

"Where else might animal products be lurking?"

Reading labels is something that is essential to being vegan. Many products contain ingredients like eggs, milk, honey, butter, or other animal products. An example of this is that most commercial margarine contains various dairy products. Other less obvious ingredients to avoid include gelatin, whey, and casein.

This list is far from complete. For a more comprehensive list get the list published by the Vegetarian Resource Group (www.vrg.org). Also, feel free to contact Compassionate Action for Animals for more information.

"Is that all?"

Hopefully this article will help you make the transition to veganism. It may not be totally painless, but it's well worth the effort. If you want to live a life where you do as little harm as possible, then veganism is the right decision. If you value your own health and want to preserve a high quality of life as long as possible, then veganism is also the right decision. You may consider it a sacrifice to give up some of things you've become attached to, but the animals whose lives you are saving will be grateful, as will your own body.

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A Vegan Primer

by David Rolisky

With Carl V. Phillips, PhD.

You may have been thinking of going vegan recently. You may have been thinking about how you don't want to participate in a system that values animals solely for their economic benefits to their "owners", a system that is willing to engage in any cruelty, no matter how atrocious, for the sake of making money. But you may also have been thinking about how hard it can be to make a change in your lifestyle and diet. You may have been thinking that you're the only person out there with your concerns. You may even have been thinking that a vegan diet isn't healthy. Maybe you're currently still eating the standard American diet and the distance to veganism seems to be just too great. It's not. This leaflet will give you the basic knowledge you need to make a significant change in your lifestyle, a change that is good for the animals, good for you, and good for the planet.

"Is this diet going to kill me?"

First of all, any fears you may have about the healthiness of a vegan diet are exaggerated. According to Gill Langley, a Ph.D. in biology and author of *Vegan Nutrition*, "it is clear from the example of many thousands of vegans worldwide that a varied plant-based diet not only supports health and well-being but, additionally, can have positive health benefits" (Langley 1995). What this means is that not only is a vegan diet as healthy as the standard American diet, it is actually much healthier. A vegan diet is protective against such major killers as heart disease and cancer. Increasingly, modern research is showing links between the consumption of animal products and conditions such as diabetes and asthma (Langley 1995). A vegan diet is also an excellent way of maintaining a healthy weight. Because most (though not all) vegan foods are less dense in calories than animal-based foods, it is possible to eat them until you feel full without consuming more calories than your body needs.

The key here is that these health benefits all come from **varied** vegan diets. You might wonder how there could be any variety in a diet without meats and dairy. The Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM), a group of physicians dedicated in part to the promotion of public health, has come up with the New Four Food Groups to help define what makes up a healthy plant-based diet. These groups are whole grains (breads, pastas, and cereals, etc.); fruits; vegetables; and legumes (beans, peas, and soy milk, etc.). The PCRM recommends five servings per day of whole grains, at least three servings from the vegetable group, three or more from the fruits group, and two to three servings a day of legumes. These recommendations not only ensure that you will get excellent nutrition, but also help avoid the boredom of eating only a few foods meal after meal.

All this is not suggest that eating a healthy vegan diet requires an exceptional amount of planning. Just by cutting the animal products out of your diet, you will already have improved your health by quite a bit. There is probably no such thing as the perfect, simple diet, but it's a lot easier to be healthy on a vegan diet than a diet including meat, eggs, or dairy.

You might be concerned about whether a vegan diet might be lacking in important nutrients. There is a lot of misinformation about this floating around, but you can rest assured that you will not be

lacking. The most common concern, protein, is actually no problem at all. Any decent vegan diet (not soda and chips) will provide more than enough protein, protein that is in no way inferior to that from animal sources. For most other essential nutrients, you will have no trouble getting more from a vegan diet than from a meat-based diet. Indeed, meat eaters have lot more to worry about when it comes to nutrient intake than any vegan.

The only exceptions to this are calcium and vitamin B-12. Calcium need not be a problem, but if you just drop dairy from your diet (a **very** healthy thing to do) without finding another calcium source you might not get enough. Fortunately, many vegetables (especially dark leafy greens) and other foods (fortified orange juice and soy milk, some tofu) have plenty of calcium. Vitamin B-12, which our ancestors probably got from eating dirt and meat-eaters get from animal flesh, is not naturally available in any plant foods. Fortunately, many foods like soy milks, cereals, and breads are fortified with B-12. Nutritional yeast (specifically Red Star T6635+, sometimes called "Vegetarian Support Formula"), a particular yeast grown to contain B-12, is a delicious substitute for sprinkled cheese and is included in many vegan recipes. And if you are at all concerned, you can easily find supplements in multivitamins or specific B-12 pills. But there really shouldn't be much concern: our bodies store years worth of B-12 and only a handful of cases of B-12 deficiency have ever been reported among vegans.

Naturally, anyone, vegan or not, with special nutritional needs (such as pregnant women) should learn more about what they are eating than they can from a short discussion like this. Indeed, it is not a bad idea for anyone. More information about vegan nutrition can be found in any of the books listed in the nutrition section of Compassionate Action for Animals' Recommended Reading List. In addition, we also have a leaflet called *Basics of Vegan Nutrition* written by Carl V. Phillips and Virginia Messina, which covers these issues in more depth.

"But what am I going to eat?"

Now that you know that it's both safe and desirable to eat a vegan diet, the question becomes "What do I eat?". First of all, you can simply make small changes to many of your current favorite recipes. Take the meat out of your tacos and replace it with beans. Take the meat out of your spaghetti sauce and replace it with textured vegetable protein (TVP) or simply enjoy the taste of the vegetables alone. Make a vegetable stir-fry with tempoh over rice and leave out the animals. There are even soy "cheeses" and "meats" that you can use if you just can't live without the taste. I refuse to eat many of these products because the taste is **too** realistic. There are several amazing macaroni and "cheese" recipes which can be made using nutritional yeast flakes. For dessert try some Torfutti or Rice Dream, (both similar to ice cream), Imagine brand puddings, or have some vegan cake, cookies, or pastries.

If you like to cook, there are hundreds of vegan and vegan-friendly cookbooks out there. A good one to start with is *The Compassionate Cook*, which you can buy from Compassionate Action for Animals. In addition to having wonderful recipes in their own right, many cookbooks will help you convert your favorite non-vegan recipes to something that is better for you and for the animals. If you have Web access, take a look at www.vegweb.com for an enormous list of vegan recipes.

For baking, there are also easy replacements for both eggs and cow's milk. Among the numerous possible egg substitutes are mashed bananas or tofu, apple sauce, and a commercial product called Ener-G Egg Replacer. Cow's milk can be replaced by soy milk, rice milk, nut milks, or even oat milk.

While at first, some of these foods may seem scary, they will soon start to feel quite comfortable. I used to be a die-hard meat-eater. As a child, I thought that going to McDonald's for a Big Mac and fries was a real treat, and I cringed at the thought of eating undigested vegetables. You couldn't have paid me enough to eat tofu. Nowadays, the smell of meat drives me out of the room and my mouth waters at the idea of some stir-fried broccoli, peppers, onions, cabbage and tofu. What is really exciting is that I am now enjoying more foods than I ever did before. I was so addicted to cooked flesh and grease that I couldn't learn to appreciate the innumerable flavors of plant-based foods.

And don't think that you can't ever eat out again. Ethnic restaurants serve numerous foods suitable for vegans. Vietnamese, Ethiopian, Mexican, and Middle-Eastern restaurants are among the many possibilities for a vegan eating out. When you are ordering, don't be shy about asking questions. Be polite but don't hesitate to ask detailed questions or to explain your needs in depth. Restaurants are a service business, and should be happy to meet your needs.

A few warnings about various foods. Mexican dishes may use lard in the preparation of the beans or tortillas. Asian restaurants may often use fish sauce, chicken stock, oyster sauce, or shrimp paste, even in dishes marked vegetarian. This is because in many Asian countries vegetarian is defined simply as not eating animal flesh. Most dishes can be made without these ingredients. Middle-Eastern restaurants often use yogurt and butter as part of their sauces. Indian restaurants may use ghee, which may or may not contain dairy, in the preparation of many dishes, as well as yogurt. Vegetable oils can easily be substituted for dairy-based ghee. Again, ask them some questions. Any good restaurant will be happy to find a way to serve you better.

"I don't have to go naked, do I?"

The most difficult animal product for a vegan to avoid in regards to clothing is leather. Some people will tell you that there is no reason to not wear leather, because it's just a by-product of the animal industry that will go to waste. However, research by University of Minnesota faculty member Carl V. Phillips shows that leather accounts for 3.8% of the profits made by raising cattle. If the leather business were to disappear, approximately 2% fewer cows would be slaughtered each year. To put this in perspective, that is more than a million cows per year. Leather is **not** a harmless by-product.

Leather is most common in the form of shoes, belts, wallets, and purses. Of these, the most difficult to replace is shoes, especially dress shoes. Vegetarian Shoes in the UK and Aessop in the US both specialize in the manufacturing of non-leather shoes, including dress shoes, sneakers, and working and hiking boots. Leather belts can easily be replaced by canvas, nylon, or plastic belts. A good source of non-leather wallets are outdoor outfitters, which sell high quality nylon wallets.

Other animal-derived clothing includes wool, silk, and down.

"Can I still shower?"

Most hygiene and cosmetic products sold in this country are both tested on animals and contain animal ingredients. Fortunately, totally vegan products are becoming much more available. One brand, Tom's of Maine, is available in many mainstream supermarkets. All of their products are free of animal ingredients except for their "propolis and myrrh" toothpaste. Many other brands are available at co-ops and health food stores. Beware of mainstream products that are marked as "cruelty-free." These products may not have been tested on animals but often contain animal by-products among their ingredients. Look for products explicitly labeled as containing no animal ingredients.

"But won't my friends and family shun me?"

Being vegan can sometimes make participation in "normal" social activities more difficult. How you handle this is up to you. Some people may choose to bring their own food to various social functions. Others may prefer to try to work with the people providing the food in order to reach a suitable solution. Caterers are usually happy to provide specialty foods as long as they are given advance notice. Another good solution is to host social functions in order to preempt any possible food problems. Invite your family to your place for Thanksgiving, or volunteer to do the cooking. Your relatives will hopefully be willing to trade the meat for the convenience, and it provides a good platform to introduce others to vegan foods.