

Whole food, plant-based diet: Eat your way to health



Although it's been around since the beginning of times, everyone is suddenly talking about it: whole food, plant-based diet. But for those serious about their health, this diet is most probably not going anywhere (unlike some of its quick fix counterparts).

What is a whole food, plant-based diet?
Actually, it's not a diet at all – rather think

of it as a healthy lifestyle. The emphasis with a whole food, plant-based diet (WFPB diet in short) is not on an eating plan or by what it eliminates, but rather on what it emphasises: eating a large variety of whole foods, as naturally and healthily as possible.

According to the health website forksoverknives.com, whole food refers to natural foods that are not heavily

processed and made from whole, unrefined or minimally refined ingredients. Think fruit, veggies, whole grains, legumes, nuts and seeds. Plant-based refers to all food that comes from plants and doesn't contain any animal ingredients such as meat, eggs, milk or honey.

A WFPB eating plan excludes refined foods like added sugars, white flour and

processed oils. Furthermore, special attention is given to the quality of foods – many elements in an WFPB follower's diet consist of locally sourced and organic foods.

The basic principles

According to healthline.com, a WFPB eating plan rests on four principles:

- Eat whole plants such as grains, nuts and fruit
- Avoid animal products such as meat, fish and dairy
- Avoid processed, artificial foods
- Avoid added fats and sugars.

How does it differ from a vegetarian diet?

While vegans and vegetarians abstain from eating some or most animal products, followers of a WFPB eating plan eat mostly plants, but animal products aren't off-limits.

But why?

According to studies mentioned by healthline.com, the diet makes it easier to **lose weight and keep it off**, and can also prevent, halt or even reverse chronic diseases such as **heart disease** and **type 2 diabetes**. Studies have shown that a WFPB lifestyle can help fight **cancer** and **cognitive decline**.

Moreover, a WFPB diet is not only good for you – it's also good for the environment, as it has a smaller environmental footprint.

What do the experts say?

"Distinguishing between a fad diet and a healthy, sustainable lifestyle change pivots on a few questions based in sound nutritional science," says Pretoria-based dietitian Lize Snyman. According to Snyman, these questions are:

- Does the diet necessitate the use of various multivitamins or minerals? Any healthy eating plan should be nutritionally complete.
- Is it proven to counter common lifestyle diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases?
- Does it sustain a healthy and functioning body in the whole, supporting muscle mass, bone structure and metabolic functions providing sustained energy throughout the day?

"It is my professional opinion that, with the correct planning, the WFPB diet ticks all of these boxes, and that the diet choices the WFPB diet propagates also poses the least negative impact on the environment," Snyman concludes.

The myths

- No, you don't have to avoid cooked foods.

- You can include frozen fruit and vegetables in your diet, as well as canned food – just look out for low-sodium options.
- Your food does not have to be bland – you're free to experiment with spices.
- It's not as expensive as it sounds. Many staples included in a WFPB diet, like beans and potatoes, are very affordable.
- You won't suffer from insufficient protein intake. According to doctorsthatdo.org all your daily protein needs can be met by the proteins found in vegetarian sources. On the contrary, animal fat is high in saturated fat, trans fat and dietary cholesterol – the top three risk factors to elevating heart disease.
- No, you won't feel hungry all the time. Tubers, whole grains and legumes such as peas, lentils and beans help you fill up on fibre, which makes you feel satiated and prevents cravings.
- Start slowly – identify one meal per day, e.g. breakfast, and make the transition to WFPB options. As soon as you're used to it, add another meal.
- Start with meals that you have always enjoyed, e.g. pasta with veggie stir fry, jacket potatoes or lentil stew. Then gradually build on these basic options by adding other WFPB eating plan options.
- Ensure that you include enough protein in your diet by eating protein rich plants like tofu, lentils, chick peas and beans.
- Variety and balance is key, as is the case with any eating plan.

So you're in? Visit the Centre for Nutrition Studies' handy whole food plant-based diet **guide** to see exactly what should be included and excluded in your new eating habits. You can also try out forksoverknives.com's meal planner, or get started with some WFPB recipes. **é**

Sources: www.healthline.com; www.forksoverknives.com; www.nutritionstudies.org; www.doctorsthatdo.org; www.forbes.com

Five tips for a successful transition to a WFPB diet

- If you have any reason to believe that your body will not cope with a WFPB diet, consult your doctor first. Also see a doctor should you experience any discomfort while following a WFPB eating plan.

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