

Healthy and Delicious Plant-Based Eating

With Cassie Christopher, MS RDN

What is Plant-Based Eating?

Plant-based eating is an umbrella term that describes several dietary patterns including flexitarian, vegetarian, vegan, and Whole Foods Plant-Based. This eating pattern focuses on choosing plant foods such as fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains, and minimizing or avoiding meat and dairy products.

Benefits of Plant-Based Eating:

- Improved heart health, decreased risk of heart attack, and lowered blood pressure.
 - Patients with heart disease were more likely to have a reduction in plaque in their arteries after switching to plant-based eating.
 - Switching to plant-based eating caused beneficial structural remodeling in healthy athletes.
- Decreased risk of Diabetes
 - High intake of fruits and vegetables may lower the risk of diabetes by up to 50%!
- Only 5% of Americans get enough fiber, and they are plant-based eaters.
 - Meeting fiber requirements protects against several chronic diseases, cancer, and digestive diseases.
- It's good for the environment
 - An Oxford study of 55,000 Britons found that plant-based diets produce 75% less heat-trapping gas, 75% less water pollution, and use 75% less land.
- And bonus! You do not have to be 100% plant-based to enjoy some of these benefits.

Busting Myths about Plant-Based Eating:

1) You can't meet your nutrient needs without animal products.

This isn't true! Check out the following sources of various nutrients to ensure adequate intake:

- Protein: Various beans, whole grains, nuts and seeds. You don't need to worry about combining specific plant protein sources, that myth has been debunked.
- Calcium: Fortified non-dairy milk and tofu, beans, sesame/tahini, and kale are a good sources.
- Iron: Legumes, like beans, peas and lentils, nuts/seeds, some types of mushrooms and other vegetables.
- B12: The only nutrient unavailable in plants is B12, however many cereal products are fortified with B12 and vegetarians can get it from eggs and dairy products. Consider

taking a B12 supplement if you follow a vegan eating pattern.

2) Soy foods will increase your risk of breast cancer.

The American Cancer Society says that soy foods are healthy and safe. Studies showing the association between high doses of soy isoflavones and breast cancer were done in rats, and don't appear to apply to humans, where whole-food soy sources are likely protective.

3) Eating this way is too costly and difficult to prepare.

To reduce costs, consider shopping in the bulk section for beans, nuts, and seeds and watching for sales on seasonal produce. On the flip side, you can often reduce prep time by buying canned beans, and pre-prepped fruits and vegetables.

4) I can't eat this way or I'll get too gassy!

Gas is a by-product of your gut microbiome breaking down food and from swallowing air. If you struggle with gas, increase your intake of plant foods slowly. For example, start with 1 tablespoon of beans (hummus counts) daily, and work up to ½ cup portions from there.

References:

- [A Look at Plant-Based Diets - PubMedCentral](#)
- [Vegans, vegetarians, fish-eaters and meat-eaters in the UK show discrepant environmental impacts | Nature Food](#)

Resources:

- Cooking blogs: [Minimalistbaker.com](#), [Loveandlemons.com](#)
- Online recipe subscription service: [Nourishingmeals.com](#)
- Cookbooks: [Anti-Inflammatory Diet Meal Prep](#) by Ginger Hultin, [Nourishing Meals](#) by Alissa Segersten and Tom Maltere,

Chia Seed Pudding with Berries

If you like texture, you'll love chia seed pudding. Plus it will keep you full until lunch! There are many variations on this basic recipe, check out ideas online for chocolate, lemon, and pumpkin pie flavors.

Ingredients

1 cup unsweetened soy milk
½ cup plain Greek-style yogurt (For dairy-free, Silk and Kite Hill both make Greek versions)
¼ cup chia seeds
1 tablespoon pure maple syrup or honey
2-4 tablespoons chopped nuts or seeds
2-4 tablespoons fresh or frozen berries

Directions

Gently whisk the soy milk, chia seeds, and sweetener together in a large bowl.

1. Let sit for 5-10 minutes and whisk again to prevent clumping. Cover and chill in the fridge for 2-3 hours or overnight.
2. Stir well before serving. Portion into bowl(s) and add nuts or seeds and any additional toppings. Leftovers will keep in an air-tight container in the fridge for 3-5 days.

Prep time: 10 minutes (active) plus soak time of 2-3 hours or overnight.

Yield: Makes ~2 servings

Adapted from Bastyr Center for Natural Health recipe

Quick Lemon & Garlic Quinoa Salad

I first had this salad, developed by "Feeding the Whole Family" Cookbook author, Cynthia Lair, in the Whole Foods prep kitchen at Bastyr University and it has become a staple in my home ever since.

Ingredients:

1 cup dry quinoa, red or white
1/2 tsp salt
1 3/4 cup water
1/2 cup chopped carrots
1/3 cup minced parsley
1/3 cup raw sunflower seeds

Dressing:

2-3 cloves minced garlic
1/4 cup lemon juice
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 tablespoons tamari or shoyu (soy sauce)

Directions

1. Start by rinsing quinoa, it has a coating called saponin which needs to be rinsed off before preparing. Add quinoa to a pot with water and salt, and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low and cover, then cook for 15 minutes. Let stand covered for five minutes. Fluff with a fork.
2. Put quinoa, carrots, parsley, sunflower seeds, and any other veggies in a large bowl and toss.
3. Add all of the dressing ingredients — no need to mix the dressing beforehand. Serve at room temperature or chilled.

Prep time: 30 minutes

Yield: 4 servings

Adapted from Feeding the Whole Family by Cynthia Lair

Crudite & Lemon Tahini Sauce

This sauce can be used as a delicious dip for raw veggies or salad dressing. I served this sauce over roasted carrots for Easter lunch to rave reviews.

Ingredients:

2 tablespoons sesame tahini
2 tablespoons lemon juice
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 tablespoon filtered water
2 cloves of garlic, smashed
1 teaspoon maple syrup
 $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon kosher salt
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground cumin

Directions:

1. Place all ingredients in a blender (I use my smaller smoothie attachment) and pulse until combined.

Prep time: 5 minutes

Yield: 4, 2 tablespoon portions

Recipe adapted from Nourishingmeals.com

Chocolate Energy Balls

This recipe comes together quickly and uses pantry items for a sweet treat in a pinch.

Ingredients:

1 cup Medjool dates, pitted

1 cup rolled oats

¼ cup cacao powder (or cocoa powder)

½ teaspoon vanilla extract

1 pinch salt

½ cup peanut butter (can sub sunflower seed butter for an allergen-free version)

Directions:

1. Place the pitted dates, rolled oats, vanilla, and salt in a food processor fitted with the “S” blade. Process until everything is crumbly and finely ground.
2. Add the peanut butter. Process for about a minute to combine. The mixture should stick together. Add liquid (coconut oil, maple syrup, water) and process again if dates are dry and the mixture isn’t holding together well.
3. Form into balls and place in a container. Balls will keep for 3 days on the counter for up to 10 days in the fridge.

Prep time: 5 minutes

Yield: 12 balls