

Top five benefits of a plant-based diet

By now almost everyone has heard about at least some of the benefits of eating a plant-based vegan diet. The past two years have seen explosive growth in not only the number of vegans, but also those who are moving in that direction.

If you're curious about the plant-based lifestyle and want to learn more, Ottawa Veg Fest is a great place to start. The 7th Veg Fest is occurring on June 4-5 at the RA Centre (2451 Riverside Drive) and has more than 80 exhibitors and a line up of great guest speakers and cooking demonstrations. (For more details visit www.vegfest.ca.)

You can also sign up for the [31-day Vegan Challenge](#), which is being led by registered dietitian Susan Macfarlane.

Need some more convincing?

It's better for your heart

Heart disease is the #1 killer in North America, and the most reliable evidence we have indicates that elevated cholesterol levels are a primary cause. A plant-based diet, which is free of cholesterol and saturated animal fats, has been very successful in preventing and treating the disease.

Evidence suggests that a plant-based diet may protect against and even reverse heart disease. Heart disease was found to be almost non-existent in populations eating a diet centered around whole plant foods. Plant foods are the only source of heart-healthy fiber, while animal products are the only significant source of cholesterol. For [links to more detailed evidence and studies](#), Michael Greger MD's Nutritionfacts.org is a great resource.

It may contribute to preventing and slowing cancer

Cancer is North America's #2 killer, and diet may be its #1 cause. Significant evidence suggests that a whole food, plant-based diet may contribute to preventing, treating, slowing and even reversing cancer progression.

Some reasons why plant-based diets may be effective include lowering methionine intake, inhibiting [inhibiting angiogenesis](#), intercepting carcinogens, and increasing fiber and antioxidants. Populations eating diets centered on whole plant foods have lower rates of cancer. Eating at least nine servings of fruits and vegetables per day may boost detoxifying enzymes, lower inflammation, lower cholesterol, and promote healthier bowel movements, ridding the body of excess estrogen and cholesterol

It helps with maintaining a healthy weight

Those who eat more strictly plant-based diets have on average much closer to an ideal body weight. Meat has been found to increase the risk of being overweight, obesity, and obesity related diseases. Vegans and those who avoid animal products (even part of the day, or part of the week) often have low rates of obesity, and on average weigh 5 to 20 percent less than meat eaters.

Conversely, fiber-heavy plant-based diets rich in fruits, vegetables and whole grains may help prevent weight gain, promote weight loss, and maintain desired weight by increasing resting energy expenditure, up-regulating metabolism, and improving satiety, among other things.

According to a study in the *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, people who eat a vegetarian or vegan diet lose more weight than those who eat meat. Researchers reviewed 12 studies with more than 1,150 people who followed different weight loss plans for 4-5 months. Those who followed a plant-based diet shed roughly four pounds more on average than those whose meals allowed meat.

It's way better for the environment

According to the 2006 [Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations](#) (FAO) report *Livestock's Long Shadow*, industrialized agriculture contributes on a "massive scale" to global warming, air pollution, land degradation, energy use, deforestation, and biodiversity decline.

The FAO report estimates that the livestock sector (which provides includes leather, wool, milk, eggs, fertilizer, pharmaceuticals, etc., in addition to meat) contributes about 18 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions expressed as 100-year CO2 equivalents. The report concluded that the livestock sector is one of the top contributors to the most serious environmental problems, at every scale from local to global.

A 2010 report from the [United Nations Environment Programme's](#) (UNEP) International Panel of Sustainable Resource Management later stated: Impacts from agriculture are expected to increase substantially due to population growth and increasing consumption of animal products. Unlike fossil fuels, it is difficult to look for alternatives: people have to eat. A substantial reduction of impacts would only be possible with a substantial worldwide diet change, away from animal products.

You live in closer alignment with your core values

Even if you don't identify as an "animal lover," most people would agree that they don't want to cause unnecessary harm to animals.

When you consume a plant-based, vegan diet, you are taking tangible action towards reducing your negative impact on the lives of animals. Estimates of how many animals per year each person eats range from 30-100 animals, or thousands over a lifetime, and the vast, vast majority of farmed animals are raised in abysmal circumstances.

Isn't it always better to choose kindness towards animals?

**Don't miss Ottawa Veg Fest on June 4-5 at the RA Centre (2451 Riverside Drive)
www.vegfest.ca**