



Maximum Nutrition: Transitioning Toward a Plant-Based Diet

With Michael Greger, M.D.

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“The most ethical diet just so happens to be the most environmentally sound diet and just so happens to be the healthiest.” – Dr. Michael Greger

Resources:

- Vegetarian Resource Group of Tucson -- VRGT (www.vrgt.org)
- 2003 American Dietetic Association position paper on vegetarian diets (http://www.eatright.org/Public/GovernmentAffairs/92_17084.cfm)
- Vegetarian Living pamphlet, from Vegan Outreach (www.veganoutreach.org)
- Vegetarian Starter Kit, from the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (www.pcrm.org)
- Meatless Mondays, Johns Hopkins School of Public Health (<http://www.meatlessmonday.com/about/faqs.html>)
- “The Compassionate Cook” cookbook, by Ingrid Newkirk (1993)
- “The Saucy Vegetarian” cookbook, by Joanne Stepaniak (2000)
- “Living Among Meat Eaters: A Vegetarian’s Survival Handbook,” by Carol J. Adams (2003)

“Isn’t it hard to go vegetarian? Open-heart surgery – that’s hard. Spaghetti’s easy.” – Dr. Michael Greger

Health Facts:

- Vegetarians have lower rates of obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, cancer, arthritis, kidney disease, gall bladder disease, hemorrhoids, constipation, appendicitis, etc.
- How much of disease is attributable to meat? – two-thirds of all high blood pressure, one-fourth of heart disease, 40% of cancer, one-third of diabetes, three-fourths of gall bladder disease, one-half of obesity, and almost all of the food poisoning
- U.S. Surgeon General says 2 out of 3 Americans die because of what they eat
- The U.S. government spends \$10 million a year to educate the public about healthy eating (that’s 2 days of advertising budget for McDonald’s)
- Less than a quarter of medical schools have a single course in nutrition

Practical Tips on Making the Transition

You could go “cold tofu,” but Dr. Greger recommends the following method:

Three Step Method (from PCRM):

Research shows the average American family rotates the same 8-9 dinners throughout the month.

- 1) Step One: List all the dinners you currently eat, and identify 3 meals that you already eat that are already vegetarian (i.e., Pasta Primavera, Spaghetti with Marinara Sauce, Vegetable Stir Fry)
- 2) Step Two: Identify at least 3 meals you already eat that could easily be adapted to become vegetarian (i.e., bean instead of beef burritos, vegetable broth instead of chicken broth, see products listing below for more substitution ideas)
- 3) Step Three: Explore 3 new veggie options. Consult vegetarian cookbooks, check out the local library and the Internet for cookbooks and recipes. Vegetarians report more variety in their diet than meat-eaters.

Now you have your 9 dinners and can move on and repeat the same method with lunch and breakfast.

Specific Grocery Substitution Products Mentioned by Dr. Greger:

- Yves Canadian Veggie Bacon
- Tofutti Better Than Cream Cheese
- Yves Breakfast Links
- Lifespring Flax Plus Toaster Waffles
- Fantastic Foods Tofu Scrambler mix
- Silk Soymilk (plain, vanilla, chocolate)
- WholeSoy & Co. Creamy Cultured Soy Yogurt (or Silk soy yogurts)
- Smart Deli slices (ham, salami, turkey)
- Yves deli slices
- Tofurkey slices
- Tuno (dolphin and tuna friendly!)
- Follow Your Heart's Vegemaise (vegan mayonnaise)
- Yves Veggie Dogs
- Health is Wealth Chicken-Free Nuggets
- Boca Burgers
- Road's End Organics Mac and ChReese
- Tofutti Better Than Sour Cream
- Bacos (they're already plant-based!)
- Hain Chicken-Flavored Gravy Mix
- Tofurkey Giblet Gravy
- Soymage Vegan Parmesan cheese
- Nate's Meatless Meatballs
- Yves Veggie Ground Round
- Lightline Smart Ground
- Soymage Vegan Cheese (also Follow Your Heart's Vegan Gourmet and Tofutti vegan cheeses)
- Yves Veggie Pizza Pepperoni
- Smart Menu Steak-Style Strips
- Fantastic Foods Sloppy Joe mix
- Veggie Ribs (Gardenburger Meatless Riblets or Now & Zen UnRibs)
- Soy Delicious ice cream (Tofutti brand also is good)
- Tofutti Cuties ice cream sandwiches
- Worthington Wham (aka vegetarian Spam – not vegan)
- Cascadian Farms Organic Blueberries
- Bionaturae whole-wheat pasta (isn't too chewy/grainy!)
- Red Star Vegetarian Support Formula Nutritional Yeast (fortified with B12)

VRGT NOTE: Personal preference plays a large role in which brand and variety of some vegetarian products you may like (taste, texture, etc.). So, don't stop at trying just one soymilk, one veggie burger, one vegetarian hot dog, one vegan cheese if you don't like the first one you try – keep trying different brands until you find the ones you personally like. Feel free to email us at info@vrgt.org at any time if you would like recommendations or ideas. Also, if you are concerned about animal ingredients in your food, check labels periodically, as items that were once vegetarian or vegan may change their formulations without you realizing it.

“Ask yourself: Is it reasonable that if a consumer undercooks a hamburger their 3-year-old dies [from eColi / fecal bacterial contamination] – the meat industry evidently seems to think so. ... Yet another reason why I decided to only eat things that didn't have bowel movements.” – Dr. Michael Greger

Food Safety:

- According to the Centers for Disease Control, 75 million people get food poisoning every year (that's 1 in 4) – no such thing as 24-hour flu, that's food poisoning
- 1 in 840 people will be hospitalized, 1 in 55,000 will die from food-borne illness (restaurants, schools, homes)
- 9 out of 10 Thanksgiving turkeys contaminated with *Campylobacter* (most common cause of bacterial food poisoning), 75% contaminated with 2 or more food-borne incl. salmonella, which is growing dangerously resistant to 5 major classes of antibiotics
- eColi – In 2002, ConAgra recalled 19 million pounds of beef, with little or no public outrage (if terrorists infected food supply, it would be a big deal, but when it's a powerful U.S. corporation, it's “business as usual”)
- Fecal-tainted meat and pus-tainted dairy, by-products of intensive factory farming

Healthy Eating Through Vegetarianism:

- Zero cholesterol in all plant foods (plants don't have livers)
- Vegetarian doesn't necessarily mean healthy
- Vegetarians tend to be healthier not only because they're not eating meat but also because they're eating more vegetables.
- Pile veggies on everything! (Instead of pasta with vegetables, have vegetables with pasta.)
- Vegetables are storehouses of phyto-nutrients (phyto = plant). Some vegetables are better than others.

Keys to Healthy Eating:

- Colorful foods
 - Eat the rainbow every day (rather than beige/white foods)
 - Dark green leafy (collard greens, kale, spinach) and “honorary” greens – cruciferous veggies like broccoli, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, bok choy
 - Think of dark green leafy veggies as a combination of all colors, and therefore one of the healthiest foods
 - Tufts University says top antioxidant veggies are kale, spinach, Brussels sprouts, alfalfa sprouts and broccoli
 - Deep yellow or orange (pumpkins, carrots, sweet potatoes)
 - Blue and red berries (Tufts University says top antioxidant fruits are blueberries, blackberries, strawberries and raspberries)
 - Deep yellow or orange (oranges, cantaloupe, apricots, mangos) – whole better than juiced
 - Red (tomatoes, pink grapefruit, watermelon)
- Flavorful foods
 - Ginger, fresh herbs (oregano, sage, peppermint, thyme), garlic, and onions
- Whole, unrefined foods
- Good carbs vs. bad carbs
 - Good = whole foods
 - The refining process of grains extracts 25 vitamins and minerals, and only 5 chemically replaced when “enriched”
 - Bad = refined foods
- Good fats vs. bad fats
 - Great = Omega-3s (flaxseeds, walnuts, dark green leafy veggies)
 - Good = monounsaturated (found in whole foods such as nuts and avocados)
 - Eat nuts or nut butters every day (if you’re not allergic)
 - Bad = saturated fats (commonly found in animal products, rarely in vegetables)
 - “Killer fats” = trans fats (only found in animal products or vegetable oils that are hydrogenated to act more like animal fats)
 - National Academy of Sciences says only safe intake of trans fats is zero

Other Healthful Habits:

- Fresh air, exercise, laughter
- Love yourself, others and what you do for a living
- Wear seatbelts and bike helmets
- Limit alcohol
- Quit smoking
- Practice safe sex
- Eat breakfast every day

Breakfast:

- Most important meal of the day
- Improves mental and physical performance, lowers cholesterol and maybe even slims waistline (skipping breakfast slows metabolism, but eating breakfast boosts energy level and is more filling, so you don't eat so much at lunch)
- Breakfast is a good opportunity to eat whole grains, such as toast, hot or cold cereal (avoid processed cereals with added sugar)
- Oatmeal is a great breakfast option – oatmeal varieties are nutritionally identical, just cooking times and texture different (rolled, quick, instant); avoid flavored instant oatmeal with added refined sugar, sweeten with fruit (raisins, berries, banana slices) instead
- Oats have soluble fiber that lowers cholesterol
- Soluble fiber also found in beans (including soymilk), nuts, and ground flaxseed

“The single-most scientifically proven dietary change to lose weight is to increase fiber intake.” – Dr. Michael Greger

Essential Nutrients:

- Protein is available in many different plant foods (combining foods is a myth) -- eat legumes (beans, peas, lentils) every day
- Plant protein is even better because animal protein has so much baggage (soy vs. steak, same quantity of protein, but steak has more calories and saturated fats, and soy has antioxidants)
- There is no essential nutrient exclusively found in meat, there are vegetarian alternatives for all
- Vitamin D – actually a hormone skin makes when exposed to sun; also found in fortified soymilks and cereals, supplements or multi-vitamins
- Vitamin B12 – made by microbes naturally found in water, but lacking now that water is treated (chlorinated); also found in fortified soymilks and cereals, supplements or multi-vitamins

- Everyone needs minerals: zinc, iron, calcium (vegetarians don't have worse rates than meat-eaters, everyone need these); found in beans, greens, nuts, seeds, fortified foods
- Omega-3 fatty acids: walnuts, dark green leafy vegetables, flaxseed is most concentrated source, not fish (which has risk from heavy metals like mercury and other toxins)
- Keep in mind 1,800 phyto-nutrients aren't listed on the food labels

Other Tips:

- Price savings – shop at Asian markets, get frozen veggies, shop for produce in season, shop at farmers markets
- Cutting prep time – buy pre-chopped frozen or fresh veggies
- Getting kids to eat veggies – your example/enthusiasm, grow your own, let kids help pick out, read veggie-oriented stories, think of veggies as convenience foods, make edible art, sneak pureed veggies into sauces and grated veggies in muffins
- Support and information through local vegetarian society and veggie websites
- Self-pressure shouldn't get in the way of trying to reduce consumption of animal products; it doesn't have to be all or nothing
- Moving toward vegetarian diet or even partially vegetarian diet is a highly personal choice
- It's not about giving up things, it's about abundance

RECIPES

Blueberry-Flax Smoothie

2 Tbls. flax seed (brown or golden)

½ frozen banana, the riper the better

½ c. frozen blueberries

Other fruits (optional)

1 c. organic soymilk

- Place flax seeds in blender, spice grinder, coffee grinder or food processor and grind into meal. Blend ground flax seeds, frozen fruit and soymilk in blender until smooth. Serve immediately.

Flaxseed Egg Replacer

1 Tbls. flax seed, ground

3 Tbls. water

- Blend or whisk ground flax seeds and water well. Replaces one egg in baking.

Shitake-Miso Soup

2 c. water

1 c. shitake mushrooms, dried (cheaper at Asian markets, good source of zinc, concentrated source of Vitamin D, decreases cholesterol and boosts immune system)

1 c. chopped spinach

Drop of sesame oil (optional)

4 tsp. unpasteurized miso paste (lighter color has sweeter, less salty, more mellow flavor)

- In medium saucepan, bring water, mushrooms, spinach and sesame oil to a boil over medium heat. Remove from heat. Skim off some hot water and put it in a separate bowl. Add miso (2 tsp. per cup of water in recipe), whisk, then add back to soup. Serve immediately.
- Other options: Add cubed tofu with the mushrooms. Add cooked barley with the miso. Add vegan Parmesan cheese and/or Asian chili sauce for extra flavor with the miso.

Lemon-Tahini Salad Dressing

1 pkg. silken tofu (12 oz.)

¼ c. tahini (sesame seed paste)

¼ c. fresh lemon juice (approx. 2 lemons)

2 Tbls. apple cider vinegar

1 clove garlic, chopped or minced

2 tsp. mellow miso

2 tsp. sweetener

½ tsp. dried dill

½ c. water

- Blend all ingredients in a blender or with a hand-held mixer. Drizzle over spinach, or spinach mixed with Romaine lettuce (avoid iceberg lettuce).
- Salad topping options: Beans, chickpeas, broccoli, ground flaxseed, Bacos, vegan Parmesan cheese and/or toasted walnuts.
- **To make toasted walnuts:** Spread raw organic walnuts in single layer on a baking tray and bake at 350 degrees for 5 minutes, until golden brown.

Hummus

1 can chickpeas/garbanzo beans, incl. juice

¼ c. tahini

2 Tbls. lemon juice (1 lemon)

1 clove garlic, chopped or minced

Olive oil or flax seed oil (optional)

- Blend in blender, adding more lemon juice or garlic to taste. Use as a sandwich spread on whole-grain crackers, bread, pita or tortilla, or as a veggie dip.

Buffalo Tempeh Strips

1 pkg. wild rice tempeh

Hot sauce for marinade

- Cut tempeh into strips. Place in a bowl with hot sauce to taste. Marinade for an hour or cook immediately. Bake, broil or sauté marinated tempeh strips until dry and crispy. Eat separately or make into a sandwich.
- Sandwich options: Use whole-grain bread (not multigrain, unbleached, stone-ground – whole should be first on the label), spinach, tomato, tempeh strips, vegan mayonnaise, and slices of avocado.
- Tempeh is a fermented whole soy product high in fiber (tofu is processed soy).

Black Bean-Garlic Stir Fry

Broccoli, zucchini, and red pepper chunks

1 c. water

1 Tbls. Asian black bean-garlic sauce

1 Tbls. tahini

1 Tbls. cornstarch

Fresh ground pepper to taste (1/2 tsp.)

- Sauté in skillet in water or broth. Cover and let steam. Whisk sauce ingredients and add to tender-crisp veggies. Continue to cook until sauce thickens.

Storing, Preparing and Cooking Greens

- Proper storage – greens need moisture and air, so store in partially open or perforated bag with damp paper towel, still will only last a few days
- Keep frozen greens on hand for convenience; fresh, organic, locally grown produce better, but frozen is better for out-of-season produce
- Preparing – clean by dunking into a bowl/sink of water so dirt and sediment sinks to the bottom
- Cooking greens – steam quick-cooking greens like broccoli and spinach; kale and collards need to be cooked longer in a liquid to draw out bitterness (bring 1 inch of water or broth to a simmer, add chopped or sliced greens, cook until bright emerald green with a sweet flavor, reserve cooking liquid for soup base)
- Serve cooked greens with lemon juice, garlic, ginger, soy sauce or caramelized onions
- Another idea: Make an easy pesto sauce by blending fresh greens, basil, tofu, garlic and toasted walnuts

Cooking Whole Grains

- To cook brown rice: Use long-grain brown rice. Use a rice cooker machine, boil, microwave or bake. To boil, add 2 c. water and 1 c. rice to a stockpot and simmer, covered, for 45 minutes. Don't peek or stir, which lets steam escape and makes rice sticky. Microwave 2 c. water and 1 c. rice in covered dish on high for 5 minutes and on medium 45 minutes. Or bake 2 c. boiling water and 1 c. rice at 350 degrees in a covered oven-proof casserole dish for one hour.
 - Try other whole grains, such as barley, amaranth and quinoa
 - To cook quinoa: Rinse quinoa well to remove bitter waxy coating. Swirl in a bowl of water, drain in colander, and repeat until water runs clear. Add 1-1/2 c. water and 1 c. quinoa to a stockpot and simmer, covered, for 25 minutes.
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SAMPLE MENU

Healthy Breakfasts:

- Oatmeal topped with fruit (berries, banana slices, raisins), nuts and fortified soymilk
- Blueberry-Flaxseed Smoothie (see recipe)
- Whole-grain toast with nut butter
- Whole-grain cereal with fortified soymilk and fresh fruit
- Unflavored soy yogurt with fresh fruit
- Whole-grain waffles or pancakes with fresh fruit
- Whole-grain biscuits and gravy
- Tofu scramble with extra veggies (try it in a breakfast burrito with a whole-grain tortilla)

Healthy Lunches:

- Soup, salad or sandwich on whole-grain bread or pita, with added greens and veggies, such as spinach, tomato and avocado
- Shitake-Miso Soup (see recipe)
- Spinach salad with Lemon-Tahini Dressing (see recipe)
- Buffalo Tempeh Strips sandwich
- Hummus sandwich
- Nut butter and jelly
- Veggie deli slices sandwich
- Tuno salad sandwich
- Eggless salad sandwich (recipe in *The Compassionate Cook*)

Healthy Snacks:

- Keep healthy snacks in view and within reach (bowl on table, washed and cut veggies in fridge)
- Fresh fruits, such as grapes, berries, cherries
- Frozen fruits, such as black cherries or grapes
- Dried fruits
- Roasted or toasted nuts
- Trail mix
- Fresh veggies, such as cherry tomatoes, carrot sticks or broccoli florets with Lemon-Tahini Dressing or hummus dip; celery sticks with nut butter
- Whole-grain pretzels, crackers or matzo
- Air-popped popcorn with nutritional yeast flakes or mix 1:1 with water for a drizzle

Healthy Dinners:

- Create entrees using a whole grain (brown rice or whole-wheat pasta) plus tons of veggies (beans count as a veggie serving) smothered in a savory sauce (sweet and sour, barbecue, curry)
- Black Bean-Garlic Stir Fry (see recipe)
- Sweet potato, baked or microwaved, with maple syrup and cinnamon (The Center for Science in the Public Interest ranked sweet potato as the #1 veggie)
- Bean burritos with organic refried beans, whole-wheat tortillas, salsa, greens and other veggies
- Veggie franks and baked beans (add spinach)
- Mashed potatoes and gravy with steamed or covered/microwaved veggies
- Spaghetti (whole-wheat), sauce, veggies, meatless meatballs, vegan Parmesan cheese

Healthy Beverages:

- WATER, drink at least 5 glasses per day
- Avoid milk: #1 source of calcium is dairy – but it's also #1 source of saturated fat and #1 food allergen, full of cholesterol, antibiotics, pesticides; better sources of calcium are vegetable-based = dark leafy greens or broccoli

DAILY CHECKLIST

(for everyone -- meat-eaters, vegetarians and vegans)

- Fruits (min. 4 servings, piece of fruit, half banana)
- Vegetables (min. 5 servings, ½ cup, one of those green leafy)
- Dark green leafy vegetables (collard greens, kale, spinach, etc.)
- Whole grains
- Nuts
- Beans
- Vitamin B12
- Vitamin D
- Omega 3s (2 Tbls. ground flax seeds)
- Calcium
- Iron
- Zinc
- Green tea (2 cups) – not with food
- Water (min. 5 glasses)