

Different plant-based diets

More people are opting for plant-based diets due to ethical, environmental and health reasons. Dietitian, Meagan Atcheson, explains the various plant-based diets.

A plant-based lifestyle is any diet that focuses on eating more foods derived from plant sources. This includes consuming more fruit, vegetables, wholegrains, pulses, legumes, nuts and seeds as well as meat substitutes, such as soya and tofu. This type of diet emphasises minimising the intake of animal products as well as limiting processed foods.

TYPES OF PLANT-BASED DIETS

There are a variety of diets that may fall under the broad term plant-based:

- 1. Lacto-ovo-vegetarian:** Lacto refers to milk and ovo refers to eggs. This type of vegetarian consumes eggs and dairy products but no other animal products.
- 2. Flexitarian:** This style of eating encourages mostly plant-based foods while allowing meat and other animal products in moderation.
- 3. Pescatarian:** Pescatarians don't consume any meat or poultry but occasionally consume fish as part of their diet.
- 4. Vegan:** A vegan diet excludes:
 - Meat and poultry: Beef, lamb, pork, veal, horse, organ meat, wild meat, chicken, turkey, goose, duck, quail, etc.
 - Fish and seafood: All types of fish, anchovies, shrimp, squid, scallops, calamari, mussels, crab, lobster, etc.
 - Dairy: Milk, yoghurt, cheese, butter, cream, ice cream, etc.
 - Eggs: From chickens, quails, ostriches, fish, etc.
 - Bee products: Honey, bee pollen, etc.
 - Animal-based ingredients: Whey, casein, lactose, egg white albumen, gelatine, L-cysteine, animal-derived vitamin D and fish-derived omega-3s.

There are numerous health benefits to following a carefully planned out whole-food plant-based diet which includes a wide variety of plant foods, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts and seeds.



BENEFITS OF PLANT-BASED DIETS

It's always best to seek advice from a registered dietitian who will provide an individualised meal plan to ensure that the diet is healthy and includes a variety of plant proteins as well as other nutrients to prevent nutritional deficiencies.

1. Lower BMI

Research shows that individuals who follow a healthy plant-based diet tend to have a lower body mass index (BMI).

2. WEIGHT LOSS

Several studies show that healthy plant-based diets are effective for weight loss. This may be due to a lower calorie intake as plant-based diets tend to be higher in fibre which leads to feelings of fullness and satiety.

3. Improved glycaemic control in people with Type 2 diabetes

Various studies show that following a low-fat plant-based diet improves glucose control in Type 2 diabetes. Some studies show that individuals on a vegan diet have a 78% lower risk of developing Type 2 diabetes.

4. Cardiovascular health

Plant-based diets may also improve heart health and reduce the risk for heart disease as they are effective in reducing blood pressure, cholesterol and blood glucose levels.

5. Other pros

These diets may also be beneficial in reducing symptoms of arthritis, reducing the risk for developing Alzheimer's and improving kidney function in diabetic patients. However, more research is still needed in these areas.

6. Soya foods and cancer

Research, although limited, suggests that eating whole soya bean products

like tofu, tempeh, edamame, soya milk may have a positive impact on overall mortality and prevention of breast cancer. Women in countries with high consumption of soya foods (Japan and China) appear to have lower rates of breast cancer, and consuming soya-based foods even appears to decrease risk of lung cancer in non-smokers.

7. Reducing consumption of red meat

Particularly reducing processed meats (smoked, cured, had salt or chemical preservatives added) has been linked to a reduced risk of colorectal cancer.

IS A PLANT-BASED DIET GOOD FOR CANCER PATIENTS?

While a nutrient dense plant-based diet has many health benefits, you don't need to change unless you want to. Animal products are often feared by people facing cancer treatments due to the nutrition misinformation out there. For example, currently there is no evidence of any clear link between dairy and cancer. In fact, some studies show increased rates of cancer in those with a lower intake of dairy foods.

Evidence does, however, indicate that eating red meat (beef, pork, lamb) is a probable cause of colorectal cancer, but that processed red meat is a convincing cause of colorectal cancer.

Whatever you decide, please speak to a registered dietitian before embarking on a new diet to assist in meeting your individual needs.



MEET THE EXPERT

Meagan Atcheson is registered dietitian who focuses specifically in oncology. She is a plant-centric foodie who promotes a nourishing approach to health and wellness using evidence-based research and guidelines only.