

Transitioning to a Vegetarian Diet

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Deciding to become a vegetarian can be simple; but for most of us it presents some challenges. When I was struggling to make the commitment to a vegetarian lifestyle, my teacher simply said, "It's just a decision!" And with that, all my duality dropped away—and I simply did it. But for others it's a progressive change over time. So here are my recommendations for transitioning to a vegetarian diet:

- Everyone's dietary needs are different. By experimenting with a new diet and different foods you can begin to tune into your own body and how the food we eat affects how we feel.
- Add—don't take away—at least at first. Concentrate on adding things into your diet for the first 3 weeks of your transition. That is, make yourself a BIG salad with every meal. Cook up one whole grain per day, either for breakfast cereal or as an accompaniment to your lunch or dinner. And don't forget your beans—at least one serving a day will help maintain your energy over the long-term. And finally, start carrying nuts and a piece of fruit with you when you leave the house to snack on throughout the day.
- Commit to Meatless Mondays—and then progressively add Tuesday, Wednesday and so on. It helps to have support; so invite some friends over for Meatless Monday and explore cooking together.
- Invest in a good Vegetarian Cookbook. Getting ideas from people who've made this transition before you can really be inspiring. There are also great online sites for vegetarian recipes. Bone up on the simple skills of steaming, roasting, and grilling and explore new spices and flavor profiles. Keep it interesting.
- Forget about protein! A solid vegetarian diet with lots of leafy greens and varied grains and nuts has more than enough protein for the average person. Take a B-12 supplement and a multivitamin to round out your nutritional support.
- Eat a savory breakfast. Part of transitioning to a healthy vegetarian diet is to avoid getting stuck eating a meat & potatoes diet without the meat. Steamed greens and miso soup are a wonderful way to start the day without the carbohydrate ups and downs of toast and jam.
- Drink your vegetables. A vegetable and/or fruit smoothie in the morning—use protein powder if you like—is a great way to boost your nutritional regimen while you learn to "eat your vegetables."
- Simplify your life. If you aren't used to cooking or preparing meals, then simplifying your food choices can be a helpful approach. Cook up a large pot of mung beans and rice and eat it every day. It's an easy one

pot meal that you can eat any time of the day. Supplement with a salad or yogurt to keep it interesting.

— If you're cooking for a family, then mix it up with vegetarian casseroles and stews that are sustaining and rich (like a meat entrée) with lighter meals that focus on having the meat course served separately from the vegetables so that you always have nutritional food options while also providing for your family's food preferences. Who knows? Maybe they'll be inspired by your renewed health and radiance and try a vegetarian diet as well.

— Feeling ungrounded? Start taking martial arts. A balanced life requires physical activity; Yogi Bhanan recommended martial arts as a way to ground vegetarians who experienced symptoms of dizziness, light-headedness or lethargy because of their dietary regimen. Know too that eating more nuts and including dairy can help ground you during the transition.

— Finally, if you need a little inspiration, I recommend the following books: *Eating Animals* by Jonathan Safran Foer, *Eat to Live* by Joel Fuhrman, MD, *Foods for Health and Healing* by Yogi Bhanan, and the classic, *Diet for a New America* by John Robbins