

The VM&F Guide to a Healthy Plant-Based Diet

Derek's Nutrition Guidelines

1. **Eat when you wake up:** This is very important because it stimulates your metabolism for the day and puts a stop to any muscle break down that may be occurring due to not having eaten in 8 or more hours.
2. **Eat every 2-3 hours:** This will keep our metabolic rate up all day (it takes energy to break down food) and will provide a steady stream of nutrients to keep energy levels up and food cravings at bay.
3. **Eat protein (beans, whole grains, nuts/seeds) and produce (fruits/veggies) at every meal/snack.** Protein is important for recovery and repair after exercise and keeps you feeling full, and produce is that healthiest food you can possibly eat since its packed with vitamins,minerals, fiber, and antioxidants.
4. **Beans & Greens are the top picks for protein and produce:** Both beans and leafy greens are packed with nutrients and are excellent sources of health-promoting energy - eat them often, once a day minimum.
5. **Start lunch AND dinner with a big green salad.** Leafy greens and green vegetables are the most nutrient dense and health promoting foods you can eat, so fill up on them first rather than less nutritious foods.
6. **Eat whole-food carbohydrates at most meals (whole grains, vegetables, fruit) and avoid refined carbohydrates (flour and sugar):** Whole grains, fruits, and vegetables are extremely nutritious and their complex carbohydrates are exactly the type of fuel the human body is designed to thrive on for optimal health and peak performance. Refined carbohydrates are artificially condensed and rich, making them much more fattening, and are nearly devoid of nutrients after all the processing.
7. **Stop eating about 2 hours before bedtime:** When you sleep your metabolic rate decreases, so going to bed with a belly full of calories may encourage some to be stored as body fat. Two hours is a good benchmark because that is the time it takes for most foods to move from the stomach to the small intestines, allowing you to go to bed with an 'empty' stomach.
8. **AVOID:**
 - Animal products, which contain the diets only sources of cholesterol, saturated fat (almost), and animal protein. Each of these has been demonstrated to have very negative effects on long-term health.
 - Processed foods, (including ALL oils) which are stripped of nutrients, artificially calorie dense, and often contain toxic additives such as trans fats and high fructose corn syrup
 - Sodium, which in excess may cause damage to the vascular system and kidneys.

Marcella's Cooking, Shopping, and Eating Tips

Sample menus & shopping lists (attached)

Included with this guide are two sample weekly menus with shopping lists and my diet planner and recipes, all in Excel. The sample menus have been used successfully by clients to lose fat and gain muscle (the most common goal). The Fat Loss version could be used to get lean quickly, especially for a smaller person, while the Higher Calorie version could be used to bulk up while eating a low fat diet to ensure that weight gained is muscle rather than fat. Each menu leaves the option to eat out or have a cheat meal; see below for some suggestions.

The diet planner is a useful tool to track your current diet and view the effect that changes in portion size or food choices on your daily macronutrient and calorie intake. The interface is far from fancy but we've found it does allow you to enter your own foods and recipes rather than sort through all the junk food in the databases of a lot of apps and software. Derek uses it religiously for contest prep, recording everything he eats for the day to ensure he's hit his calorie target and playing with adding or subtracting servings of foods to hit just the right percent of calories from protein, fat, and carbohydrates, and saving each daily record so that in the future he'll know what worked.

Some free online options that our clients use to track their diet are [myfitnesspal](#) and [MyPlate](#), and of course there many other phone apps and online trackers as well.

Creating a Menu and Shopping

On our website, I've laid out a [blueprint of a healthy plant-based diet](#) and shared one of our [weekly shopping lists and what I made with it](#) to give you a general idea of how you might plan your meals and shop. It is actually surprisingly cheap and easy to eat a whole foods plant-based diet. The staple foods of our diet are cheap whole grains and legumes bought primarily in bulk, salad greens and whatever fresh fruits and vegetables are appealing and available, along with non-dairy milks and frozen fruits and vegetables for smoothies. Because we eat simply, I don't generally need to make a shopping list or buy special items for one recipe – instead I make sure to have our staples on hand so that I can combine them in various ways. It's actually a pleasant, stress-free way to shop and surprisingly inexpensive.

Making Your Favorite Recipes Healthier

- Sauté in water instead of oil. You CAN get nicely browned veggies with water, it just requires a little more vigilance. I generally add about 1-2 tablespoons of water, sauté the vegetables until the water evaporates, then QUICKLY add another tablespoon of water (so they brown without burning and getting stuck to the pan) and then proceed with the recipe.
- Replace refined foods with whole foods when possible. For example, when a tabbouli recipe calls for olive oil, add chopped kalamata olives instead.

- Replace meats with tofu or beans. For example, a chicken salad can become a chickpea salad easily.
- Add richness with avocados and nuts (sparingly) rather than with real or imitation dairy products.

Convenience Foods

Great foods to have on hand for quick meals are canned beans, pre-seasoned tofu, and quick cooking grains like whole-wheat cous cous or quinoa. When I had a 10-hour-a-day corporate job, canned chickpeas or black beans with quinoa, with different Indian, Mexican, or Italian spices, was my go to lunch. Always eaten with a salad of course! Add pre-seasoned tofu to your salad for an even quicker light lunch. Raw diced bell peppers are an easy way to add color and nutrition to either of these options.

The most convenient snack food of all is fruit! A whole grapefruit or large apple can be pretty filling. Derek also snacks quite a bit on Ezekial sprouted breads to bulk. We know that vegan protein powders and bars are a popular snack, but advise limiting them because they are processed and contain a lot of sodium, causing you to retain water. In fact, many of Derek's clients have immediately dropped pounds and looked leaner with this diet modification alone!

Meals to Go

If you have the cash on hand and want to start a plant-based diet before you've gotten the *how* part figured out yet, or are extremely busy during the work week, you might want to consider getting prepared meals. It's not an option everywhere, but it's becoming more popular for local caterers or health food stores to offer the option of healthy prepared daily meals that you can pick up or have delivered. Your local health food store may be able to point you in the right direction. Here in Richmond, Virginia we're fortunate to have our friend Yeshi of Nile Ethiopian restaurant available to prepare vegan, whole food meals for clients with no added oil or salt. If you live in the US an excellent option is Julieanna Hever's (author of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Plant-Based Nutrition*) Gourmet-to-Go meal delivery service. She even has an option of larger portion sizes for athletes. Check out a sample menu [here](#).

By the way, we're not compensated in any way for endorsing these guys and, of course, we think it's better to do it yourself – you'll have to figure it out sometime!

Healthy Restaurant Options

Eating with non-vegan friends is only an issue at American chain restaurants and really, why would you want to eat there anyway?? Here's an outline of vegan options at restaurants and fast food places when you're on the road or with friends (these are not healthy by any means – eat sparingly!):

Fast food (for when you're desperate on the road only!):

Taco Bell

Bean burrito

Tacos with beans subbed for beef

Seven Layer Burrito without the cheese and sour cream

Arby's

Pre-baked sweet potatoes

Burger King

BK Veggie burger

Subway

Veggie sub

Chinese Food:

Appetizers:

Varies, usually there's steamed vegetable dumplings or spring rolls

Soups:

Hot and sour is sometimes ok, if there's no egg

Entrees:

There's always a vegetable section. Your healthiest option will be mixed steamed vegetables, but nobody orders that. Also relatively healthy and common is Sautéed String Beans, it's surprisingly good.

Vegetable Lo Mein

Vegetable Chow Mein

Bean Curd Home Style (my old favorite)

Szechuan Bean Curd (also good, spicier)
Bean Curd with Garlic Sauce (also good)
Eggplant with Garlic Sauce (another old favorite)
Broccoli in Garlic Sauce (not as good as eggplant, I think the crowns get too saucy)

Some Chinese places, have mock meat dishes, too, and since they've been perfecting the art for hundreds of years you usually can't tell the difference.

Mexican Food:

Appetizers:

Chips and salsa

Usually guacamole – sometimes they mix it with sour cream, ask

If they have it and you haven't tried it yet, try cactus (nopales or nopalitos) salad! So good!

A la carte:

Any burrito, enchilada, taco, tostada, chimichanga, etc can be made with beans or beans and vegetables instead of chicken or beef. Make sure to say no cheese, no sour cream. I've never had a problem at any Mexican place with making myself understood on those points: they get it. Putting cheese on everything is such an American thing.

Vegetarian:

Most Mexican places have a dedicated vegetarian section on their menu with fajitas or potato enchiladas or vegetable burritos with sides of rice and pinto beans. Just make sure to say no cheese, no sour cream.

Indian Food:

Appetizers:

Vegetable Pakora

Vegetable samosa (yum!)

Papadum (lentil crackers)

Chutneys

Pickles

Soups:

Mulligatawny

Breads:

Roti

Paratha, plain or stuffed – tell them to leave off the ghee (clarified butter)

Entrees:

You will always want to ask to make sure no dairy is in the entrees you order here.

Vegetable Biryani (rice, nuts, veggies)

Chana masala (chickpea and tomato sauce curry)

Bhindi masala (okra)

Bhaingan Bhartha (eggplant)

Ask what vegetarian dishes have no dairy, there's usually more

Italian Food:

Lots of variation in this category, but there's always something

Soups:

Sometimes minestrone, ask

Salad:

Just choose a meatless option and say no cheese!

Breads:

Bread and olive oil and/or balsamic

Focaccia

Pizza:

Ask for no cheese and get lots of veggies. We like broccoli, spinach, mushrooms, and olives or red and green bell peppers and onions

Pasta:

Pastas with marinara and veggies or olive oil and veggies – even if they aren't on the menu it's easy for them to make it for you if you ask

In addition to the above common options, there are usually vegan options at just about any "ethnic" restaurant. Some other favorites of ours are Greek and Ethiopian – especially Ethiopian – you haven't lived until you've tried shiro wat!

Reading list

Here's a list of the books we keep in our nutrition and recipe lending library and recommend to anyone eating a plant-based diet. We feel the primary reason that people don't stick with the diet is simply not knowing all of the extremely compelling reasons to do so. Eliminate doubt by educating yourself!

The Complete Idiot's Guide to Plant-Based Nutrition –Julieanna Hever M.S., R.D., C.P.T.

Disease-Proof Your Child: Feeding Kids Right – Dr. Joel Fuhrman

Forks Over Knives: The Plant-Based Way to Health - Dr. T. Colin Campbell and Dr. Caldwell B. Esselstyn, Jr.

Unprocessed: How to achieve vibrant health and your ideal weight – Chef AJ and Glen Merzer

Breaking the Food Seduction: The Hidden Reasons Behind Food Cravings—And 7 Steps to End Them Naturally – Dr. Neal D. Barnard

Foods That Cause You to Lose Weight: The Negative Calorie Effect – Dr. Neal Barnard

The Engine 2 Diet: The Texas Firefighter's 28-Day Save-Your-Life Plan that Lowers Cholesterol and Burns Away the Pounds – Rip Esselstyn

21-Day Weight Loss Kickstart: Boost Metabolism, Lower Cholesterol, and Dramatically Improve Your Health – Dr. Neal Barnard

Keep It Simple, Keep It Whole: Your Guide To Optimum Health – Dr. Alona Pulde and Dr. Matthew Lederman

The Get Healthy, Go Vegan Cookbook: 125 Easy and Delicious Recipes to Jump-Start Weight Loss and Help You Feel Great – Dr. Neal Barnard

Prevent and Reverse Heart Disease: The Revolutionary, Scientifically Proven, Nutrition-Based Cure – Dr. Caldwell B. Esselstyn Jr.

Dr. Neal Barnard's Program for Reversing Diabetes: The Scientifically Proven System for Reversing Diabetes without Drugs – Dr. Neal D. Barnard

Appetite for Reduction: 125 Fast and Filling Low-Fat Vegan Recipes – Isa Chandra Moskowitz