

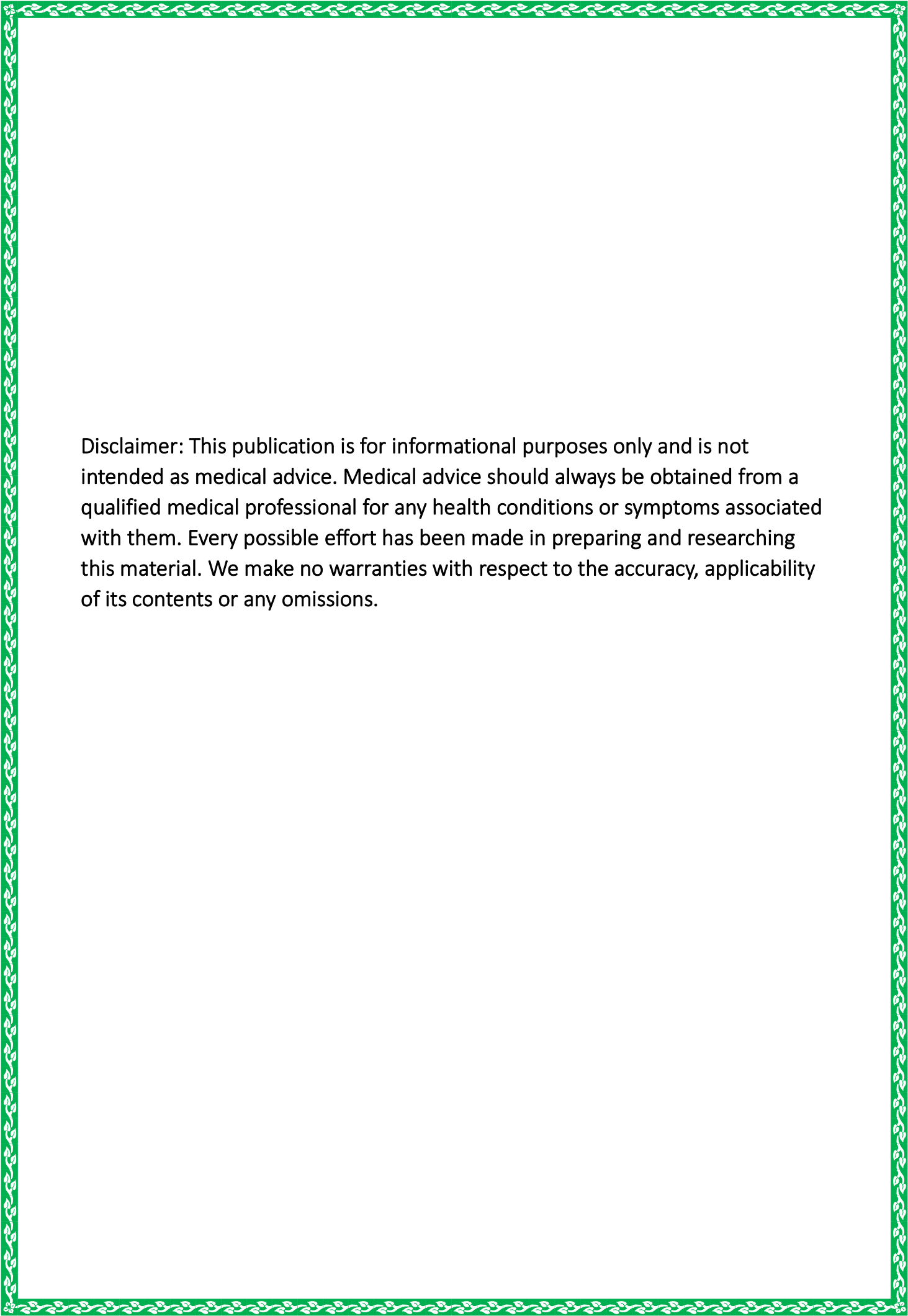
The Vegetarian Diet For A HEALTHY HEART

By The American Institute of Health Care Professionals, Inc.



Table of Contents

Vegetarian Diet 101	1
Types of Vegetarians	4
Vegan	4
Ovo-Lacto	4
Lacto	4
Ovo	4
Partial	4
Vegetarianism And Your Health.....	5
Cancer	5
Type 2 Diabetes.....	6
Heart Disease	6
Vegetarianism And A Healthy Heart	7
7 Tips For Going Vegetarian.....	11
Addressing Vitamin Deficiency	13
Vitamin B12.....	13
Omega 3 Fatty Acids	13
Protein.....	13
Iron & Zinc	13
How To Deal With Cravings For Sweets When You're Trying To Lose Weight	14
Addiction	14
Habit	15
Follow-through	15
In the short-term.....	15
Long-term Prevention.....	16
Final Thoughts	18



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Vegetarian Diet 101

There are a lot of reasons people choose to become vegetarians. There are environmental reasons, religious convictions, health considerations, and of course, animal welfare concerns. It may even be a budgetary requirement, perhaps you simply can't afford to be a meat-eater.

There has never been a better time in history to shun meat and embrace vegetarianism. Fresh, affordable produce is more than just appealing, it's accessible. There are more options when eating out, and many restaurants are geared entirely to vegetarians.



A 2019 poll from the Vegetarian Resource Group found that 4% of Americans identify as a vegetarian or vegan (https://www.vrg.org/nutshell/Polls/2019_adults_veg.htm). A further 20% of people say they eat vegan meals sometimes or all the time. Meanwhile, many people have chosen to continue eating fish and/or chicken but have eliminated red meat.

Typically, research into the topic of vegetarian has been focused on nutritional deficiencies. Thankfully, that's changed in the last few years. The pendulum is finally starting to swing the other way. Studies now are discovering the many health benefits of vegetarianism.

Today, a vegetarian diet is recognized for two things. One, it's nutritionally sufficient for anyone to follow provided they are doing so correctly. Secondly, it can also be used to decrease the risk of certain chronic illnesses.

The American Dietetic Association suggests that a vegetarian diet, properly planned, may provide health benefits to treat or prevent certain diseases (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19562864>).

The important point here, though, is properly planned. There is a recommended guideline for nutrition. There is a certain amount of fat we should consume, there's a balance of proteins, whole grains, and produce we need to achieve.



These are the dietary choices that influence weight control, fat consumption, and overall health and wellness. Think about it like this, technically speaking, a diet of just soda, chocolate, candy, potato chips, and cheese pizza is vegetarian.

So, it's possible to eat *vegetarian*, but get it completely wrong in terms of health.

For the purposes of your health and wellness, if you choose to embark on a vegetarian diet, then it's crucial that you balance it with plenty of fresh produce, whole grains, healthy fats, and appropriate sources of protein.

Moreover, if you consume too many calories, even if they come from a nutritious source, you will still gain weight. So, portion control is still an important aspect of eating vegetarian. So, much as any other diet one undertakes, vegetarians need to read nutrition labels just as religiously as everyone else does.

Additionally, you can enjoy many of the same health benefits of vegetarianism by going *part* of the way. Eating a diet like the Mediterranean diet has been linked to a longer lifespan and reduces the risk of chronic illnesses.

The focus of a Mediterranean diet is plant-based foods, meat is consumed only sparingly. So, if you aren't quite ready to make the full jump to vegetarianism, then you may want to consider transitioning into a Mediterranean diet first.

For those who are completely unwilling to even consider a vegetarian diet, there are still plenty of easy ways you can increase your healthy intake of plant-based protein and scale back on meat. It's up to you to decide whether it's right for you.



Types of Vegetarians

In the strictest sense of the word, a vegetarian is someone who doesn't eat seafood, poultry or, meat. However, lots of people call themselves vegetarians. So, let's take a gander at the different types of vegetarians. You might just find a home for yourself in one of these categories.



Vegan

A vegan is someone who doesn't eat fish, poultry, meat or any product that has come from animals including gelatin, eggs, cheese, and other dairy products.

Ovo-Lacto

This vegetarian *does* eat dairy products and eggs, but they don't indulge in fish, poultry or meat.

Lacto

An ovo vegetarian does eat dairy products, but in addition to shunning poultry, fish, and meat, they also refuse eggs.

Ovo

Eggs are on the menu, but no dairy, fish, poultry or meat.

Partial

A partial vegetarian tends to be fine with eating fish, possibly poultry, but all other meat products are off the menu.

Vegetarianism And Your Health

As compared to meat-eaters, vegetarians typically consume less cholesterol and saturated fat, while consuming more fiber, potassium, vitamins C and E, folic acid, and flavonoids. This, according to The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition (<https://academic.oup.com/ajcn/article/89/5/1627S/4596952>).

What does that mean for your health? Well, this balance contributes to lower bad cholesterol levels (LDL), can reduce your blood pressure, and contribute to a lower BMI.



All of these are associated with a longer lifespan *and* less risk of chronic diseases. Let's take a look at the research so far.

Cancer

There have been numerous studies on cancer and diet. Eating lots of vegetables and fruit may help you in protecting against a variety of cancers. Now, increasing your intake of fruit and vegetables is going to boost your plant intake.

It's just that being a vegetarian makes it easier to get the recommended servings of fruit and vegetables. There has been a suggestion that fish and poultry along with a heavily plant-food diet is sufficient. (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3048091/>). Regardless, this shows that cutting out red meat can help you eliminate the risk of colorectal and colon cancer.

Type 2 Diabetes

The biggest study into vegetarianism and type 2 diabetes was focused on Seventh Day Adventists. Part of their faith requires them to practice vegetarianism, so they provide us with an excellent research pool.

What researchers have found in their studies is that, after BMI is taken into account, Seventh Day Adventists are 50% less at risk of developing Type 2 Diabetes (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6153574/>) versus non-vegetarians. A vegetarian diet may also contribute to the treatment of type 2 diabetes.

Heart Disease

Of course, a vegetarian diet contributes to a healthy heart. It was important to make that point here, but we'll expand on it further below.

Vegetarianism And A Healthy Heart

There is evidence that following a vegetarian diet can reduce the risk of heart health issues. Specifically, vegetarians run a reduced risk of heart attacks, heart events, and death from heart problems.

The largest study on the matter is a meta-analysis of five studies. Over 75,000 people participated and it showed that vegetarians are 25% less likely to die from heart disease (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10479225>). This, of course, was also covered in the study that followed Seventh Day Adventists.

If you want to take a proactive approach to your heart health, then a vegetarian diet can be protective. If you choose whole grains that high in fiber, low GI legumes that digest slowly, then this will help you manage your blood sugar.



Moreover, the soluble fiber found in many fruits and vegetables will help you maintain a healthy cholesterol level. Whereas, refined carbohydrates and starchy foods like white rice, potatoes, and white flour can cause a spike in your blood sugar levels. This doesn't just increase the risk of diabetes, it also increases the risk of cardiac issues, such as heart attacks.

Another heart-protective plant food? Nuts! Nuts are low on the Glycemic Index, but they also contain plenty of healthy fats, minerals, antioxidants, fiber, and protein. Just be careful with the portions as they pack a high-calorie punch, too. In particular, walnuts are an excellent option. They are an excellent omega 3 fatty acids source, which comes with plenty of health benefits of its own.

The University of Oxford published a major study in the British Medical Journal in September of 2019 (<https://www.bmj.com/content/366/bmj.l4897>). Almost

50,000 people participated in this study that spanned between 1993 and 2001. The objective? To analyze the link between a vegetarian diet and the risks of strokes and ischemic heart disease.

When the results were published, the media fell over themselves to report on it (<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/sep/04/being-vegetarian-lowers-heart-disease-risk-but-increases-chance-of-stroke>). This study found that being a vegetarian reduces the risk of heart disease but increases the risk of stroke.

That seems to be bad news for vegetarians, but there's a bit more to it than that! The media chose to lead with the stroke news, barely mentioned the reduction of heart disease until many paragraphs in. Let's look at the study.

Over the 18-year study, the vegetarian group reduced their risk of developing heart disease. They were 20 fewer heart disease cases per 1,000 vegetarians who took part in the study. There were also pescatarians involved in the diet and they still experienced the same reduced risk of heart disease.

Now, the heart disease issue may be easily explained. Vegetarians tend to have lower blood pressure, lower cholesterol levels, and a lower BMI. A plant-based diet contributes to all of those positive health factors, which explains *why* vegetarians are heart-healthy.

As for the stroke issue, the strokes occurring in vegetarians were hemorrhagic versus the more common type of stroke ischemic. The former is caused by bleeding around or inside of the brain. Whereas, the common stroke is caused by a blood clot that blocks the supply of blood. A hemorrhagic stroke is caused by high blood pressure.

Based on the information above, also in the study, that doesn't make much sense. Considering the fact that we learned vegetarians tend to experience improved levels of high blood pressure. It's inexplicable. No aspect of eating a vegetarian diet properly increases your blood pressure.

The researchers can't quite explain why the stroke factor came through, but what is clear is the positives far outweigh the negatives.

This cohort study targeted vegetarians using health stores, magazines, newsletters, and medical offices. Each volunteer was required to complete a questionnaire regarding their diet.

However, questions were also included regarding education, lifestyle, weight, age, height, overall health, and location. Almost 25,000 participants were meat-eaters, almost 8,000 were pescatarians, and just over 16,000 were vegans or vegetarians.



The completed a follow-up survey in 2010. This was to determine whether their diets had changed and how. They were followed for 18 years. None of the participants in this study had any cardiovascular diseases at the beginning of the study. Results were adjusted to account for alcohol, smoking, activity, supplements, medications, education, and socioeconomic status.

Overall, this study suggests that a vegetarian diet bolsters heart health.

What about the idea that eating a vegetarian diet can *reverse* existing heart disease? If it was as easy as that, wouldn't everyone be doing it? This idea isn't new. In fact, it's been circulating for decades. As a vegetarian diet has become more popular, the idea it can reverse heart health has become a hot topic of conversation.

Everyone knows that changing your lifestyle, diet, and prescribed medications can slow the progress or heart disease. Whether it can reverse it or not is a conversation for another day (once there are more studies, that is). So, if you

have an existing heart disease problem, it's unlikely that following a vegetarian diet will *reverse* that. However, it absolutely can bolster your heart health! Now, that's not to say that there *haven't* been studies on the subject of vegetarianism reversing existing heart damage. There was one in the 1980s, but it involved just 22 participants. Of them, four saw a reversal of their condition.

There was a more recent story. In 2014, almost 200 participants joined a strict plant-based diet. The results were incredible, with 22% of them experiencing a reversal of their heart condition.



The problem with this study, though, is it wasn't just a typical plant-based diet. Everything was cut out, including sugar, salt, fruit juices, nuts, avocados, processed food, and more. So, while the results of this are positive, it would be an incredibly difficult diet to follow with the level of restrictions required to get results.

Again, these are small studies. What we know for sure is that a vegetarian diet can help you reduce the symptoms of heart disease, and also reduce the risk of further damage.

7 Tips For Going Vegetarian

If you aren't quite ready to commit to an entirely vegetarian diet, you can increase your intake of plant-based meals and snacks. This will help you reduce bad cholesterol levels and boost your heart health. There's nothing wrong with mixing meatless meals into your meal plan.

- **Top Tip One**

Most of the saturated fats Americans consume come from full-fat dairy products and meat products.

Decrease that animal fat intake and you automatically (and easily) reduce your saturated fat

intake. As you reduce the animal fats, you can increase plant foods.



It isn't complicated either – portobello mushrooms exist and make a big, meaty burger. Going meatless doesn't mean a boring diet, nor does it mean giving up on some of your favorite comfort foods. You can do most family favorites meatless.

- **Top Tip Two**

It's easier to go meatless when you move the spotlight and shine it on the traditional side dishes. Vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, those should be the star of every meal. They're rich in fiber, packed with minerals, vitamins, and phytonutrients. Half of your plate should be filled with vegetables. Now you're talking.

- **Top Tip Three**

If you're struggling to get started, then the easiest way forward is to go meatless one day a week. It's important to note that not only is a vegetarian diet great for your wallet, it's also good for your waistline.

Vegetarians often consume fewer calories. As for your bank balance, legumes as a protein are far cheaper than meat. Per pound, meat is the most expensive protein source available. On your meat days, you may want to consider ditching red meat and instead embrace oily fishes and skinless poultry.

If you can't resist meat, keep your portions to 3 ounces, and always opt for the leanest option possible. You can make it healthier by grilling or baking it.

- **Top Tip Four**

It's so important that you make your choices healthy ones. It's easy to drop meat if you decide to eat a quiche instead. However, in terms of heart health, that's going to make a difference. A vegetarian diet should be about making healthy decisions.

- **Top Tip Five**

Make your life easier by stocking your pantry and refrigerator with plant-based foods. Keep tofu, vegetables, fruit, whole grains, nuts, and beans on-hand. You may want to plan your meals as well; this will make life a little easier if you feel tempted by unhealthy meals.

- **Top Tip Six**

Seek out meatless meal recipes. You might be surprised to learn just how many options are out there and how fun cooking without meat can be.

- **Top Tip Seven**

Keep meatless meals and healthy plant-based snacks handy when you're at work and on the go, too.

Addressing Vitamin Deficiency

There are concerns about certain vitamins and nutrients that a vegetarian diet may lack. We're happy to address them here.

Vitamin B12

This is a vitamin that is mostly found in animal products, which includes dairy and eggs. So, if you choose to go meatless but still embrace eggs and low-fat dairy, you'll still get plenty. If you have cut out *all* animal products, you'll need to choose foods that are fortified with vitamin B12 or opt for a supplement.

Omega 3 Fatty Acids

We typically think of fish when we discuss omega 3 fatty acids. Fish is a great source of it, but it's also available from nuts, soy, and oils. So, you should still be able to get plenty of it from a healthy diet.

Protein

Most vegetarians should have no problem getting plenty of protein. Eggs and dairy products are an excellent protein source. If, however, you do not eat animal products at all, there are options.

Plant-based foods like lentils, nuts, peas, chickpeas, whole grains, beans are all fantastic sources of protein. These are likely the foods that will replace meat in your diet so it's a good like for like exchange. Simply combine plant-based proteins at each meal to make sure you're getting the protein and nutrients you need.

Iron & Zinc

Despite concerns, there is no evidence that vegetarians in western countries struggle to get enough iron. In fact, it appears as though vegetarians and meat-eaters get the same amount of iron from their diets. The difference is that the

iron that comes from red meat is quickly absorbed. You can improve your body's ability to absorb iron with vitamin C.

Likewise, there doesn't seem to be any real evidence that vegetarians suffer from zinc deficiencies. Zinc is found in all of the healthy foods a vegetarian should be eating, such as whole grains, legumes, and nuts.

How To Deal With Cravings For Sweets When You're Trying To Lose Weight

There is literally nothing worse when you're trying to lose weight than having to deal with cravings-- especially sugar cravings.

Sugars are carbs, but they're simple and unhealthy carbs. Moreover, nearly everything we eat with added sugar is usually highly processed with an added fats and unwanted preservatives.

Addiction

So, what do you do when you're trying to lose weight, and a sugar craving hits? The first thing to do is to understand why you're craving sugars in the first place. When we eat sugars, our body rewards itself with a release of endorphins.

So, you got to ask yourself if you're craving that sugary snack because you want a pat on the back?

Sugar cravings are more about our internal rewards, in much the same way drugs and alcohol are to addicts, rather than our body's need for nutrition.

If this is why you're craving sugar, then this is what you need to address.

Habit

Another reason we might crave sugar is habit. It's highly unlikely that you remember being a baby, but the first taste we crave as human beings is sweet for some reason. Eating sugars and sweet things may come more from habit than anything else.

If you're capable of having a bite or a piece, then there's not likely going to be any harm done to your weight loss plan if you give in every now and then.

However, if you're an emotional eater, or one of us who will take 10 bites if we take just one, then it's probably best to stay away from sweets in general.

Follow-through

Regardless of whether you're a champion of self-control or just human, there are several things you can do that will curb immediate cravings when they happen, prevent long-term cravings, and strengthen your will.

The thing is that none of these are permanent solutions nor will they work for everyone. Simply put, diminishing sugar cravings only really works over the long-term so it makes sense that fighting sugar cravings takes time.

In the short-term

Some things you can do that will minimize your cravings for sugar in the moment include:

- Drink a glass of water
- Change your scenery
- Give in with moderation
- Force yourself through the craving

Now, obviously no human being has the will of iron. You can force yourself through a craving once or twice—maybe a handful of times. The problem is that this behavior isn't sustainable or really all that healthy.

Forcing yourself through a craving without giving in might work if you're driving to an appointment or out where your pantry or the grocery store isn't handy. The problem occurs at the next craving, or the next. Trying to will yourself out of a craving will only increase the likelihood that you eventually break and then binge.

On the other hand, giving in and having a single cookie isn't likely to break your calorie, or fat count if you can stop at just one.

Indulging when you have a craving without bingeing will give your brain the reward it's seeking and quiet your desires. The trick here is moderation. For some, this is easier said than done.

Another in the moment stop-gap you can deploy is to change your scenery. Take the dog for a walk or go for a run. Either activity will release endorphins which is one of the things your body is looking for. On the other hand, you can take a hot bath, or move to a different room. Instead of washing the dishes, go fold the laundry or clean the bathroom. Separate yourself from your pantry.

If you decide to take a bath, take a hot one. Not a cold or cool one. Also, take a bath. Not a shower. Make sure the water is just barely bearable and sit in the tub for a while. When you get out, you'll experience a sort of euphoric, almost dazed, high. This doesn't work for everyone in the strictest sense, but there's no harm in trying it. At the very least, it'll keep you busy.

Long-term Prevention

To prevent sugar cravings in the long-term, some things you can do are:

- Cut added sugars from your diet all together.
- Minimize your lifestyle stress levels.
- Look for quality over quantity.

You've heard of crowd-out? By adding in healthy sweets like bananas, and berries you can push the unhealthy chocolate cakes and ice-cream sundaes out of your diet by adding in fiber rich sources of natural sugar. Also, look to avoid added sugars. Part of the reason we like the foods we do is that our taste buds are accustomed to them.

By cutting out added sugars all together, you can get that sugar out of your tongue and start enjoying naturally sweet foods more because they'll essentially grow on you.

Also, check your stress levels. One of the reasons your body may be looking for that euphoric high or a reward may be stress. If you live with constant stress it may be time to google a few words:

- Live simply
- Enjoy life
- MINIMALIST

Mostly, we're just kidding here, but seriously... Check your stress levels. Like your diet, your stress level and lifestyle are cumulative. Neither exists in a vacuum. Finally, if you're not quite willing to give up sugars all together to lose weight, the maybe put quality over quantity. Think: Mississippi Mud Pie over Supersized candy Bar.

Reach for something that you have to go on an extra mile to get. Whether it's driving 40 minutes to the only restaurant in your city, county, or state that serves your favorite desert or spending 3 hours making it from scratch you're more likely to appreciate it more and savor the treat longer.

Moreover, if your brain gets accustomed to simply reaching for a sub-par candy bar, your craving might become more demanding than it would be for something you also have to work in some way for that's of higher quality.

Final Thoughts

What's clear from the research into vegetarian diets is that it's a smart health decision. It doesn't matter whether you're currently dealing with heart disease or you're trying to future-proof your heart, it's a good choice.

Following a vegetarian diet properly will help you manage your BMI, lose weight, and protect against a wide range of health issues. All of these things work hand



in hand to improve heart health and prevent issues like blood pressure and cholesterol from occurring. The key is this, following a *proper* vegetarian diet.

You cannot simply drop meat and choose unhealthy food items to replace them. A healthy diet is vitally important to your overall health and wellness. That's something that everyone, not just vegetarians, needs to take into consideration.

There's no point in going meatless if you exchange that protein for candy and soda. It's all about embracing whole grains, fruit, vegetables, legumes, and other healthy food items. A plant-based diet is an excellent tool to improve your health, boost your energy, and protect your body. There just so happens to be the added benefit of cost-efficiency.

It's okay if you're not quite ready to commit yourself to a completely vegetarian diet. Just follow the tips above to get started. You might just find that it's much easier than you anticipated – from there, you can do anything. Experimenting with meatless recipes is a great opportunity to get creative and see what you're capable of in the kitchen.