



EAT MORE PLANTS!

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You have probably heard the terms plant based or plant forward, but what do they mean to you? Do you imagine a strict vegan or vegetarian diet or do you imagine just eating less meat? Actually, any of those meanings are correct. You can be vegan, vegetarian, or just eat less meat and have a plant forward eating pattern.

Many folks that still eat meat, but less of it, call themselves flexitarians. A flexitarian may eat that steak as a special occasion dish or just use less of it in cooked dishes. If you still want to consume meat, try lessening the portion size of the meat and bulk up the rest of your meal with plant-based foods.

If you are concerned that plant foods do not have enough protein, I have good news for you. They do! According to a review paper in *Nutrition Reviews*, as long as you eat a variety of foods including whole grains, fruits, veggies, nuts, seeds, and legumes you WILL get enough protein. America is obsessed with protein quantity and there is no shortage of it. Plant foods have all of the essential amino acids, but they differ from animal proteins in that some of the amino acids are limiting. Note that I said the word “limiting” and not “devoid of”. For example, beans are limiting in methionine, but they aren’t devoid of it. However, if you eat a VARIETY of plant foods, you will get enough of the amino acids that you need.

Gone are the days of complementary proteins in the same meal. For example if beans are limiting in methionine but higher in lysine, the old recommendation was to eat a grain product such as rice in the same meal, which is higher in methionine and lower in lysine. The new recommendation is that it’s OK to consume complementary proteins within a 24 hour period. That practice of eating them in the same meal has been debunked!



WHY SHOULD YOU EAT A PLANT FORWARD DIET

- Plants have potent disease fighting phytochemicals and antioxidants.
- Plant foods have all essential amino acids!
- Plant foods have a lower carbon footprint than animal protein. According to Christopher Gardner PhD, lead author of the Nutrition Reviews article, a gram of beef produces 7.5 times more carbon emissions than a gram of plant protein.
- Plant based foods such as fruits and veggies can help to lower blood pressure, cholesterol and decrease your chances for developing cardiovascular disease.
- Plant foods contain fiber to keep your microbiome healthy. Your microbiome affects some major functions in the body including weight status, mental health and immunity!

HOW TO START EATING A MORE PLANT FORWARD DIET

- Try Meatless Monday
- Use meat as an accent rather than as the star of the plate
- Experiment with whole grains. There are plenty at the supermarket besides the usual brown rice. Farro, quinoa, millet, whole ground polenta, buckwheat, spelt and rye berries are just a few examples.
- Aim to eat ½ cup of beans, chickpeas, lentils and/or dried peas per day. If you're new to pulses, start with a couple of tablespoons.
- Blend silken tofu into a smoothie.
- Include whole grains at breakfast such as oatmeal, quinoa, or whole grain toast.
- If you think you don't think you like tofu, look up a recipe on how to cook it and buy the super firm variety.
- Make ½ your plate composed of vegetables.
- Add nuts to breakfast, snacks, salads and even stir fries.
- Add fruit to breakfast and snacks.
- When you're eating at HSC dining locations, such as Panda Express, add more veggies to your plate. Swap out those chicken tacos one day a week for a salad at the Salad Spot.
- On the UPC campus, check out the 100% plant based station at the USC Village Dining Hall, acai bowls at The Shop, Café Gratitude grab n' go items at Seeds Marketplace, Indian cuisine at Tutor Café, or the array of market salads at Lemonade.

