

## Chapter 1

# The Lowdown on Vegan Eating and Living

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Making the connection between diet and health
  - ▶ Building a whole vegan lifestyle
  - ▶ Experiencing the spiritual side of veganism
  - ▶ Responding to common questions about vegan living
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**A** vegan is the ultimate, hard-core vegetarian. Someone who follows a vegan diet avoids eating, drinking, wearing, using, or otherwise consuming *anything* that contains animal ingredients or that was tested on animals. This means a vegan eats pretty much everything except dairy from cows, sheep, or goats, (or horses, if you're ever visiting Mongolia), cheese, milk, butter, eggs, meat, poultry, fish, shellfish, or honey.

In this chapter, you discover the vast health benefits of a vegan diet, what vegan living entails, and how to deal with the common (and often ignorant) questions that people will likely ask you about your lifestyle choice.

## *You Are What You Eat: The Health and Food Connection*

If you want to be vibrant, healthy, and full of energy, you should eat fresh, healthy, vibrant foods. If you feel bloated, tired, sluggish, and full of aches and pains, you should look to your diet first to see whether the culprits are hiding on your plate. Answer these questions to get a better sense of what's really going on in your body:

- ✓ Do you feel tired and unfocused during the day?
- ✓ Do you use caffeine to help you wake up in the morning?

- ✓ Do you have sugar, caffeine, or salt cravings?
- ✓ Do you drink regular or diet soda?
- ✓ Do you have high blood pressure or high cholesterol (or both)?
- ✓ Are you overweight or obese?
- ✓ Do you get bloated or have stomach cramps after eating?
- ✓ Do you often have headaches, depression, or moody outbursts?
- ✓ Do you eat most of your food from fast-food joints, packages, or boxes?
- ✓ Do you have problems with constipation or diarrhea?
- ✓ Do you eat fried foods often?
- ✓ Do you have skin problems like acne, eczema, or rashes?

If you answered yes to even a few of these questions, your diet needs a serious cleanup.



Moving to a vegan diet that's based on whole, unprocessed grains, beans, vegetables, and fruits, with some nuts and seeds thrown in, will give your body everything it needs to heal and recuperate from years of abuse. The benefits are clear, and it isn't difficult to figure out how to eat this way.

If you want to live a life of high-energy, peak experiences, and accomplish your biggest goals and dreams, you need a diet that will fuel your body to meet those challenges. Meet the challenges without meat!

## *Heart-healthy, low-fat, cholesterol-free foods*

Place your hand over your heart and feel it beating. Say out loud, "Thank you, heart, for always beating even though I don't always treat you so well. From now on, I promise not to be so hard on you."

Vegans, as a group, have healthier blood pressure levels and a lower risk for heart disease. Several major studies have shown that vegans and vegetarians are 15 to 20 percent less likely to die from heart disease than meat eaters.

If you have high blood pressure, just use a whole-foods, vegan diet for two weeks, and then get retested — you'll most likely show an improvement. Plant foods are lower in fat and sodium and higher in potassium (a mineral that helps to lower blood pressure) than meat- and dairy-based foods. These are key reasons why switching to a vegan diet will improve your heart health.

Because vegan foods are naturally free of cholesterol, your arteries are less likely to get clogged up with the stuff. Humans do need cholesterol for many

different functions, but the human body produces what it needs. Animal products are the biggest sources of cholesterol in modern diets, so eating a diet rich in whole, vegan foods cuts out the clogs pretty quickly. Not only will eating a low-fat, high-fiber vegan diet help you avoid heart disease, it's also been proven to reverse *atherosclerosis*, or the hardening of the arteries.

## *Feeling fine with fiber*

Fiber is the part of plant foods that our bodies can't digest. Not being able to digest something sounds bad, but it's actually excellent! All that fiber gets mashed up by your chewing and fills up your stomach, leading to a feeling of fullness when you eat more of the healthy complex carbohydrates. Simple carbohydrates, like white bread, rice, pasta, and sugar, have little fiber, so they get digested quickly and you don't fill up on them.

Not only does fiber fill you up quickly, but it also cleans you out when it moves through your intestines. Moving things out fast is a must for overall health! This "fiber brush" effect scrapes out the food particles that can get stuck in the nooks and crannies of your gastrointestinal system. All this fiber means more elimination, which is a great way to keep the body clean and devoid of rotting material. One of the negative effects of a diet heavy in simple carbohydrates and meat is the huge amount of leftover rotting flesh and pasty glue stuck in people's colons. The fiber brush effect is one of the main reasons why vegans have less colon cancer.



As vegans avoid the modern, processed diet and go for the veggie-based one, they get abundant vitamins, *phytochemicals* (chemical compounds found in plant foods that have health-promoting properties), and fiber associated with lower cancer rates.

If you're eating a whole-foods based diet, you're already taking in more fiber than the average person. The vegetables with the highest amounts of fiber are artichokes, beans, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbages, carrots, eggplant, leafy green vegetables, mushrooms, potatoes with the skin, pumpkin, peppers, rhubarb, spinach, and sweet potatoes. High-fiber fruits include apples, avocados, bananas, berries, dried fruit, guava, kiwi, oranges, pears, and prunes. Whole grains, nuts, and seeds also are good sources of fiber.

The American Heart Association and the Institute of Medicine recommend that adults consume 14 grams of fiber for every 1,000 calories eaten. For vegans, this level is no problem to achieve: 1 cup of peas has almost 9 grams; 1 cup of black beans has 19 grams; 1 banana has 3 grams; ½ cup of blackberries has more than 4 grams; and 1 tablespoon of shredded coconut has more than 3 grams. Vegan food is fiber-rific!

## Raw foodists and macrobiotics

Just when you thought veganism couldn't get any more specific, here come the raw foodists and macrobiotics. Two distinct sects of the “vegan religion,” raw foodists and followers of the macrobiotic diet choose to eat plant-based diets that are prepared a certain way and avoid even more ingredients than a straight-up vegan.

A raw foodist eats uncooked or slightly prepared foods that can be warmed in dehydrators to only as much as 118 degrees Fahrenheit. While some raw foodists do eat raw fish such as sushi, or even raw chicken, eggs, or meat, a majority of these folks are vegan.

Macrobiotics eat a diet based on traditional Japanese foods, which can be slightly adjusted to include local ingredients. As with raw foodists, many Macrobiotics include fish in their

diets, but a good percentage avoid all animal foods and are vegans. These vegans tend to eat mostly cooked food with a focus on whole grains like brown rice, and tend to avoid tropical and raw fruits.

People tend to choose one of these diets for health, spiritual, or environmental reasons, and many documented cases from both diets have been shown to cure diseases, including cancer, diabetes, heart disease, obesity, arthritis, digestive problems, and depression. While the two diets seem to be in complete opposition to each other (one is almost 100 percent raw and the other is almost 100 percent cooked) they're both rich in health-promoting plant foods and can be useful to people experiencing health problems.

## *The power of proper protein*

Vegan protein offers so much more than the building blocks for muscles. Because they have other magical components like fiber, complex carbohydrates, minerals, and vitamins, you can actually heal your body with vegan protein sources. In fact, according to the American Dietetic Association, a vegan diet “may be useful in the prevention and treatment of [kidney] disease . . .”

So while you're getting all the amino acids you need from your well-planned and diverse vegan diet, you can feel confident that you're also adding the natural healing components of plant foods. Eating truly healing and nutritionally dense foods — now that's smart!

## *The healing power of plant foods*

Food was the first medicine, and a vegan's “kitchen pharmacy” can be well planned to help prevent and treat illness. Traditional healers and doctors used willow bark to treat fevers and inflammation for centuries before science discovered that the bark was teeming with *salicylic acid*, which is the inspiration and foundation of aspirin. This drug has been prescribed to people with cardiovascular problems for decades.

Here are a few foods that have been studied medicinally over the years:

- ✓ **Green leafy vegetables from the *cruciferous*, or cabbage, family:** These vegetables are known to help the body fight cancer growth. Broccoli, bok choy, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, and kale are all part of this group, so dig in. Not only do these greens offer great cancer-fighting properties, they're also rich in vitamins, minerals, and fiber. Eating these veggies is a win-win-win!
- ✓ **Ginger and turmeric:** These spices have been the most studied botanicals in recent years. They have incredible healing properties and can easily be worked into your daily diet. Ginger is used for nausea, digestion disturbances, gas, and reducing the effects of chemotherapy. Turmeric, a spice common in Indian cooking, is used for improving liver function, arthritis pain, reducing inflammation, and heartburn as well as in cancer treatment and prevention.
- ✓ **Garlic:** This powerful food can be used as a natural antibiotic and antifungal agent. As well as having anticarcinogenic and antibacterial attributes, garlic is used to treat ear infections, sinus problems, high blood pressure, and cholesterol.
- ✓ **Mushrooms:** Edible mushrooms aren't just a great meat replacement for vegans. They're a powerful class of medicinal foods. Mushrooms and their extracts are used to treat cancer, strengthen the immune system, and reduce inflammatory conditions.

These foods are only a few of thousands of plants, herbs, and spices used for centuries to heal and protect human health. By relying on these powerful plant-based foods, your kitchen truly can be a natural pharmacy.

## *Living Vegan Beyond Your Diet*

Veganism doesn't stop at the dinner table — it leaps out of the kitchen and transforms your whole life. From what you wear to the products you buy to beautify yourself and your home, vegan living encompasses every aspect of your daily life.

### *Fierce, fabulous, fur-free fashion*

A full vegan lifestyle not only includes a diet of solely plant-based foods, it also is dedicated to avoiding harming any living creature for any type of fashion product, whether it be handbags, shoes, sweaters, belts, or coats. Most vegans don't buy new leather, wool, or silk. Chapter 11 shows how vegan fashion can be fun and fabulous without being cruel.

## *Keepin’ it real at home*

Home is where the heart is, and a vegan home takes every purchase to a deeper level. Your home should reflect your beliefs by offering sanctuary, entertainment, and space to nourish and nurture yourself and your family according to your values.

Learn to express your individual style as a vegan at home using cruelty-free materials and decorations. Cleaning your home, making up your face, and washing your hair take on new significance when you use products that are nontoxic and not tested on animals. The labels and brands discussed in Chapter 11 can help you choose fantastic products that work for your home, body, and morals.

## *Staying vegan in a nonvegan world*



After you know that you want to live a vegan life full of integrity, you may find areas of cruelty-free living that you just don’t know anything about. Part III illustrates the nuts and bolts of daily life as a plant-food lover. Knowing how to shop for food, cook it, and make it delicious are the most important, basic, vegan skills a person can have. Even if you can’t boil water or your cupboards are as bare as Mother Hubbard’s, Chapter 7 can walk you through the steps of creating a basic vegan kitchen.

Living in a vegan bubble with vegan friends who love to make vegan food would be ideal, but many of us live in “mixed families” of meat and veggie heads. The combining of food ethics at home can be tricky, but Chapter 8 helps you navigate the choppy waters of sharing a kitchen with a carnivore.

Living a vegan life can be challenging if you don’t map out a plan in advance. So, like a five-star general plotting a path through enemy territory, wise vegans ensure their success by learning how to strategize. Chapter 9 shares menu suggestions, healthy vegan snack lists, and shopping and meal planning guides. Integrating these blueprints on a regular basis takes the stress out of shopping, cooking, and living a busy, modern life.

## *Energetically Speaking: The Spiritual Side of Veganism*

Various religions around the world have specific dietary rules to demonstrate their faith. Some religions avoid pork products or alcohol and others

set aside certain days for fasting. The spiritual side of food has a long history that vegans can adopt to create a deeper connection with other people and animals.

Here are just a few of the many religions that have adopted vegan or vegetarian lifestyles:

- ✓ **Buddhism:** Buddhists believe that every person should try to minimize the harm that they inflict on all beings. This belief has led several Buddhist sects to live vegan lifestyles. Cultivating a “pure heart” by making the extra effort to be as compassionate as possible easily translates into avoiding eating meat and other animal products.
- ✓ **Jainism:** Jainism is an ancient religion from India that has conscious nonviolence at the center of its dinner plates. Even though most of the Jain are vegetarians and do eat dairy or eggs, growing numbers are becoming vegan. Spiritual followers of this dharma religion believe that to be truly nonviolent, they must avoid enslaving or mistreating animals in order to take their milk or eggs.
- ✓ **Seventh-day Adventism:** Seventh-day Adventists are Christian vegetarians who have been well-studied for their dietary choices and health. These religious vegetarians and vegans believe that “demonstrating reason and restraint in daily life” by avoiding meat, tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drugs brings them closer to God. These Bible passages often are quoted to justify their food choices:
  - “I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seeds; to you it shall be for food.” (Genesis 1:29)
  - “And you will eat the plants of the field.” (Genesis 3:18)
  - “But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat.” (Genesis 9:4)

Following these Biblical guidelines, most Seventh-day Adventists are vegetarian, but many are becoming vegan as they further develop their spiritual beliefs.

For the rest of us vegans who don’t belong to a specific religious group, the spiritual side of a plant-based diet encompasses many traditions. Every meal or bite brings with it an awareness of the pain and suffering that we’re preventing for other creatures. Vegans know they’re making a difference every day in the lives of others, and they take much pleasure and happiness in that. By constantly cultivating compassion, vegans protect the lives of other humans, animals, and the wide world around us.

## *Tackling Common Questions about Veganism*

Vegans answer questions on a weekly basis about their choice to avoid animal products — so get familiar with the facts and get comfortable explaining your logic and actions. Chapter 26 even lists the most common questions you'll hear along with plenty of information to stop your inquisitors in their tracks!

### *Why on earth would you live like that?*

Vegans see the bigger picture when it comes to making a difference with small, daily actions. For those who may not readily understand this concept, you can just brag about how much healthier you're eating with a vegan diet.

Besides, most Americans are just sick and tired. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, more than 34 percent of Americans are obese, and another 32 percent are overweight — that means 66 percent of the adults in this country could stand to lose more than a few pounds! The numbers of children that are obese and overweight are just as bad. According to the Centers for Disease Control, 32 percent of children in the United States are overweight, and 16 percent are obese. A whopping 11 percent of children are extremely obese.



All those extra pounds cause more problems than just making it difficult to find jeans that fit right. The top causes of death in America are heart disease, cancer, stroke, chronic lower respiratory diseases, accidents, and diabetes. If you're overweight but wearing your seat belt and a helmet, you're still more likely to die because you're eating a high-fat, refined diet.

The good news is that lettuce-loving vegans tend to be on the skinnier side without much effort. Some vegans are overweight, but it's a much smaller percentage of the population, consisting of around 11 percent. Membership in the vegan club has its privileges!

Not only are vegans less likely to be overweight or obese, they're also healthier overall compared to the general meat-eating population. Modern dairy and meat products have been proven to contribute to the growing numbers of people with colon, breast, ovarian, and prostate cancers. A study from



Harvard University showed that regular meat consumption increased a person's risk of developing colon cancer by about 300 percent. Eating a diet high in fat causes the human body to produce more estrogen hormones, which have been linked to breast cancer.



The good news for vegans is clear: Even if you're choosing to eat a cruelty-free diet for ethical or environmental reasons, you'll still gain substantial health benefits. And improving your own health gives you the stamina needed to create a healthier, more positive world for the rest of life's creatures!

## *What can a vegan eat?*

As you transition to veganism, you're bound to hear people say, "You don't eat dairy? Or meat? What *do* you eat?" For strangely deep, emotional reasons, people will get passionately weird about your eating choices, but don't let this scare or deter you.



The world is ripe with vegan options if you know how to look for them. And more than 300 vegan cookbooks are on the market, so you'll never be at a loss for inspiration or delicious recipes. Table 1-1 provides a sample of vegan foods that most people eat regularly without realizing it. Included in the table are the nutrients that those vegan dishes provide.

To get started with your vegan culinary skills, check out Part IV. These chapters offer delicious, healthy vegan recipes to get you through breakfast, lunch, and dinner as well as snacks and desserts.

## *Is it a balanced diet?*

At first you and your family may question whether you can get all the nutrition you need from a plant-based diet. The answer is absolutely! Protein, calcium, iron, and B12 are the main nutrients that newbie vegans need to pay attention to — and it's so easy to get enough from whole grains, beans, nuts, seeds, vegetables, fruit, and a couple of supplemental foods or vitamins.

Not only do vegans get enough protein, calcium, and iron, they get more fiber, vitamins, antioxidants, and phytochemicals than nonvegans. That's because they tend to eat more fresh fruits and vegetables! Chapter 4 uncovers the truths about bone health, the mysteries behind common diet-induced diseases, and options for nutritional healing.

**Table 1-1 Common Vegan Foods and Their Nutrients**

<b><i>Food</i></b>	<b><i>Nutrients</i></b>
Beans and rice	Protein, fiber, and complex carbohydrates
Garden salad with oil and vinegar	Fiber, phytonutrients, and monounsaturated fats
Coconut curry with vegetables and rice	Healthy fats, vitamin C, calcium, complex carbohydrates, and fiber
Hummus, pita bread, and olives	Protein, complex carbohydrates, and monounsaturated fats
Black bean dip, salsa, and guacamole with tortilla chips	Iron, protein, complex carbohydrates, fiber, vitamin C, and lycopene
Gazpacho and grilled corn on the cob	Vitamin A, and lycopene
Three-bean salad	Protein, fiber, and complex carbohydrates
Lentil soup with whole-grain bread	Protein, fiber, iron, and complex carbohydrates
Oatmeal with almonds, raisins, and maple syrup	Protein, complex carbohydrates, iron, and fiber
Steamed broccoli, tofu, and brown rice	Calcium, iron, protein, and complex carbohydrates
Stir-fried vegetables with udon noodles	Complex carbohydrates, vitamin C, iron, and calcium
Peanut butter and jelly sandwich on whole-grain bread	Protein and complex carbohydrates
Couscous with chickpeas, parsley, garlic, and lemon	Complex carbohydrates, protein, iron, vitamin K, vitamin C, and fiber
Pasta primavera with white beans, olive oil, and basil	Fiber, complex carbohydrates, protein, and monounsaturated fats