

Be a Flexitarian: A Short Guide to Plant-based Eating

Reducing your meat intake and embracing a plant-based diet is one of the best things you can do for your health *and* the environment. This approach is not exactly vegetarian, rather, the focus is on lowering your meat intake while increasing your fruits, vegetables and grains. The term for this dietary practice is "flexitarian."

According to research done by Technomic Research and by the Kellogg's company, the flexitarian model includes a movement toward clean labels, shopping locally and by the seasons, and simply knowing where your food comes from. Keeping transportation and environmental costs in mind, this philosophy of eating says support your farmer's market, eat whole foods and limit your meat consumption to grass-fed meats.

One of the concerns voiced about vegetarian and flexitarian lifestyles is a possible lack of protein in the diet. People tend to turn to nuts for extra protein. While nuts do have protein, they also have more fats relative to protein per ounce. There are three categories of healthy meat alternatives that pack in the protein.



1. Legumes – All kinds of beans (black, red, lima, white, pinto), lentils, and garbanzo beans provide almost as much protein per ounce as meats. These beans are great in soups and salads as well as a wide variety of ethnic recipes, including bean tacos and hummus.



2. Grains - Seitan (wheat gluten), bulgur wheat and quinoa are excellent sources of protein and fiber. These ancient grains have been eaten for protein for centuries and lend themselves to any dish where you may typically use rice. Try quinoa with green onions as a side dish at your next meal.



3. Soy-Based - Tofu (bean curd), tempeh (fermented soybeans), and edamame (young green soybeans) are all sources of protein and used in many vegetarian products. These products will take in the flavor of any spice you add to it, making them ideal for stir fry or veggies burgers.

With a flexitarian diet, you don't have to eliminate meat completely to reap the health benefits associated with vegetarianism, such as great heart health and lower risk for diabetes, cancer and other diseases. You can be a vegetarian most of the time, but still eat a burger or steak when you have the carnivorous craving.

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