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# Plant-Based Basics

Nutrition can be complex. Here are the most important lessons we've learned from 5 years on a plant-based diet. We hope it helps with the IRM fast, and as a general guideline for health (even after the fast is over).

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## Summary

Here's the most important part:

A plant-based diet is healthy for the mind, body, wallet, animals, and environment.

The largest nutritional study of its kind ([The China Study](#)) found that populations who ate **more plants and fewer animals** live longer and have fewer diseases.

[The WHO puts \*\*processed meats\*\* in the same cancer-causing category as cigarettes, and lists \*\*red meat\*\* as a likely carcinogen.](#) If nothing else, try to eliminate these from your regular diet.

- Plant-based eating shouldn't be about perfection, but gradual progression over time.
- "Plant Based" or "Vegan" doesn't always mean healthy. Oreos and fries don't have meat or dairy - doesn't make them healthy!
- If you feel hungry or unsatisfied, try adding eggs, poultry, or fish into your diet before gradually reducing animal proteins again. Think long-term!

**Bottom line: Eat a wide variety of whole plant foods, minimally processed.**

Your body will need some time to adjust to any diet change. Your tastebuds and gut will adapt given enough time. Some basic differences are:

- Whole plant foods typically have more nutrients, but fewer calories than processed or animal foods; make sure to eat enough food - more than you may think at first!
- To get the most nutrition from plants, you need to break the cell walls by chopping, blending, cooking, juicing, or simply chewing very thoroughly.
  - Any unchewed food will become fiber, which is good for your gut, but nutrients and energy trapped inside the plant's unbroken cells won't be absorbed into your blood/body.

**The diet's basic daily components are listed in orange:**

These categories reflect the updated USDA's "My Plate" and [Harvard's "Healthy Eating Plate."](#)

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## Whole Grains / Starches

This is where a lot of your calories, iron, protein, and minerals will come from.

Eat a variety of whole grains and starches as the base for most meals, such as:

Brown Rice / Quinoa / Chickpea noodles / Rice noodles / Couscous / Oats

- When bought in bulk, these are the most calorie-dense foods for the money. You can use a 10-lb bag of brown rice for months, and people have eaten nothing but potatoes and spices for a year while remaining perfectly healthy.
- In a pinch, a bowl of seasoned rice or quinoa with ½ a can of beans and some seasoning can be a whole meal. Cheap and quick!

## Protein / Legumes

But where will I get protein?

...from the same place the strongest / biggest animals on earth (elephants, cows, gorillas) do: plants!

Legumes (beans), nuts & seeds have the most protein of all plants.

Pair legumes with whole grains for the most complete forms of protein. Combination examples include:

- Rice & beans, lentils & quinoa, peanut butter & whole-wheat toast, split pea soup & brown rice, or a burrito made with tofu & a whole-grain tortilla.

Nut butters like almond, peanut, or cashew butter, or tahini (ground up sesame seeds) can boost protein/calories and act as a base for sauces in many meals.

- For example: add peanut sauce or tahini to Asian meals, have almond/peanut butter on apples or oatmeal, or add soaked, blended cashews to pasta sauce or stir-fries.

Legumes:

- Black beans / Chickpeas (a.k.a. Garbanzo beans) / Lentils / Peas / Soy Beans (eaten plain as Edamame, or minimally processed into Tofu, Tempeh, or meat substitutes like sausages or patties).

Nuts / Seeds:

- Almonds / Walnuts / Cashews / Peanuts / Pecans / etc.
- Flax Seeds / Chia Seeds / Hemp Seeds (all rich in Omega-3's) / Sesame Seeds (Tahini) / Pumpkin Seeds (a.k.a. Pepitas)

## Vegetables / Mushrooms

There are over 1,000 different veggies out there. Get creative!

Variety is key! Most vegetables go with most meals. Try something new!

- For extra health: steam them, boil them, or eat them raw.
- For efficiency: chop them, add mixed spices, and bake them all together for the most versatile, meal-prep-ready veggies.
- Pepper / Broccoli / Zucchini / Onion / Cauliflower / Carrots / Sweet Potatoes are just some of the most nutritious and versatile.
- Often, certain nutrients in veggies are brightly colored. Keep it colorful!

Dark, leafy greens are the most nutrient-dense foods you can eat.

- Spinach has a neutral texture and taste while having plenty of iron.
- “Kale is king” of nutrients. Very high levels of vitamins A, K, B6, and C, calcium, potassium, copper, and manganese.
- Mixed / spring greens are great for flavor and crunch while still being nutritious.
- Greens need to be cooked down, chopped up, or juiced to get the maximum nutrition.
- Adding a handful of spinach to smoothies, chopping up bok choy or spinach to add to stir-fry, or drinking kale/wheatgrass juice will add tons of nutrients that are otherwise hard to find.

Mushrooms: the forgotten food group.

Not everyone likes the taste/texture, but they’re very healthy.

- Pan-fry some portabellas (or baby bellas), oyster, white, or button mushrooms in some olive or coconut oil, and add a mixed grill / rub seasoning.
- If you can’t stand the texture, you can get dehydrated, powdered mushrooms like lion’s mane, chaga, turkey tail, porcini, etc. and add a teaspoon or two to soups, smoothies, coffee, etc.

## Fruits

Hydrating, nutritious, energy-providing, and delicious.

Great in morning oatmeal, on the side at lunch or dinner, or as a dessert.

Some of the best fruits out there are:

Berries: highly nutritious! Avocados: full of good fats! And tomatoes (yes! It’s a fruit!)

- Smoothie tip: buy extra bananas, and freeze the over-ripe ones in a gallon ziplock bag. Then add some to a morning smoothie with frozen berries, almond/coconut/oat milk, a handful of spinach, and some pea, soy, or hemp protein.

## Vitamin B12 / Vitamin D

The *only* nutrients missing on a plant-only diet.

**Vitamin B12** (good for nerves and energy) comes from bacteria in the soil. Before modern sanitization and pesticide use, humans got it from little bits of dirt left on potatoes, spring water, etc.

- Today, health professionals recommend everyone supplement this vitamin, even animal-eaters.
- This should be supplemented in pill form, under-tongue drops, or fortified foods like almond/coconut/oat/cashew milk with B12 added.

**Vitamin D** comes from exposure to the sun and can be supplemented if needed.

- 15-40 minutes of at least arms, face, and neck exposed to bright sunlight (not through a window) is typically enough for a day. More melanin? You'll need more sun, or supplementation.
- If this much sun isn't possible to get, take a Vitamin D3 (or D2) supplement, *especially* in winter.

## Probiotics

Your body contains 10x more bacteria and microorganisms than human cells.

Take care of the good bacteria in your digestive tract for improved nutrient absorption, immunity, mood, and health.

Yes, this part gets a little weird to think about. But your gut microbiome is an entire ecosystem of bacteria and other tiny organisms working together to digest your food, regulate mood and cravings, and strengthen your immune system.

- For example, say you decide to stop eating bread. Over time, the species of gut bacteria that eat yeast (called Candida) will die down, which will eventually reduce your cravings for bread.

The solution here is pretty simple.

- Drinking the occasional kombucha (fermented tea), or eating some kimchi (Korean fermented cabbage) will add to your good bacteria.
- You can also look for almond/coconut milk yogurt, which is typically a probiotic food.
- Google "probiotics" if none of these appeal to you. They can be found in capsule/pill form.

## A note on ethics:

In my opinion, eating meat / dairy / eggs / fish isn't inherently wrong. However, we need to realize that the picture on the box of a happy cow, grazing in the meadow under a blue sky, is a marketing scam and a lie. The small, sustainable, farms of our ancestors are **not** where 99% of grocery store and restaurant animal products come from.

The reality of factory farmed animals is too dark to adequately describe here, but it's my opinion that anyone who buys these products ought to become educated on where they come from, even if it means facing some unpleasant truths. The *standard practices* of modern industrial agriculture are often unspeakably inhumane. To become informed on what goes on in the production of meat and dairy, watch the documentaries "[Earthlings](#)" or "[Dominion](#)" on YouTube.

Veganism or plant-based eating is essentially just a boycott on an unethical industry. While some vegans are known for acting holier-than-thou, the basic premise is simply reducing unnecessary suffering by reducing one's "dollar-vote" for more animals to be bred into these industries.

Once you know that humans can thrive without animal products, you may ask yourself, "Is this meat or dairy product necessary for my life? Or am I putting my sensory pleasure above the suffering of another sentient being, who I wouldn't harm if I saw in real life?" A certain amount of animal protein may be necessary in the diets of some people. But treating animals (who deserve just as much respect and kindness as dogs or cats) as tasty entertainment begins to weigh heavily on those who know the reality of modern farming practices.

## Info & Recipes

YouTube has an unlimited supply of vegan recipes to try. Here are a few ideas to start with:

[Vegan Nutrition Basics](#) (10 min vid)

[Quick, healthy meals](#) (10 min vid)

[A bit less healthy, a bit more delicious](#) (7 min)

[High Protein Vegan 10-min meals](#) (17 min vid)

[Budget-Friendly Meal Prep](#) (10 min vid)

[12 Meals](#) (in 12 minutes)

[Full Day of Eating](#) (16 min vid)

## Deep-Dives on nutrition:

### [TRACK YOUR NUTRIENTS USING THIS SITE!](#)

Not necessary every day, but do it now and then to get an idea of what you're getting/missing.

Inflammation is the root of many ailments. **Turmeric** is an excellent anti-inflammatory and goes with many dishes like curry, pasta, rice dishes, and even in smoothies or sauces. Mix in some **black pepper** to amplify your body's absorption by 2,000%.

"It is the position of the American Dietetic Association that **appropriately planned** vegetarian diets, including total **vegetarian or vegan diets, are healthful, nutritionally adequate, and may provide health benefits** in the prevention and treatment of certain diseases."

**Plant foods do not have cholesterol**, the main factor in the world's deadliest disease: heart disease. To further prevent heart / circulatory issues, eliminate solid fats like lard, bacon fat, and butter, keep oil to a minimum, and **avoid deep-fried food**.

[Nutritionfacts.org](#) - short, very helpful videos on common nutrition questions.

A 49-year-vegetarian doctor explains the reasoning and health benefits of the diet and dives into the flawed nutrition information from the past: Sometimes racially-biased, sometimes from inadequate science, sometimes profit-driven. ([45 min video here](#))

[Type 2 Diabetes is preventable / treatable](#) with a plant-based diet!

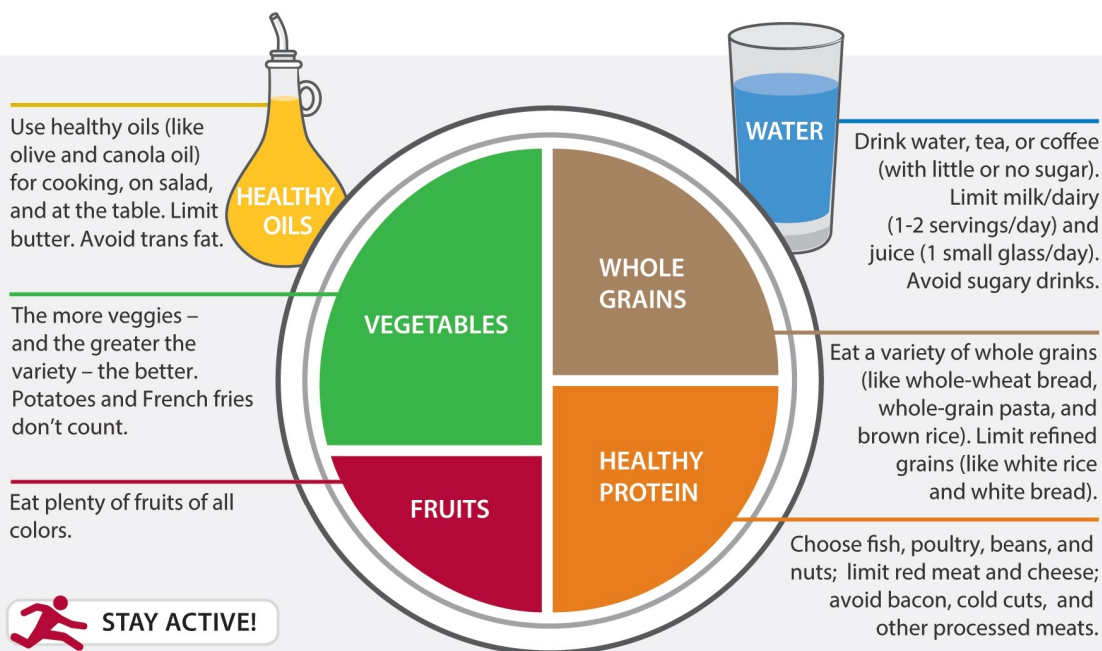
Excellent, informative, entertaining 1-hour [video on foods to protect the body & mind](#).

[My email](#) if you have any questions! :)

-Grant

## From Harvard:

### HEALTHY EATING PLATE



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