

# Let sleeping cows lie

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For a vegetarian, a meatless meal is no big deal. But when the caveat says 'no dairy products' in the food intake, there is bound to be some anguish. Vegetarians consider cheese and yogurt as the protein substitute for meat. And which child has not had to battle his/her mother every morning to drink up that glass of milk for healthy bones?

But a growing tribe of vegans —those who do not consume animal products in any form — is rewriting the rules of a healthy diet and quite tasty ones at that, as a recent potluck lunch of Mumbai vegans ([www.mumbaivegans.blogspot.com](http://www.mumbaivegans.blogspot.com)) revealed.

Dr Nandita Shah, a homeopath from Mumbai who runs Sanctuary for Health and Reconnection to Animals and Nature (SHARAN), an NGO to promote vegan diet and healthy living, holds regular workshops called Peas Vs Pills for a healthy living. She, in fact, has been instrumental in inspiring many to turn vegan.

Says Shah, "An ideal diet is one that is low in fat and cholesterol, high in fibre and alkaline yielding. A whole food plant-based diet which doesn't include animal products can prevent and reverse all the 'lifestyle' diseases like diabetes, blood pressure and cancer to name some.

Unprocessed and unrefined whole foods include fresh fruits and vegetables, legumes (beans, lentils, etc.), nuts and seeds, and whole grains like brown rice and whole wheat bread."

So, tofu replaces cheese and coconut/cashew/almond milk helps rustle up yummy deserts and fruit salads and cashew, groundnut, or sesame seeds go into delivering some delectable dips.

Diana Mahimwala, 46, who converted to a vegan diet in March this year after attending the Peas Vs Pills workshop, says her aches and pains have disappeared and eyesight improved. The other unexpected fallout of her family turning vegan is that her husband Jal Mahimwala, 61, has stopped snoring.

Jal laughs that off but adds that turning vegan has helped him get rid of a paunch — something he had been trying to do for the past five years. "The benefits are visible in the way we feel. Even if we have had a full meal, we feel very light," he says.

That is exactly what Dr Shah means when she says veganism is not a fad but a scientific way to a healthy life. Health benefit is what drove actress and animal activist Meghna Raj to veganism. Raj says, "Each one finds a resonance in veganism in his or her own way. By the time the benefits of the diet kick in, you become a believer in the philosophy behind a vegan diet."

Kasia Wierzbicka, a yoga teacher from Poland says, "Since I turned vegan two years ago, I have not suffered even the mildest of colds."

At the potluck, participants share vegan recipes and addresses of shops where they can source organically-grown fruits, vegetables and cereals from. They also find alternatives to butter on toast or how sol kadi — the famous pink aperitif from Konkan — can substitute a glass of buttermilk. Some vegans even demonstrate vegan dips and shakes, like a banana shake with coconut milk and dates.

More than anything, these potlucks of vegans it is a meeting of minds — of people who believe in a certain way of life and a healthy one at that.

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