diet can affect the environment, check out some of these articles:

[A Healthy Future for Our Planet Is Possible! See How Your Food Choices Impact the Future of Life on Earth](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/climate-change-food-sustainability/)

[Study: The World's Largest Meat and Dairy Companies Combine To Emit More Greenhouse Gases Than Most People Would Have Imagined](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/meat-dairy-greenhouse-gases/)

[The Surprising Truth About Antibiotic Resistance & Factory Farms](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/antibiotic-resistance-factory-farms/)

6 Best Practices for Plant-Based Diet Beginners



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Now that you know all the benefits of a plant-based diet, how do you get started and put it into action? Here are a few strategies that will help you succeed, thrive, and get the support you need on your healthy eating journey.

Fill Your Plate with Plants

Approximately 54% of calories in the standard American diet [come from](https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/2019/08/25/putting-your-diet-plant-based-path/2101240001/) processed foods, while another 34% come from animal products. While research has [shown](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6146358/) just how detrimental these foods are to your health, federal nutrition guidelines have yet to catch up. It wasn't until 2011 that the USDA [replaced](https://www.choosemyplate.gov/brief-history-usda-food-guides) their meat food group with a generic "protein" one. And while their [MyPlate](https://www.choosemyplate.gov/start-simple-myplate) guidelines are certainly an improvement over [past recommendations](https://www.choosemyplate.gov/brief-history-usda-food-guides), it's still not exactly the optimal balance of nutrition.

Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine created the Power Plate, which provides another take on what a healthy plate really looks like. Spoiler alert: It's full of plants! The Power Plate recommends meals consisting of a balance between fruits, vegetables, legumes, and grains. Check it out [here](https://p.widencdn.net/n0ayrz/18155-NTR-Power-Plate-Booklet-RGB).

Invest in a Few Good Cookbooks

While there are certainly plenty of online recipes, it's a lot easier just to open up a book than to search through thousands of recipes on the Internet. Cookbooks are a great way to have a library of recipes at your fingertips whenever you need them. And having a good cookbook on hand can also provide guidance on pantry staples to have. Along with tools you may need, common substitutions for animal products, or even further ways to modify a recipe if you have food allergies.

We've created a list of cookbook recommendations to get you rolling on your plant-based journey. Check them out [here](https://foodrevolution.org/blog/best-plant-based-cookbooks/) (<https://foodrevolution.org/blog/best-plant-based-cookbooks/>).

Plan Ahead

Making any kind of change in your life requires some degree of planning. This is especially true when choosing to go plant-based. It also requires time, which might already be in short supply for you. One way to combat this is by planning ahead with simple solutions that will help you prepare for each week of food.

Figure out a few recipes you want to make, and then create a shopping list of all the ingredients you'll need. There are also many plant-based meal planners out there via subscription sites like [22 Days Nutrition](https://mealplanner.22daysnutrition.com/) (<https://mealplanner.22daysnutrition.com/>) or [Forks Over Knives](http://www.forksmealplanner.com/?ref=FOODREVOLUTION) (<http://www.forksmealplanner.com/?ref=FOODREVOLUTION>), or you can source them from cookbooks too.

Buying staple foods in bulk will also allow you to always have what you need and shop less often. From there, you can prepare meals in larger quantity so that you have food ready-to-go in your fridge or freezer. It also helps to prepare food the night before, so you have something to eat for breakfast and lunch the next day. Leftovers are your friends on a plant-based diet!

Communicate When Eating Out

Eating out at restaurants, or when visiting friends and family, presents its own set of challenges.

Unless you're going to a restaurant that specializes in vegan, vegetarian, or plant-based food, you may struggle with finding completely plant-based options. Let whomever you're dining with know your dietary preferences and see if you can find someplace that suits you both. Use apps and websites like [Yelp](https://www.yelp.com/) (<https://www.yelp.com/>) or [Happy Cow](https://www.happycow.net/) (<https://www.happycow.net/>) to find plant-based eateries.

Looking at menus ahead of time can also help. And when at a restaurant, ask questions about food preparation methods and substitutions. Most restaurants will do their best to accommodate your request.

Similarly, when going to parties and dinners with family and friends, let your host know your dietary needs ahead of time. In extreme circumstances, you could also offer to bring your own food or even to eat beforehand.

Take it One Step at a Time

If you decide to try a plant-based lifestyle, take it one step at a time. You may decide to go "cold turkey," but you can also go slower if that feels easier and more sustainable to you. Go at the pace that feels right for you, as you add in new things and steer clear of others.

What's most important is that you keep taking steps for your health and the health of the planet — and then take more steps, as you build momentum. This isn't about a diet or a fad. It's about laying the groundwork for a new way of life. At the end of the day, it's your habits that help to shape your destiny.

Find Support

Eating a plant-based diet means you may not be eating what everyone else is eating, and that can be lonely. But it doesn't have to be. Find someone in your life to share your journey with. It could be your spouse, your children, or a friend. Let them know you're choosing a new way of eating and that you'd appreciate their support on the journey. Let them know how they can help. Encouraging words, a sounding board, and adopting the lifestyle for shared meals can all help.

And Here's Another Resource

Want some hands-on support implementing a plant-based lifestyle in your life? Check out the Food For Health MasterClass with Food Revolution Network founders John Robbins and Ocean Robbins. You'll discover the top four food lies that the food industry hopes you never discover, and 10 mighty plant-powered breakthroughs that can truly change your life. And best of all, it's free! [Join in right here.](https://thriving.foodrevolution.org/) (<https://thriving.foodrevolution.org/>)

We wish you all the best on your journey to a fabulous plant-based lifestyle. Here's to your health!

Tell us in the comments:

- What do you think of plant-based diets?
- Have you ever tried one?

Featured Image: los_angela



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