

Going Vegan without the perfectionism!

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Introduction

Welcome to the world of veganism! Whether you've been thinking about a plant-based lifestyle for a long time or you're just beginning to consider it, I hope you'll find this book a helpful guide in your journey to a healthier, more energized life.

Going vegan has many benefits, from improving your health to enriching your inner life. Following a vegan diet, you can shed extra pounds, tap into new levels of wellness and develop a more compassionate relationship with the world. You'll discover new foods, and hopefully, you'll make new friends along the way.

A lot of people think going vegan has to be hard, but that's not true. I'll show you how to make it easy and stress-free. The key is to see it as a process, a journey that you'll make in your own time and in your own way, rather than expecting everything to be perfect immediately – and judging yourself harshly if it's not.

I'm here to help you live your most fulfilling, confident and joyful life through a plant-based diet. In this book, I'll show you how to get started and how to set yourself up for success as you grow into your new lifestyle.

How I Started My Vegan Journey

Throughout this book, I will advise you to start slowly and think of this as a journey that takes time. My story is a perfect example of that.

I started experimenting with a plant-based diet while attending college in Kansas. For many people, college is a time to explore lifestyle choices, and I was no different. The problem was, I really didn't know what I was doing.

Living a healthy vegan life involves preparing your own food, but when I started out, I really didn't know how to cook. What's worse, I was afraid of seasonings, even salt! I felt that once you added spices or seasonings, there was no going back if you used too much. (This is true, of course, but the thought of adding spices gradually never dawned on me.) I didn't want to ruin my food, so I avoided them altogether.

As an example of the kinds of things I ate, I often bought textured vegetable protein (TVP) and made it into a stir-fry or patties to serve alongside some vegetables. The TVP, basic as it was, probably could have been good, had I been aware of things like cooking techniques or how to season food. But ultimately, the TVP only tasted like...TVP. Slightly vegetal and synthetic. My attempts at vegan chili with TVP were similarly weak.

In the summer, I would make gazpacho, a favorite dish growing up. But given my reticence about seasonings, my gazpacho tasted like canned crushed tomatoes and garlic with little cucumber triangles floating in it. This was the 90s, before

the time of Iron Chef, but I don't think my cooking would have even qualified as Play-Doh Chef!

In addition to my attempts with TVP, I made a concerted effort to like tofu dogs. They were terrible, even swaddled in bread and doused in mustard. Their strange aftertaste (and duringtaste) drove me back into the arms of the even more disgusting traditional hot dogs.

At that time, I don't think I was aware of the existence of non-dairy milks. Even if I had been, I doubt I would have appreciated their uses. So, breakfast was limited to toasted bread and jelly.

I also wasn't sure how to chop or prepare a lot of vegetables, so I steered clear of many of them, too. Tomatoes, potatoes, corn and spinach were my comfort zone, frozen where possible. Any other vegetables I bought would be for a particular recipe, and the unused portion would inevitably go to waste.

When I ate beans, they were from a can, and they were likely part of a 7-layer Mexican dip served with tortilla chips. I didn't know of many seeds or grains except for rice, which I avoided because I'd ruin the pan making it, and hey, that's what restaurants are for. If I did manage to make rice, it was always crunchy and undercooked. Suffice it to say, my grain intake came from bread, preferably studded with nuts and raisins or maybe chocolate.

A major turning point came when I began to learn more about cooking. Thanks to my family, the Moosewood cookbooks helped set me on the right path to creating some delicious and healthy recipes. Without those cookbooks, it would have been overcooked spaghetti and jarred tomato sauce all the way.

Skipping ahead a few years, I moved to New York, attended culinary school and eventually went vegan. It didn't happen overnight, and I'm nowhere near perfect, but I've come a long way in eating a fresh, healthy, plant-based diet that keeps me energetic and happy.

Developing a healthy diet takes time. If your vegan cooking attempts don't yet resemble the gorgeous recipes on Pinterest or Foodgawker, or you feel discouraged as you navigate the boundaries of a plant-based diet, be patient. Things will improve as you explore new ingredients and cooking techniques.

I was recently in a rut with my cooking, but then I thought back to my college diet and realized how far I've come since then. I'm eating and living so much better now, all due to high-quality, delicious plant-based foods. I've learned a lot over the years. Here are a few suggestions based on the mistakes I made:

1. Explore new ingredients. Try to pick up a new type of produce or other ingredient every week or two and experiment. Be fearless! Let a new recipe be your reason for investing in an unfamiliar item and then look for other ways to integrate it into your cooking.

2. Don't be afraid of spices. Spices not only accentuate the flavors of the foods you eat and offer nutritional value, but they also help bridge the gap between the familiar foods you love and your new plant-based recipes.

3. Eat fresh. Perfect even for busy college students, fresh produce as well as bulk grains and legumes are tastier and cheaper than the more processed or packaged options.

4. *Work from reputable recipes.* My cookbook library has grown enormously over the years and helps to keep me inspired all year long. The Internet is a great source of recipes too, though I recommend searching reputable cooking sites.

Most importantly, remember that embarking on a plant-based diet is a process. You don't have to be perfect, and there are so many more delicious discoveries ahead of you.

Making The Leap: When To Go Vegan, When Not To, And How to Get Started

I always say there's only one way to go vegan, and that's YOUR way. On your own time, and through your own habits, you'll evolve your eating and lifestyle in a way that's comfortable for you. This means you can pick the time you get started, the length of the transition and how you go about it.

The way you begin your vegan diet factors into your success. Even with the best motivation, bad timing is enough to keep some people from succeeding. Here are some tips on when to start your vegan journey to help you make a smooth transition.

- *As part of a kickstart project program.* The structure and support from programs like the PCRM's 21-Day Vegan Kickstart or Colleen Patrick Goudreau's 30-Day Vegan Challenge are invaluable for their high-quality information and ability to help you establish good habits.
- *During seasons of abundance.* When there's abundant organic produce available (e.g. late spring/early summer), many new vegans have an easier time finding foods they like. That makes it easier to begin developing habits that will serve them over time. In addition, longer days in April and May mean more exposure to sunlight and fewer cravings for unhealthy foods. People reportedly feel more energy during these months, which results in more activity. By the time cold weather rolls

around again, their good eating patterns have become habituated.

- *In combination with increased physical activity.* Behavioral medicine researchers at Stanford University School of Medicine have discovered that making changes to BOTH diet and exercise at the same time makes you more likely to maintain these healthier habits. Use the momentum created by your exercise regimen to support your dietary changes and vice versa.
- *On a specific date.* Research shows that setting a date to start makes you more likely to reach your goals, whether that date is the first of a month, your birthday or an anniversary. Setting a date enables you to prepare, plan and mark the start of your changes. That helps provide weight and structure for your goal.

In fact, the day of the week matters, too. Many experts suggest preparing for dietary changes on a Sunday to start on Monday. We often view Mondays as a fresh start, a new opportunity. One UK study indicated that people who start diets on Mondays are more likely to stick to them.

- *During a vacation or other break.* This can go both ways. On one hand, when you're on vacation, you have control over your schedule and can more easily assimilate new habits. On the other hand, some say that vacations aren't as "real" as everyday life, so it may be difficult to apply the habits learned while on vacation when you return to your regular schedule. I think it really depends, but in general, having a little extra time to focus on your diet during a vacation is going to serve you well when you return to your everyday life.

There are also less-than-ideal times to begin your vegan journey (or any major changes to your life). Some of the more challenging times to start are:

- *Holidays.* During the holidays, stress, travel and expenses pile up, making it seem overwhelming to think about forming new habits.
- *Times of change.* In the midst of changes such as getting married, having a child or the death of a loved one, your life is turned upside down, for better or worse. When facing massive changes or uncertainty, it's often better to wait until you feel a bit more settled before planning major lifestyle changes.
- *Around deadlines.* Significant deadlines such as final exams or finishing a major work project can interfere with your dietary goals. Part of a healthy vegan diet may involve food shopping or cooking more frequently. If you're faced with major deadlines, you may lack the time to dedicate to these changes. Finish your projects first, so you have enough mental and emotional bandwidth available for the changes you want to make.
- *Feeling under the weather.* If you're coming down with a cold or flu, or dealing with another health condition, you may experience cravings that can disrupt good eating habits. Focus on getting better first.
- *In the wrong mindset.* Being mentally prepared is essential to making lasting changes. You don't want to start a vegan diet out of fear, guilt, or a desire to please someone else. Focus on being committed, happy and calm.

If you're looking to try a vegan diet but the timing isn't quite right, that doesn't mean you have to stand still. You can progress by setting a realistic interim goal, or taking up an enjoyable activity that won't disrupt your life too much. Once you've moved past your current challenges, you'll be even better equipped to begin your vegan journey. Some examples:

- Pick up a book like Victoria Moran's *Main Street Vegan*. Do some fun advance research about being vegan to increase your knowledge in the interim.
- Do some prep work like purging any junk from your refrigerator and pantry. Taking time to streamline your kitchen will help you be successful right from the start.
- Keep a food journal to help you recognize areas for improvement or opportunities for vegan substitutions in your diet.
- Cultivate mindfulness in the way you eat. Slow down your eating and chew food longer. Put down your fork between bites and make meals a time of relaxation and true enjoyment.
- Pay attention to your attitude. Studies have shown that those who have a positive attitude about dietary changes are far more likely to be successful than those with a negative attitude.
- Work on basic habits like getting more rest. You'll be feeling prepared and refreshed by the time you're ready to introduce more vegan dishes into your life.

Whether you're actually ready to start changing your lifestyle right now or not, learning more about veganism is a great use of your time. For some people, a big obstacle to practicing a

vegan lifestyle is feeling overwhelmed by all the details, decisions and things they don't know. The more you can learn in advance, the better.

It's natural to start out with a lot of questions. "Am I getting enough nutrients?" "What do I eat now that I can't have _____?" "Can I still go out to restaurants?"

The good news is you don't need to have all of your questions answered before you begin. You can learn as you go.

For me, answers and realizations have come with time. I think that's true of most people. As you enjoy your plant-based diet one day at a time and read everything you can, you'll find the answers you need. To get you started, here are a few things I've learned from my journey to a plant-based diet.

1. There's Protein EVERYWHERE

For some reason, people tend to assume that meat is the only form of dietary protein, so when you adopt a vegan diet, everyone asks where you get your protein. In fact, getting sufficient protein is easy with a balanced vegan diet.

Depending on your gender, weight and other factors, you'll need roughly 50-80 grams of protein per day. When you're eating foods like oatmeal for breakfast, a lentil salad for lunch, and some broccoli, tofu and brown rice for dinner, you're getting plenty of protein and calcium. Grains, legumes and vegetables (even spinach!) contain substantial amounts of protein. Combining types of proteins so that you receive all of the necessary amino acids makes a plant-based diet even tastier!

2. Bread Is Not a Food Group

Sometimes new vegans default to bread as the centerpiece of their diet because starchy foods like bread seem filling, and many available types (baguettes, ciabatta, ficelles) are dairy-free. The problem is, it's easy to go overboard. While bread is relatively low in calories and fat, it's not ideal as a primary source of nutrients. Today's refined grains, many of which are genetically modified, can dramatically elevate blood sugar levels, increase belly fat, and be almost addictive, stimulating hunger and cravings for more refined carbs. When you're trying to eliminate foods from your diet, this is the LAST thing you need. I found that when I reduced the amount of bread I ate, I was less hungry. I even lost some extra fluff, despite eating more fat in the form of nuts, chocolate and avocados.

It's also important to note that many commercial sandwich breads are not vegan. Consider Arnold Whole Wheat, which contains whey (a milk-derived product) and non-fat milk, as well as a long list of complex ingredients for something that should be very simple. I try to steer clear of commercial breads, but I'll indulge in the occasional local bakery baguette.

3. They're No Longer "Substitutions"

Have you tried any vegan cheeses lately? As a former fromage fanatic, I can tell you they're downright incredible. I've dabbled in faux meat and cheese products for almost two decades, with considerable disappointment. But I'm delighted to report that vegan "meats" and "cheeses" have hit their stride. Both my omnivore boyfriend and I marvel at the tasty vegan sausage, chk'n strips and cheeses available today. Keep an eye out for brands like Beyond Meat, Daiya, Treeline Cheeses, Upton's Naturals and Gardein – all of these companies are making delicious vegan-friendly foods that anyone would enjoy.

While some of these foods undergo some processing, they're great for people new to a vegan diet who crave familiar flavors and textures. I always keep a few of them on hand. They're so tasty and satisfying on their own that referring to them as "substitutions" or "alternatives" is a thing of the past.

4. No More "Chicken or Beef?"

"Chicken or beef?" You'll recall this old-school refrain from weddings and commercial flights. Believe it or not, those two items comprise more than 80% of the meat consumed in the United States. (Just check out the real estate they occupy in your grocery store.) And people say vegan diets are limited?

A plant-based diet is full of options. Look around your health food market and you'll find more types of meat substitutes than there are meats! Unlike the "chicken or beef" model, vegans who dig into the plant-based food landscape will discover an incredible and diverse array of fruits and vegetables, grains and legumes. And spices!

Get to know the unique chiles, herbs and other flavorings you've previously passed up. Some you'll love, some you won't. Either way, you'll open yourself up to the abundant world of options available to you, far beyond the old "chicken or beef" model.

5. You're In Good Company

Vegans are no longer the tiny minority we once were. Today, I no longer expect to be the only vegan at a wedding, in the office, on a flight, or in a social situation.

With our growing numbers, there are many more options available to us. You can visit packed restaurants specializing in vegan (and raw) foods with exciting menus and dishes that

rival the quality of any traditional dining experience. You can read well-designed magazines dedicated to a plant-based lifestyle, like *VegNews*. You can shop in stores or online for cruelty-free vegan products, ranging from makeup to shoes. You can partake in travel excursions catering to vegans.

With so many possibilities and great people to share them with, you'll never be alone on your journey to a plant-based lifestyle.

As you embark on this journey, there are endless resources available to help you. It's also useful to know what obstacles you may face and how others have successfully overcome them. That's what we'll cover in the next section.

Obstacles to a Successful Plant-Based Diet, and How to Overcome Them

Many aspiring vegans fail for one simple reason: they approach veganism as a diet. We are so conditioned to seek out diets as solutions to our problems. Whether it be raw, vegan, vegetarian or paleo, we expect a quick fix for weight loss, mental clarity and longevity just a few meals away.

The problem is, strict diets to improve health or lose weight don't work forever, if they work at all. Diets, which usually involve deprivation and reduced choices, aren't a sustainable way to live. Want to drop 10 pounds in six weeks by not eating bread? Sure, go on a diet. But it's highly likely that the results will be temporary and you'll gain the weight back.

It's not that people don't take diets seriously. In fact, it seems we're downright obsessed with them. But I prefer to think of eating plant-based foods as a lifestyle, not a diet. Diets are fleeting and set you up for failure. A lifestyle is an ongoing commitment to making better choices, but with less pressure to "succeed" and fewer attachments to a final outcome.

Among many other advantages, eating healthy, plant-based foods reduces the risk of certain diseases and conditions. It also tends to lead to weight loss. While I'm happy that veganism is growing in popularity, for many people, jumping into a vegan "diet" leads to failure. Deciding to radically change the way you eat can have unanticipated effects that often prove too overwhelming to continue. Here are some of

the reasons that I've seen well-intentioned would-be vegans question their choice of a plant-based diet.

1. Hunger. Unaware of how to determine an appropriate intake of calories, fat and protein, new vegans often report feeling hungry all the time. That would cause anyone to abandon a diet.

Unless you know how to deal with hunger and make the nutrient adjustments required to remain satisfied, a plant-based diet will be over almost before it begins. For example, before becoming vegan, I wouldn't have dreamed of eating as many nuts and avocados as I do now – I was too apprehensive about the fat and calories. But without the satisfaction I receive from these nutrient sources, I'd be hungry and miserable, too.

It may take time to gauge how you feel, identify the cause and find appropriate solutions. That's ok. It's time worth spending.

2. Eating processed and low-quality foods. Plant-based doesn't always mean healthy. In fact, it's easy to follow a poor plant-based diet.

Eating Spicy Sweet Chili Doritos and PB&J sandwiches every day, while plant-based, is not the path to good health. It's also not feasible for the long term. On top of that, processed foods make you feel terrible.

I used to eat a ridiculous amount of chips and bread on a vegan diet. I had to make adjustments to develop healthier, more sustainable eating habits. You can do it, too, with time and practice.

3. Feeling overwhelmed. For the new vegan, not only is there an entire world of plant-based foods and ingredients to

comprehend, there's also vegan makeup, shoes, handbags, personal care products and travel to consider.

Between shopping in different stores and scrutinizing ingredient labels, starting a plant-based diet can seem like a lot of work. Every day, it seems, there's a new realization. For example, the marshmallows you enjoy might not be vegan. (Luckily, however, there are delicious vegan versions, like Sweet and Sara)!

Again, it helps to remember that you don't have to be perfect, and you don't have to do everything all at once. Be patient with yourself and go as slowly as you need to.

4. Lack of time. Many people new to a healthy, plant-based lifestyle don't realize that additional time may be needed to prepare food. This is not good news for anyone who is pressed for time or not a fan of the kitchen. As a result, many new vegans fall back on processed food or old habits. One way to avoid this obstacle is to plan your menus in advance and streamline food preparation as much as possible.

5. Habits. Habits are powerful, and adopting a plant-based lifestyle requires changing many habits that you've maintained over a lifetime. It's not easy to reverse such ingrained habits or discard them overnight – it takes time.

Most people have deep associations with certain foods in their lives. Those foods may pose significant challenges to your dietary intentions. You'll inevitably encounter the office birthday cake, the family gathering around the holiday ham or other occasions where it's more comfortable to partake, doing what you've always done, than to decline. This is why I recommend a slower approach to adopting a vegan diet. Habits have meaning, and you'll be well served to gradually

evolve out of the old habits while you create new ones. We'll talk more about how to build good habits in the next chapter.

6. Cravings. New vegans often feel cravings for the foods they miss. Wanting to listen to their own bodies, many decide to revert back to old eating patterns.

Another approach is to look for new alternatives to address these needs. For example, with the advances in plant-based "meat" products such as Beyond Meat, anyone craving the taste, texture and satisfaction of meat will be pleasantly surprised at the delicious products available today.

7. External pressures. In some situations, you may find yourself having to explain or defend your eating choices to others. This can get old.

Whether dining in a restaurant, at an office gathering or at a friend's house, there are many ways a new vegan can feel left out. What's worse, you may actually feel coerced to eat things that you're not comfortable with, just to please others.

Some might suggest simply removing yourself from these situations, but that can be just as demoralizing and cause other feelings of alienation and disconnectedness. Instead, I recommend alternatives such as enlisting family and friends to discover plant-based foods along with you, or suggesting alternative activities like visiting a vegan restaurant.

8. Lack of Support. Any type of life change requires support from the people around you. While I'm not one to care what anyone thinks, I have also been blessed with supportive family and friends when it comes to my eating choices. However, many people exploring a plant-based diet are not so lucky, suffering ridicule and shame, even from loved ones.

If you feel like you're on a solitary journey, you're far more likely to revert back to old habits, just to fit in. Try joining a local veggie meet-up group or cooking class to engage with like-minded folks, and remind yourself that you're by no means in this alone.

9. Fear of experimentation. What many people don't realize is that becoming vegan can actually expand your palette, rather than limit it. Fruits and vegetables, grains, legumes and other products you may have previously overlooked in the grocery store can be integrated into your life.

Lack of familiarity can make any diner skeptical. After trying a vegan food item that doesn't appeal, many people give up or automatically assume that they don't like other vegan foods. Rest assured, there's a whole world of delicious plant-based foods. It's worth your time to explore the options and keep trying new things.

10. Misinformation. Many people doubt whether a plant-based lifestyle can provide essential nutrients like protein and calcium. We've been conditioned to believe that protein comes from meat and calcium from dairy products. However, protein is abundant in many plant-based foods, and you'll find plenty of calcium in foods like dark leafy greens, broccoli and tofu. When you know the facts, you can make healthy choices and get your nutritional needs met without having to resort to animal products.

As you begin your vegan journey, you'll probably encounter these obstacles as well as others. You can overcome them, especially if you take the long view and think of veganism as a lifestyle, not just a diet. People who take a dieting approach often feel overwhelmed by rules. In the end, they can't sustain these changes, despite a deep concern for the environment

and the lives of animals. And then they feel guilty because they feel like they've failed.

On the other hand, a lifestyle is something you explore gradually, not all at once. That makes it an ideal way to approach being a vegan. A gradual transition will give you more solid grounding for the very rewarding and delicious lifestyle you seek.

Begin with small changes to your eating habits. You may consider starting out as a vegetarian, and then moving toward a vegan lifestyle. Or, try being vegan just one or two days per week to start.

By taking small steps, you can minimize the sense of missing out on things, because you don't need to change your lifestyle all at once. Over time, you fully assimilate these behaviors and readily take on new ones. Meanwhile, going slowly also allows those around you to witness and be part of your evolution, rather than feeling excluded.

When you view your plant-based habits as a lifestyle, not a diet, you build a better foundation for success. In the next chapter, we'll talk more about how you can use this approach to change your habits and build lasting change over time.

Habits and Lasting Change

As you begin creating your plant-based lifestyle, it's important to have a solid foundation. You need to be clear on why you want to become vegan. Otherwise, you'll have a hard time sticking with it through obstacles, pressures and other situations that make it seem easier to fall back to your old habits and ways.

Clarity of purpose doesn't mean you'll be entirely free from temptations or distractions, but it can help you to be more resolute in your goal of becoming vegan. When you're aligned with your goals and passions, positive changes follow suit.

When the going gets tough, clarity can help you stay focused on the future and what you're creating for yourself, instead of what's broken in the present. It can also help you direct your energy inward instead of outward. You can control what's inside you, regardless of other people or circumstances.

To develop this clarity of purpose, you'll need to personalize your goal of creating the diet and lifestyle you want, based on what matters to you. This will make you more confident in your passions and beliefs. You'll become focused and clear in your intentions, ready to say "YES" to living and eating the way you want and excited to welcome the benefits that come with it.

To begin, let's look at what might be holding you back. We all have a variety of assumptions and beliefs, some of which can contradict each other in ways we may not be aware of. If you believe it's important to live a plant-based life, but you also

have competing beliefs that pull you in the opposite direction, it will be more difficult to make lasting changes to your lifestyle.

For example, perhaps someone has told you, "Going vegan is hard. And it seems like a pain. I could never go without cheese. What about all the things you'll miss out on?" Maybe you've even said these things to yourself.

As you examine your beliefs, think about which ones are truly yours and which ones actually belong to other people. You don't need to worry about the beliefs that belong to others – you can safely dismiss those. For the beliefs that are yours, which ones are rooted in truth? Which ones are just fear?

When your intentions are stronger than your fears, you can align your energy and habits to your intentions, giving your new lifestyle a much greater chance of success.

Once you know in your heart that you want to go vegan, what can you DO so that your actions are aligned with this belief?

- *Optimize.* Enable clarity by optimizing your surroundings and possessions. Your physical environment is very important to achieving your long-term goals. Throw the bad things in your refrigerator away. Discard the old spices in your pantry. Don't bother keeping the old clothes you haven't worn in several years. Take care of any lingering to-dos or unfinished business that might otherwise divert your attention from maintaining clarity.
- *Nourish.* Fill yourself with inspiration. I can't tell you how many people I speak with who see films like *Vegucated* or *Blackfish* and immediately become clear in their intention to go vegan. Films, books and other resources

help to nourish and solidify your passions and drive you toward clarity.

- *Make Room.* Make a clear space in your mind to focus on what you want. Sit still and listen deeply. You'll know if you're following the right path. The distractions may not go away entirely, but focus on the higher truth of what you want and believe – that eating a plant-based diet is the best way to both maintain health and live your values.
- *Release.* Let go of any old ideas you may have about becoming vegan. Going vegan isn't difficult or disruptive. In fact, it's attainable today. Decide that you're not going to allow yourself to be burdened by old beliefs. Replace these ideas with your sincerest intentions.
- *Accept.* Know that you are not perfect and will likely succumb to distractions. Acceptance is the easiest way to hold true to who you are and keep moving when you encounter obstacles.
- *Solidify.* Use writing, drawing or other forms of expression to cement your goals and intentions.
- *Remind.* Pay attention to your thoughts and actions on a regular basis. If you need to, set a date and time to check in with yourself. How are things going with your diet – not just in your mind, but also in your heart? How are you feeling about the choices you've been making? Let these feelings be your guide to knowing whether you're living in accordance with your intentions.

Once you've clarified your beliefs and started aligning your life with those beliefs, you can start taking more concrete actions to move toward a plant-based lifestyle. For most people, that starts with food.

What to eat?

Many people think a vegan diet has to be limiting. They're afraid of what they CAN'T eat on a plant-based diet, instead of looking forward to what they CAN enjoy. It doesn't have to be that way.

I don't believe in deprivation when it comes to diet. One of the best things about plant-based eating is the unending variety of satisfying and healthy foods available. In fact, I've never felt deprived or wanting for anything on a vegan diet.

Based on that idea, I'm going to suggest something that's a little different from most of the advice you may have heard. If you're considering going vegan but aren't sure how to begin, start by identifying plant-based foods you love, or would like to try. Then, start enjoying them now, alongside your current way of eating. It's not about giving anything up. Instead, simply ADD more vegan-friendly foods and healthier daily practices to what you're already doing.

Some ways to do this:

- Add a green juice to your daily ritual. It's satisfying and packed with nutrients.
- Enjoy a nice big salad along with your regular lunch. (Studies show that people who eat fiber-rich foods are less likely to be overweight).

- Have a green tea. It not only contains antioxidants but also may boost your metabolism.
- Revisit fruits or vegetables you once loved but have recently overlooked. Buy produce according to what's in season, so that you're enjoying the highest quality fresh foods at any given time.
- Discover new protein sources like beans, spinach, nut butters, sprouted grain breads and non-dairy milks.
- Try a vegan restaurant in your area. (Happy Cow has an amazing directory).

One of the main reasons people lose their way on any diet is that they're not satisfied. This is often because they haven't found the right things to eat. By focusing on adding new vegan foods, rather than subtracting foods you're used to, you can ensure that you stay satisfied while you expand your perspective. This is a gentle way to learn how to stay full and happy with plant-based foods. It's like "try before you buy."

To ensure overall satisfaction, make sure you consider variety: sweet, salty, crunchy. As a bonus, because a vegan diet is lower in calories than an omnivore diet, you can eat more!

You might not be eating a completely plant-based diet immediately, and that's ok. With this additive approach, you'll still improve your nutritional intake and enjoy greater vitality right away. You'll be exposed to new foods in a low-pressure setting, and you'll get to enjoy the satisfaction of vegan foods without having to uproot your current habits. Once you've found a core set of plant-based ingredients, recipes and options that work for you, you'll naturally start to reduce other non-vegan foods on your own terms, in your own timeframe.

Notice I said “reduce,” not “substitute” or “eliminate.” When people think of diets, they usually think about substituting other ingredients for ones they love, or eliminating foods they’ve adored their entire lives. To me, that’s setting yourself up for failure. Instead, I recommend taking small steps and shifting your habits gradually.

Building Good Habits and Making them Stick

Successfully converting to a plant-based way of eating begins with a mindset of abundance. Once you recognize the enormous variety of foods available, you’re off to a good start. The next step is to start building habits that support the lifestyle you want to live.

Habits are very important. As Aristotle said, we are what we repeatedly do. In the long run, your habits form the foundation of your lifestyle, for better or worse. For many people, their old habits are so powerful, they override even very strong convictions, undermining all efforts to change to a plant-based lifestyle.

For example, I recently read an article about a study that surveyed students who read *The Omnivore’s Dilemma*, a book by Michael Pollan about the relationship between food and society. (If you haven’t read it, you should check it out.) When they read the book, many of the students became vegetarian, likely due to the alarming issues about industrialized food production and the moral implications it raises. However, one year later, the majority of those students had returned to their previous eating habits, their feelings about the subject presumably dissipating over time.

This change of heart may be due to the impressionability of youth or just plain forgetfulness. We'll never know. But what is clear is that habits, particularly those pertaining to food, are deeply ingrained in us and difficult to break.

An award-winning book like *The Omnivore's Dilemma* has had a profound impact on attitudes about the food system. It may even cause people to rethink their diet. Unfortunately, changes prompted by reading this or any book is unlikely to last unless we change our habits.

BJ Fogg, a Stanford psychologist who studies behavioral change, is an expert in creating new habits that stick. He developed The Fogg Method, a simple three-step system for cultivating new behaviors.

Instead of transforming all of your habits at once (as a result of reading a book, for example), Fogg emphasizes the benefits of creating tiny habits that build to create behavioral change. This process applies to any type of habit, from flossing to money management. I think it's an especially good fit for changing the way we eat.

To apply this method, first, start small and get specific. Don't try to change all of your eating habits overnight. If you're currently a dedicated meat eater, eating a strictly plant-based diet is not a small change. Instead of trying to change your entire diet, you could start by trying to eat more vegetables. As I suggested earlier, you might try adding a green juice to your current breakfast or a green salad to your dinner a few times a week.

Whatever you choose, make sure the behavior is as easy as possible for you to achieve. Simplicity is essential.

One way to do this, Fogg suggests, is by anchoring a new activity to your existing behavior. This makes small changes easy by associating them with current routines. For example, as your coffee brews in the morning, get out the ingredients for your green juice and run them through the juicer. You're already standing there in the kitchen – just add this one small thing.

A change like this is easy to make, because it's not disruptive to your life. Rather, it's part of your current flow, so much so that you hardly have to think about it. That makes it easy for the behavior to become automatic. The next thing you know, you're green juicing all the time. (And looking fabulous, by the way.)

As you make these small changes, it's essential to remind yourself of what you've accomplished. You might think, "So, big deal, I've eaten a few salads." But actually, this process of acknowledging your good behavior (no matter how small it might seem) is essential for your success. Recognize the momentum you've gained and feel good about it.

The realization that you're forming new habits – and doing something that will be easy to continue – builds your confidence and leads to more. Perhaps you'll start participating in Meatless Monday, or ordering tofu stir-fry instead of chicken at your favorite Chinese restaurant. Again...tiny habits.

I'm not suggesting that you "aim low" when it comes to plant-based eating. I'm just saying you need to be realistic. The grander the goal, the less likely you'll be to create permanent change. Instead, begin with small changes, followed by small successes. Over time, you can use these small changes to

create new habits and unlock the power to completely transform your eating and your health.

Building Lasting Change from Small Habits

How can these tiny changes add up to the lifestyle shift that you're aiming for? First of all, they build on each other. As you experience small successes, you feel good and start doing more.

Secondly, even tiny changes can produce effects that ripple out into other areas of your life. For instance, I've noticed that, when I'm eating better, I'm also more effective in different areas of my life. The times when I find myself most decisive, organized and productive at work tend to be the times when I'm aligned with my healthy eating routines. When I'm not eating as well as I'd like, I often leave things unresolved and end up with a disorganized desk and a clogged email inbox.

But which comes first? Do you eat well because you're a productive person who generally happens to manage your responsibilities well? Or, does the practice of healthy eating lead to productivity in other aspects of your life?

I'd say the principle can work either way. Improving any area of your life will probably enhance your performance in other areas, too.

Personally, I choose to focus on small, concrete changes to what I eat. Because it's clearly defined, changing what I eat is easier than changing other behaviors. Compare that to the idea of trying to "be more productive" – what does that even mean? Such a goal is ridiculously daunting and inevitably leads to failure. But simply training yourself to eat better creates a "new normal" that, almost automatically, leads to

good habits and experiences in other aspects of your life. Focusing on this one habit allows you to reap the rewards of your healthy behavior in many different ways.

I know it's not easy. Work, social situations and other duties present daily disruptions and challenges to our eating habits. As a result, many people view eating a healthy plant-based diet as a constant balancing act – or worse, an uphill battle. That's why I recommend taking small steps, approaching healthy eating as a series of attainable and enjoyable goals.

You'll soon find that one good choice leads to another...and then another. Recognizing the positive outcomes that result from healthy eating makes it even easier.

Let's take an example. Maybe you'd like to start taking a vegan lunch to work every day. On Sunday night, you pack up your dinner leftovers, and on Monday, you take them with you for lunch. All is well.

But then, when Tuesday morning comes, you're running late. There's no way you're going to get your lunch made and leave on time.

You hurry out the door for work, lunchless, and feel as though you've already failed. This is an awful feeling. If you're not careful, it can lead to other bad choices as well. ("Well, I've already screwed up on this, so I might as well do something else bad for me." – let the downward spiral begin!)

The solution is to set more realistic goals. Instead of trying to pack your lunch every day, you might set a goal of taking a delicious, envy-inducing vegan lunch to work *one* day this week.

That's it. It may seem small, but more importantly, it's achievable. And as you achieve this, you're conditioning yourself to more of the same good behavior.

But the success doesn't end there. That one lunch may also trigger many other positive effects.

- Perhaps when you shopped for the ingredients, you picked up a few items you had never tried before, and you discovered you really like them.
- Since you're going to be packing your lunch more, maybe you bought a few things in bulk, saving you money.
- After making your lunch at home, you may have cleaned up the dishes in the kitchen and, since you were on a roll, organized your dry cleaning too.
- By choosing to make your lunch, you also maintained greater control over your calories and nutrients for the day, getting you closer to the weight loss goal you've been thinking about.
- Maybe someone at work noticed your delicious lunch, and you ended up having an uncharacteristically pleasant conversation.
- Serving as a "healthy eating role model" for other people at your job may have sparked an idea that helped a co-worker, deepened your work relationships or made you feel better about your job.

This example shows the power of one small change. Taking your healthy plant-based lunch to work one day a week may not seem like much, but as it becomes a habit, it can lead to

other good behaviors and many positive results that might not have occurred otherwise.

How can you apply this in your life? Let's say your goal is to eat a healthy plant-based diet, but you're not quite there yet. Don't think about next week or next Thanksgiving. Think about eating a healthy vegan diet today, and make that your goal. Or, start even smaller by eating one vegan meal or adding one vegan food that you normally wouldn't eat.

Strangely enough, the simple act of setting a goal and believing in it makes you much more likely to achieve it. Once you reach your goal of eating a plant-based diet for one meal or one day, you have an accomplishment to build on. This creates better habits, leads to other unexpected positive outcomes and heightens your innate drive to fulfill future goals.

There's something very interesting about building good eating habits. You may occasionally overindulge or not eat as well as you could have. But when you possess good habits to fall back on, it becomes much easier to pick back up and resume your healthy eating. (No downward spiral!)

As you build good habits, you'll find that episodes of poor eating become few and far between. Instead of having to actively choose between wholesome, nutritious foods and less-than-ideal foods, you naturally select and enjoy the healthy options. The rest of your life follows suit.

Success is habit-forming. With straightforward, simple actions, you can cultivate better routines and achieve greater productivity overall. Begin with eating better in small ways, and you'll experience unanticipated benefits in other aspects of your life.

Parting Words

I'm overjoyed that you've decided to start on the path to a plant-based lifestyle. I know that you'll find immense satisfaction and heightened awareness in going vegan. You have A LOT to look forward to, beginning with a healthier and more energized life. I hope this book will help you make a good start.

As you begin your journey, you may get the impression that other vegans never struggle with their choices. It may seem as though more experienced vegans live in a neat, cruelty-free world where all restaurants have plentiful options, the produce is impeccable and everything is homemade, organic and GMO-free. You may begin to feel like you're the only one who doubts, slips up or struggles.

That's not true. No one is perfect.

We sometimes eat a cookie, even though we're not entirely sure if it's vegan. We eat cheese sprinkled on a salad because it's impossible to pick it all off. We drink alcohol that's been made with gelatin, casein or egg albumen. We resort to buying a veggie sandwich on bread that contains whey, when there are no other options. We suddenly realize the nut bars we've been enjoying for months contain honey. We struggle to part with our leather boots and take medicine that's been tested on animals. We uneasily eat non-vegan foods lovingly prepared by friends and family because we don't want to hurt their feelings.

I want you to know that it's OK. These types of things inevitably happen. There's nothing wrong with you, and there's nothing wrong with the goals you've set for yourself.

Remember, going vegan is a *process*, not an *event*. You're just getting started, and I expect you'll continue to evolve your diet, lifestyle and thinking for years to come. As part of this process, you'll encounter uncomfortable truths, delicate situations, and plain old misinformation along your vegan path. We all do.

Despite the occasional setback, remember not to judge yourself or let these things discourage you from living a joyful and satisfying life as a vegan. You can always be proud of your efforts toward going vegan, and you have your whole life to continue learning and practicing. You'll have plenty of time to obsess over ingredient labels, scrutinize the origins of your cosmetics, try new spices and make new discoveries in your long, wonderful life as a vegan.

For the moment, explore, learn and question. Follow your heart and your values as best you can, and enjoy the process. I look forward to hearing how it unfolds for you.

Yours Truly,
Sara Hohn

Thank you

Thank you for reading Going Vegan – without the perfectionism! I hope you've found some useful tips to help you on your plant-based journey.

As a vegan food advocate, chef and coach, I'm passionate about helping people transition to a plant-based diet in a way that's comfortable, fun and sustainable. If you have ANY questions about going vegan, feedback about the eBook, or just want to say 'hi,' please feel free to email me at [**sara@homemadelevity.com**](mailto:sara@homemadelevity.com). I'd love to hear from you!

-Sara