

Eating the Right Way and the One-Month Challenge

October 30th, 2008

Eating should be an enjoyable and worry-free experience, and shouldn't rely on deprivation. Keeping it simple is essential if we are to enjoy our food.

I encourage you to read or listen to "The China Study" by T. Colin Campbell. The best way for me to describe it, is that it will change your life, if you finish the book. It has mine.

Good food and good health is simple. The biology of the relationship of food and health is exceptionally complex, but the one message is simple. The recommendations coming from the published literature and research are so simple, I can state them in one sentence:

Eat a whole foods, plant-based diet, while minimizing the consumption of refined foods, added salt and added fats. That's it. Below is a table summarizing food to eat, to minimize, and to avoid.

Supplements?

Daily supplements of Vitamin B12, and perhaps Vitamin D for people who spend most of their time indoors and/or live in the northern climates are encouraged. For vitamin D, you shouldn't exceed RDA recommendations.

That's it. That's the diet that science has found to be consistent with the greatest health and the lowest incidence of heart disease, cancer, obesity, and many other Western diseases.

WHAT DOES MINIMIZE MEAN? SHOULD WE ELIMINATE MEAT COMPLETELY?

The findings from the China Study indicate that the lower the percentage of animal-based foods are consumed, the greater the health benefits – even when that percentage declines from 10% to 0% of calories. So it's not unreasonable to assume that the optimum percentage of animal-based products is zero, at least for anyone with a predisposition for a degenerative disease.

But this has not been absolutely proven. Certainly it is true that most of the health benefits are realized at very low but non-zero levels of animal based foods.

**EAT ALL YOU WANT (WHILE GETTING LOTS OF VARIETY) OF ANY
WHOLE, UNREFINED PLANT-BASED FOOD**

General Category	Specific Examples
Fruits	Orange, okra, kiwi, red pepper, apple, cucumber, tomato, avocado, zucchini, blueberries, strawberries, green pepper, raspberries, butternut squash, pumpkins, blackberries, mangoes, eggplant, pear, watermelon, cranberries, acorn squash, papaya, grapefruit, peach
Vegetables	
Flowers	Broccoli, cauliflower (not too many of the huge variety of edible flowers are commonly eaten)
Stems and Leaves	Spinach, artichokes, kale, lettuce (all varieties), cabbage, Swiss chard, collard greens, celery asparagus, mustard greens, brussels sprouts, turnip greens, beet greens, bok choy, arugula, Belgian endive, basil, cilantro, parsley, rhubarb seaweed
Roots	Potatoes (all varieties), beets, carrots, turnips, onions, garlic, ginger, leeks, radish, rutabaga
Legumes (seed-bearing nitrogen-fixing plants)	Green beans, soybeans, peas, peanuts, adzuki beans, black beans, black-eyed beans, cannellini beans, garbanzo beans, kidney beans, lentils, pinto beans, white beans
Mushrooms	White button, baby bella, cremini, portabello, shiitake, oyster
Nuts	Walnuts, almonds, macadamia, pecans, cashew, hazelnut pistachio
Whole grains (in breads, pastas, etc)	Wheat, rice, corn, millet, sorghum, rye, oats, barley, teff, buckwheat, amaranth, quinoa, kamut, spelt
Minimize	
Refined carbohydrates	Pastas (except whole grain varieties), white bread, crackers, sugars, and most cakes and pastries
Added vegetable oils	Corn oil, peanut oil, olive oil
Fish	Salmon, tuna, cod
Avoid	
Meat	Steak, hamburger, lard
Poultry	Chicken, turkey
Dairy	Cheese, milk, yogurt
Eggs	Eggs and products with a high egg content (i.e. mayonnaise)

My advice is to try to eliminate all animal-based products from your diet, but not obsess over it. If a tasty vegetable soup has a chicken stock base, or if a hearty loaf of bread includes a tiny amount of egg, don't worry about it. These quantities, very likely, are nutritionally unimportant. Even more importantly, the ability to relax about very minor quantities of animal-based foods makes applying this diet easier.

CAN YOU DO THIS?

For most Americans, the idea of giving up virtually all meat products – including beef, chicken, fish, cheese, milk and eggs – seems impossible. You might as well ask Americans to stop breathing. The whole idea seems strange, fanatical or fantastic.

This is the biggest obstacle to the adoption of a plant-based diet: most people who hear about it don't seriously consider it, despite the truly impressive health benefits. If you are one of these people – if you are curious about these findings but know in your heart that you will never be able to give up meat – then I know that no amount of talk will ever convince you to change your mind.

You have to try it.

Give it one month. You've been eating cheeseburgers your whole life; a month without them won't kill you.

A month isn't enough time to give you any long-term benefits, but it is long enough for you to discover four things:

1. There are some great foods you can eat in a plant-based diet that you otherwise may never have discovered. You may not be eating everything you want (desire for meat may last longer than a month), but you will be eating lots of great, delicious foods.
2. It's not all that bad. Some people take to this diet quite quickly and love it. Many take months to fully adjust to it. But almost everyone will find that it's a lot easier than they thought.
3. You'll feel better. Even after a month, most people will feel better and likely lose some weight too. Try having your blood work done before and after. Odds are, you'll see significant improvement in even that period of time.
4. Most importantly, you'll discover that it's possible. You may love the diet, or you may not, but at the very least, you'll come away from the one-month trial knowing that it's possible. *You can do it, if you chose to.* All the health benefits are not just for Tibetan Monks and fanatical Spartans. You can have them too. It's your choice.

The first month can be challenging, but it gets much easier after that. And for many, it becomes a great pleasure. I know this is hard to believe until you experience it yourself, but your tastes change when you are on a plant-based diet. You not only lose your taste for meat, but you begin to discover new flavors in much of your food, flavors that were dulled when you ate a primarily animal-based diet.

"If you take me up on my suggestion of trying a plant-based diet for one month, there are five main challenges you'll likely face:

- In the first week, you may have some stomach upset as your digestive system adjusts. This is natural; it is nothing to worry about and doesn't usually last long.
- You'll need to put some time into this. Don't begrudge this time—heart disease and cancer take time too. Specifically, you'll need to learn some new recipes, be willing to try new dishes, discover new restaurants. You'll need to pay attention to your tastes and come up with meals that you really enjoy. This is key.
- You'll need to adjust psychologically. No matter how full the plate is, many of us were trained to think that without meat, it's not a real meal—especially at dinner. You'll need to overcome this prejudice.

- You may not be able to go to the same restaurants you used to go to, and if you can, you certainly won't be able to order the same things. This takes some adjustment.
- Your friends, family, and colleagues may not be supportive. For whatever reasons, people will find it threatening that you are now a vegetarian or vegan. Perhaps it's because, deep down, they know that their diet isn't very healthy and find it threatening that else is able to give up unhealthy eating habits when they cannot. [They may also feel guilty about the inhumane aspects of their diet, and resent you for reminding them that their complicity in animal suffering is entirely unnecessary, and therefore all the more inexcusable.]

I'd also like to offer you a few pieces of advice for your first month:

- In the long term, plant-based eating is cheaper than an animal-based diet, but as you learn you may spend a little extra money trying things. Do it. It's worth it.
- Eat well. If you eat out, try lots of restaurants to find some great vegan dishes. Often, ethnic restaurants may not only offer the most options for plant-based meals. but the unique tastes are exquisite. Learn what's out there.
- Eat enough. One of your health goals may be to lose weight. That's fine, and on a plant-based diet you almost certainly will. But don't hold back—whatever you do, don't go hungry.
- Eat a variety. Mixing it up is important both for getting all the necessary nutrients and for maintaining your interest in the diet.

The bottom line is that you can eat a plant-based diet with great pleasure and satisfaction. But making the transition is a challenge. There are psychological barriers and practical ones. It takes time and effort. You may not get support from your friends and family. But the benefits are nothing short of miraculous. And you'll be amazed at how easy it becomes once you learn new habits."

Take the one-month challenge. You'll not only do great things for yourself, you'll be part of the vanguard working toward moving America into a healthier, leaner future.

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