



# PLANT-BASED EATING STARTER GUIDE



**Plant - Based  
Eating** [apnm.org/plantbased](https://apnm.org/plantbased)

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## WHAT IS PLANT-BASED EATING?

There are several different ways that the term “plant-based” is defined and used. Sometimes it’s used to refer to a diet that is mostly plant-based, but occasionally contains animal-derived ingredients. Other times (and most often) it’s used to refer to a diet that is exclusively plants and plant-based foods. In this guide, the term is used to refer to the latter.

### **Plant-based eating means avoiding the following foods and ingredients:**

- **Meats**  
including beef, chicken, pork, fish, lard, and meat-based broth
- **Dairy**  
animal-based products including milk, cheese, yogurt, ice cream, and whipping cream
- **Dairy/Milk Derivatives**  
including whey, casein, and milk solids
- **Egg**  
including any foods that contain egg
- **Honey**
- **Gelatin**

Many other ingredients are derived from animals. While following a perfect plant-based diet is a great goal, that can be difficult when it’s not always possible to identify the origin of every single ingredient in certain foods. It’s best to avoid getting too focused on eliminating any and all animal-based ingredients. Simply focus on avoiding the foods and ingredients listed above, and from there, you can determine how much more capacity you have to monitor the ingredients in your food.



## WHY PLANT-BASED EATING?

Each person's motivations for following a plant-based diet are different. But here are the four most common reasons most people have for adopting a plant-based lifestyle.

### For Animal Protection

The most obvious and impactful way that plant-based eating protects animals is through the reduction of demand for farmed animal meat. Animals born and raised for food suffer atrocious living conditions, and sometimes die before they even arrive at the slaughterhouse. Farmed animals are kept in extreme confinement and in many cases do not even have enough room to turn around or spread their wings, including those with labels such as humane and cage-free.<sup>1</sup> Some examples of abuse farmed animals experience include chickens having their beaks mutilated and cut off and male pigs being castrated, both with no pain relief. The suffering doesn't end when they leave the farm or CAFO (concentrated animal feeding operation), as the slaughterhouse brings additional pain and suffering. Due to profit driven practices, many animals are not killed at the beginning of the slaughter and remain conscious for much of the process including while they have their hides ripped off or enter the scalding tanks.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to farmed animals, animal agriculture also causes harm to wildlife. Bears, coyotes, cougars, beavers, birds, and many other species are killed by state and federal agencies to protect livestock.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, meat production causes deforestation, pollution, and drought which all harm wildlife and lead to endangerment or even extinction.<sup>4</sup>



## For Health

Following a plant-based diet that consists primarily of whole foods has been shown to help manage, prevent, and even reverse many common health conditions including diabetes, obesity, cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, arthritis, Alzheimer's disease, depression, and many others.<sup>5</sup>

According to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, appropriately planned plant-based diets are nutritionally adequate, suitable for all stages of the life cycle (pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, adolescence, older adulthood), and may provide health benefits for the prevention and treatment of certain diseases.<sup>6</sup>

## For the Environment

Switching to a plant-based diet is potentially the most impactful action a person can take to protect the environment. Every second, 1-2 acres of rainforest are cleared for grazing livestock or growing animal feed, and 91% of deforestation is caused by livestock.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, livestock accounts for 51% of global greenhouse emissions, and animal agriculture is responsible for more greenhouse gas emissions than the entire transportation sector! Each day, a person who eats a plant-based diet saves 1,100 gallons of water, 45 pounds of grain, 30 square feet of forested land, 20 pounds of CO2 equivalent, and one animal's life. According to environmental experts, it is necessary for humans to stop consuming meat and dairy in order to prevent irreversible damage to the planet.<sup>8</sup>

## For Social Justice

The industries that produce foods using animal body parts and secretions are extremely harmful to humans, disproportionately affecting people of color and low-income communities. Working in a meat processing plant is the most dangerous job in America,<sup>9</sup> and meat processing facilities target undocumented people to hire for dangerous jobs.<sup>10</sup> There have been many cases of meat processing companies reporting employees' immigration status to the authorities immediately after the employees got severely injured or had advocated for better working conditions. Additionally, many communities whose residents are primarily people of color and/or low-income have a lack of access to healthy and affordable food.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, CAFOs (concentrated animal feeding operations) and large dairy factory farms are placed in communities whose residents are primarily low-income and/or people of color, polluting the air and water and causing poor health outcomes for residents.<sup>12</sup>

In contrast, the world's farmers produce enough plant-based foods to feed 1.5 times the world's population, yet over 840 million people experience chronic hunger, and even more experience food insecurity and undernourishment, as the majority of crops go to feed livestock instead of people.<sup>13</sup> The coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated these issues.<sup>14</sup>

As the world's population increases there will soon not be enough land or other resources to produce enough meat to feed everyone. The only solution to a sustainable food system is to shift towards plant-based diets.

## WHAT DO YOU EAT?

There are many different ways to follow a plant-based diet. Finding the way that's best for you will depend on your individual goals, lifestyle, culture, and preferences. With that said, there is virtually no food or meal that cannot be made from plants. There are countless plant-based products on the market that mimic animal-based foods such as meat, cheese, milk, ice cream, and eggs. Here are just a few ideas of what foods might be included in a plant-based diet.

### Breakfast

- Oatmeal with plant-based milk
- Smoothie (or smoothie bowl)
- Pancakes
- Bagel, English muffin, toast
- Plant-based sausage/bacon
- Tofu scramble

### Lunch

- Sandwich (veggie, peanut butter and jelly, peanut butter and banana, Tofurky deli slices, etc.)
- Pasta with marinara sauce
- Bean burrito with grilled veggies and chile (vegan cheese optional)
- Chickpea Salad
- Soup or stew

### Dinner

- Veggie burger and fries
- Veggie pizza (vegan cheese optional)
- Frito Pies
- Curry (with chickpeas or tofu)
- Lasagna or pasta with marinara sauce
- Sushi
- Enchiladas made with vegan cheese

### Snacks

- Veggies and hummus
- Fruit and almond butter/peanut butter
- Chips and salsa
- Pretzels
- Roasted chickpeas

## IS IT EXPENSIVE?

There is a common misperception that some people cannot follow a plant-based diet because it costs too much. While it is true that most of the plant-based alternative products (such as vegan meats and vegan cheeses) are more expensive right now than their animal-derived counterparts, meals do not need to always contain these products. Plant-based staples such as vegetables, fruits, grains, potatoes, and beans are the most affordable foods in the grocery store. With a little learning and experimenting, anyone can create foods and meals that they enjoy made with affordable plant-based ingredients.

**Expert Tip:** When not focusing too heavily on plant-based alternative products, following a plant-based diet can be the most affordable lifestyle possible—some people even cite budget and affordability as their reason for making the switch!

## IS IT HARD?

Making meaningful lifestyle changes can take time and be challenging at first. However, once the initial learning curve is achieved, the majority of people who adopt plant-based diets express that they no longer think about what they eat any more than they did before going plant-based. Learning to adapt to this new lifestyle simply means reimagining the foods you currently enjoy and exploring new recipes, products, ingredients, and restaurants. The wide and constantly growing availability of plant-based foods in grocery stores and restaurants makes it a lot easier for most people. Additionally, the wide array of free resources available online can help you make the switch.

## WHERE DO YOU GET YOUR PROTEIN?

A lot of Americans grew up thinking that protein only exists in meat and other animal foods. While a lot of animal-based foods have high concentrations of protein, it is certainly not true that they are the only way for humans to get protein. Every plant food contains protein in different amounts. Generally speaking, if you are getting enough calories and eating a variety of foods, you can feel confident that you are getting enough protein. If enough calories are being consumed, it is actually quite difficult to *not* get enough protein.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, the majority of Americans consume far too much protein which is not good for health and wellness.<sup>16</sup>

**Expert Tip:** It used to be believed that certain foods needed to be combined in the same meal in order to get the right kinds of protein—this process of eating certain food combinations was referred to as “complete proteins.” This has since been discredited; we now know that as long as a variety of protein sources are consumed throughout the day, our bodies can combine them as needed.<sup>17</sup>



## WILL I BE MISSING ANY OTHER NUTRIENTS?

Appropriately planned plant-based diets are nutritionally adequate and may provide health benefits for all ages from infants to elders.<sup>18</sup> In order to get adequate amounts of all essential nutrients, any diet (plant-based or otherwise) requires proper planning. It is important to include a variety of whole foods, and include reliable sources of nutrients like iron, calcium, and vitamin B12. For more information about nutrition and plant-based sources of essential nutrients, visit <https://veganoutreach.org/plant-based-nutrition/>

## WHAT ABOUT KIDS/ELDERS/PREGNANCY?

Appropriately planned plant-based diets are nutritionally adequate and suitable for all stages of life (pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, adolescence, older adulthood).<sup>18</sup> There is literally never a need to include animal-based foods for nutritional needs.

**Expert Tip:** If you have individual medical concerns you should talk with a doctor or registered dietitian who is knowledgeable about plant-based nutrition.

## WHERE CAN I SHOP?

Thanks to the ever-increasing demand for plant-based foods and products, almost any market or grocery store is a great place to shop. Most of the plant-based staples (beans, rice, and other grains, potatoes, and other vegetables, etc.) can be found just about anywhere. Additionally, if you are looking for plant-based alternative products (such as vegan meats and vegan cheeses) those can also now be found at most stores.

**Expert Tip:** If your local store does not carry a food or product that you are looking for, talk with a manager and they will most likely stock it for you.

## CAN I STILL EAT OUT?

The short answer is: absolutely! There are a growing number of vegan restaurants in communities across the country, and many non-vegan restaurants include plant-based options on their menus. Even if a restaurant does not have plant-based options listed on the menu, chances are they can still make something plant-based for you, so don't be afraid to ask.

There are lots of great resources online to help you find places to eat out on a plant-based diet. There is also an app called Happy Cow that shows restaurants and grocery stores near you that have plant-based options.

## WHERE DO I START?

Feeling inspired...yet a little intimidated? One of the easiest ways to start is to simply identify the top five meals that you (and maybe your family) eat the most often and make them plant-based. Once you become comfortable with making your five most common go-to meals plant-based, then identify a couple more meals that you eat often and make those plant-based. Continue this process to incorporate more and more plant-based meals into your diet.

Another approach is to “cut out” one food at a time and gradually change your diet that way. For example, you might plan to remove one new item from your diet each month beginning with beef, then chicken, then fish, then milk, then eggs, etc., until your diet is completely plant-based.

## CAN I STILL EAT [INSERT FAVORITE FOOD]?

The good news is that virtually anything can be made plant-based, and just as delicious as the original. This might require a little effort and research to find or create the plant-based version, but as mentioned earlier, there are so many foods and products available, it will likely not require much effort at all. Plant-based options are increasing as demand continues to grow. If you are not able to find a plant-based version of your favorite food, chances are a plant-based version will soon be available.

**Expert Tip:** If there is one specific food that is stopping you from adopting a plant-based diet, consider going plant-based except for that one specific food until you find a plant-based option that you like.





## **RECIPES**

Here are four recipes to get you started and inspire you on your journey to eating plant-based. Find more recipes at <https://apnm.org/what-we-do/promoting-plant-based-eating/plant-based-recipes/>

## Tofu Scramble

Tofu scramble is a delicious dish that is reminiscent of scrambled eggs—without the cholesterol. The secret ingredient that makes this dish smell and taste like scrambled eggs is black salt. If you don't like scrambled eggs you might enjoy tofu scramble without the black salt.

### Ingredients

- 1 package firm tofu
- 1-2 bell peppers, chopped
- 1/4 onion, chopped
- 1 teaspoon turmeric
- 2 tablespoons nutritional yeast
- 1 cup fresh spinach
- Pinch black salt
- Spices to taste (garlic, pepper, chile, etc.).

### Instructions

1. Open the tofu and remove from water. Pat dry with paper towels.
2. Crumble the tofu using either your hands or a fork. Sprinkle turmeric and other spices (except for black salt) over tofu. Set aside.
3. In a large skillet, sauté pepper and onions over medium heat.
4. Add crumbled tofu to the pan, stir in nutritional yeast and make sure all the spices are mixed in well. Continue to cook over medium-high heat for 5-7 minutes.
5. Add spinach during the last 2 minutes of cooking.
6. Serve tofu scramble topped with a pinch of black salt (to taste).



## Spinach Lasagna

Springtime is the perfect time to prepare a luscious lasagna, and incorporating fresh spinach bumps up the veggie value even more.

### Ingredients

- 1 lb. tofu, crumbled up like cottage cheese (either use a fork to mash, or just crumble with your fingers)
- 4-5 tablespoons vegan mayo
- 1 tablespoon chopped (or dried) parsley
- 1 teaspoon crushed garlic (or garlic powder)
- 2 cups loose spinach, finely chopped
- 5 oz. shredded vegan cheese (Daiya brand "mozzarella style shreds" are preferred)
- 1/4 teaspoon crushed red pepper (optional)
- salt and pepper to taste (don't be shy with the black pepper)
- 1/4 cup nutritional yeast
- 1 package lasagna noodles
- Pasta sauce of your choice (about one quart), either from a jar or homemade

### Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. In a mixing bowl combine the tofu, mayo, parsley, and garlic powder. Mix well and then add spinach, 3/4 of the cheese, red pepper, salt, pepper, and nutritional yeast. Mix well and set aside.
3. Cook lasagna noodles to "al dente" consistency.
4. In a glass baking dish, layer as follows (you should be able to make 2-3 layers of tofu mixture between noodles):
  - pasta sauce on bottom of pan, lasagna noodles
  - spoon tofu mixture generously on noodles, more pasta sauce
  - layer with more noodles
  - tofu mixture
  - more pasta sauce, noodles
  - tofu mixture, pasta sauce, noodles
  - pasta sauce
6. Top the whole dish with an additional sprinkle of nutritional yeast and the remaining cheese. Cover with aluminum foil and bake at 350 degrees for about 45 minutes or until bubbling. Enjoy with a green salad and your favorite bread.



## Green Chile Chik'n Enchiladas

Enchiladas are a staple in many New Mexican households. This recipe puts a plant-based spin on this traditional dish. Experiment with different plant-based meats, grilled veggies, chiles, and ratios, to find the perfect recipe for you and your family.

### Ingredients

- 1 batch cheese sauce\*
- 1-2 cups green chile (roasted and chopped)
- 12 corn tortillas
- 1 package meatless chik'n strips\*\*

\* See page 11 for cheese sauce recipe.

\*\*Any plant-based meat can be used. Grilled veggies (such as squash and corn) can be used instead of plant-based meat, or both can be omitted to make cheese enchiladas.

### Instructions

1. Prepare cheese sauce; set aside.
2. Cook chik'n strips on stove top, according to directions on the package. Break up chik'n strips into smaller pieces.
3. In an 11" x 8" baking dish, assemble enchiladas by layering cheese sauce, tortillas, green chile, and chik'n strips. 12 corn tortillas is enough for 3 layers. *Note:* The cheese sauce and chik'n strips are enough to make a larger dish using additional corn tortillas, if a larger dish is desired. You can also make a smaller batch and have leftover cheese and chik'n for other meals.
4. Bake at 350 for 30 minutes. Remove from oven and allow to cool for 15 minutes. Serve with desired side(s) and garnish with chopped lettuce and tomato (if desired).



## Cheese Sauce

This plant-based cheese sauce has endless uses in recipes and dishes. It is reminiscent of nacho cheese and is perfect for nachos, but it can also be used to make a wide variety of dishes including mac-n-cheese and enchiladas. It can also be used as a dipping sauce (with some spices or chile added) or topping for foods like tacos and burgers.

### Ingredients

- 2 medium carrots
- 1 large russet potato
- 1 large sweet potato
- 1 medium onion
- 1/2 cup nutritional yeast
- 1/2 cup raw unsalted cashews
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 2 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon onion powder (optional)

### Instructions

1. Wash and chop carrots, potatoes, and onion into large pieces. In a large pot combine all veggies with enough water to cover. Boil until soft (at least 20 minutes).
2. Drain veggies, saving the water they were boiled in.
3. Add boiled veggies and remaining ingredients in blender. Add about 1.5 cups of water that was saved in step 2. Blend until desired consistency is reached, adding more water if needed. *Note:* If using a high-powered blender, cashews do not need to be soaked ahead of time. If blender is not high powered, soak cashews in water for at least 4 hours, then drain before adding to recipe.
4. Cheese is ready to be served or used in another recipe.

## Chocolate Covered Strawberries

### Ingredients

- 1-16 oz package strawberries
- 1/4 cup coconut oil
- 1/4 cup cocoa powder
- 1/4 cup maple syrup

### Instructions

1. Wash strawberries, pat dry, and place in refrigerator to cool.
2. Heat coconut oil in small pot over low heat until it is melted.
3. Remove from heat, and then add additional ingredients. Stir with a fork or whisk until well combined.
4. Pour mixture into a bowl and allow to cool for about 10 minutes.
5. Dip cooled strawberries into chocolate mixture and place on a plate lined with parchment paper or foil. Place chocolate covered strawberries in refrigerator and allow to cool for at least 15 minutes before serving. Experiment with dipping additional ingredients such as bananas, marshmallows, pretzels, etc.

Visit <https://apnm.org/what-we-do/promoting-plant-based-eating/plant-based-recipes/> for more recipes.

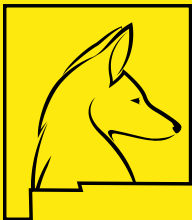


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