

Green Is The New Colour

Sandra Melwani shares her experience of turning over a "new leaf" with **DR NANDITA SHAH**. Says, life is so much simpler with veganism, which brings health and a beautiful body, with a personality to match

Vegan: What's that? Why have you turned vegan? What do you eat – grass? Have you gone mad? What's wrong with milk? Why have you given up chocolate?

All these questions and more, I continue to face almost daily. So, beginning backwards, here are some answers:

I haven't given up on chocolate, just milk-based ones. There is always dark or bitter chocolate to fall back on, fortunately.

Much is undesirable with dairy products, including milk and I opt for many other healthier substitutes such as almond and brown rice milk.

No, I'm not mad, nor crazy; simply convinced that this is the place where I am right now.

I do eat grass sometimes. Not the garden variety, but wheatgrass. I also eat

'live food' which means lots of vegetables and greens, sprouts, fruits and so on. Being vegan simply put, means refraining from consuming, wearing and using animal-based products including toiletries and cosmetics, and household products to list a few items. Often, to soften the impact, I use terms like 'plant and animal lover;' 'herbivore' also does fine, to get the meaning across.

I also choose to avoid most store-bought, commercial and branded packaged foods because, unless the package clearly states or has a symbol to indicate that the item is, 'suitable for vegetarians/vegans,' most food and beverage items such as carbonated drinks, jams, baked goods such as biscuits and breads, instant cake mixes; the list goes on, definitely or possibly contain some form of animal product. These ingredients often appear among

the list of contents in the form of code numbers, so unless one is motivated enough to find exactly what these code numbers mean, they remain safely hidden and blissfully consumed. Truth be told, grocery shopping with me can be a somewhat tedious experience because I can't help studying package contents in detail – definitely easier to do when alone.

Why I turned vegan

There are several good reasons for turning vegan; I did so out of a concern over animal welfare. How do people involved in professions of saving and conserving animals, consume other creatures, I cannot help asking myself; all I have had is a love of and respect for other living things that share our planet, but it was enough to cause a long internal struggle that now no longer appears to exist.

What veganism has done for me

On a personal level, it has motivated me to take up the study of nutrition; in my opinion veganism coupled with a deep understanding of how to eat right, and what to eat, is a good way to live. It has simplified my existence by limiting my choice of food and drink. The need to spend time mulling over what to eat for my next meal or snack no longer exists, not even when I eat out. 'Simplified' also translates into 'boring,' which is what I appear to have become to friends and family and no amount of convincing is proving the contrary. I do wish I could impress upon them that in fact, because my choice of foods is fairly limited, I have become far more creative in the kitchen. I find myself discovering 'new' ingredients that had escaped me before and using them in various different ways too.

For instance, the base of a cauliflower tastes quite similar to *bok choy* and works very well in an oriental stir-fry, as do the stalks of fenugreek (*methi*), though they are even bitterer than the leaves. On a lighter note, friends do not have to worry about what to gift me: just parcel your unwanted radish tops and I will happily accept.

Other reasons to become vegan

Animal rights and hidden ingredients in food may not be cause enough to adopt



TOP AND BOTTOM STIR-FRY

Ingredients:

- 4 small cauliflower bases, diced
- 4 small turnips,
- small tender leafy tops set aside
- 1 large carrot, sliced diagonally
- 2-3 small bulbs of spring onions, chopped fine
- 1/2" piece ginger, chopped fine
- 2 medium sized garlic cloves, chopped fine
- salt to season
- sugar to season
- white pepper powder to season

Method:

Sauté the ginger, onion and garlic till slightly soft. Add the cauliflower bases till they soften slightly. Add the carrot slices and lastly the turnip leaves. Season accordingly and serve warm.



WHITE KIDNEY BEAN SOUP

Ingredients:

250 gm white kidney beans
 1 medium red onion, finely chopped
 1 garlic clove, crushed
 1/4 piece green ginger, crushed
 coriander or flat parsley stems, roughly chopped
 salt
 white pepper, freshly ground
 lime juice
 coriander leaves

Method:

Place the washed beans in a pan with the first five ingredients.

Boil or pressure cook them with water 1" above their level till the beans have softened.

Set the beans aside for later consumption. As for the resulting 'water', season further with pepper and lime juice as required.

Garnish with coriander leaves.

Serve warm or chilled.

a vegan lifestyle; there are other reasons that may prove to be the deciding factor: economical, health, philosophical, spiritual and social.

To expand in brief, I begin with a sound economical reason which is inflation. These days, newspaper headlines voice a common sentiment that is seen in phrases like, "Weighed down by rising food costs for the fourth year running, Mumbaikars hope for some relief from the Centre," "Rise in prices of essentials such as bread, eggs and milk," "Staples such as bread-butter, bread-omelette are becoming increasingly out of reach of the common man." When did these items become essentials and staples? Also, some may argue that vegetables and fruits are not inexpensive; in fact, they could cost more than a kilo of meat. However, looking at the ill-effects of animal consumption listed below one might be tempted to give the meat, fish and all animal-based products a miss altogether. In addition, just think how low a grocery bill could be minus all the non-traditional staples and essentials that include carbonated drinks, branded chips and ready-to-eat foods.

On the connections between veganism and health

Turn vegan and lose kilos in the blink of an eye with the minimum of effort which is what I and hundreds like me have experienced. Healthy, slim and beautiful inside

and out; what more could one desire? All the proteins, vitamins and minerals that are supposedly gained from eating meat can all be gathered from eating non-animal based products. Not only do fruits and vegetables, pulses and nuts provide these nutrients, but they are also free from un-required fat and all the hormones that are jammed into those poor animals that did nothing to ask for them in the first place.

This last statement brings me to one of the social and ethical reasons for opting for veganism.

Apart from the 'How Can You Ignore The Inhumane Attitude Towards Providence's Other Creatures' question, know that animal farming is depleting rain forests and helping the world's increasing shortfall of fresh water.

How to become vegan; tips on staying vegan

Becoming vegan, and remaining one, is not difficult if the reasons for it are strong enough. I have not been vegan all my life, nor vegetarian; less than a couple of years in fact. While I have the food part under control I am still in the process of trying to alter other areas: finding out which companies manufacture shampoos that are animal-friendly for example, or realising that an old pair of well-loved shoes is made of leather. The point I am trying to get across is that, altering a lifestyle overnight is unrealistic and could be stressful too, even for those around us; I go about it slowly and peacefully without setting time boundaries, and focusing on the present hurdle to overcome.

Vegans are not confined to eating at home and they do socialise. Naturally I study menus in detail, sometimes as studiously as I do food labels. It does take a while to zero in on the right dish but not impossible. Vegetarian *thali* restaurants are a safe bet, in my opinion.

Adopt a vegan celebrity

As a final word, take a message from the growing band of celebrities around the world who have embraced the vegan way and are proving that 'green is in,' and always should be. ❄

PEPPERED PEEL

Ingredients:

4 small ridge gourds, peeled
 peanut oil, for frying
 sea salt to season
 Sichuan peppercorns to season

Method:

Skin the gourds and cut the peel into thin slender strips.

Salt the peels and set aside to remove any excess water.

Heat the oil in a deep-bottomed pan.

Drop the peel into the hot oil in small batches and fry till pale brown.

Drain the fried peels on absorbent paper.

Toss the cooled strips in crushed pepper.

Serve the strips with lime wedges.

