

Eat Smart: The Neo vegetarian

Women's Health

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It's a movement that's gaining momentum, going beyond its fad value: Veganism is being embraced for more than one reason. Go green when you're on the vegan bandwagon. Ctrl+Alt+Del all animal products. That's what veganism is—saying no to honey, cheese, ghee, jelly, chocolate and ice cream. Goodbye to those occasional butter-cookie treats that your boss brings in. In fact, an immersive vegan lifestyle involves eliminating leather, silk, shell, coral and wool. Women across India have successfully made the switch. We talk to experts and practicing vegans and suss out reasons to go their way...

...FOR FIGHTING ALLERGIES

After a particularly intense wheezing attack in 2013, 34-year-old Bengaluru-based Anubha Kothari underwent an allergy test.

Think About It

Now gluten-free and vegan, her sneezing and coughing incidents have come down dramatically. "I can breathe freely now and all my minor aches and pains have disappeared," says Kothari.

How To...

Do your research: the Internet is your best resource for recipes and hacks. Also, get in touch with local vegan communities on Facebook for support. You'll have to deal with increased social scrutiny: "The first year was tough, but I was ready to sacrifice taste for health and now even my extended family is pro-veganism." When going out, she chooses restaurants that will cater to her dietary requirements ("Punjabi is out, I make it at home") or gets meals customised. Her tip: "If the food from your kitchen is tasty, you'll stick with it. So, develop the cooking skills."

...FOR ANIMAL RIGHTS

"It's a fallacy that cows 'give' us their milk. The more I read about industrial animal rearing and animal testing, the more I wanted out," says Bengaluru-based vegan chef Susmitha Subbaraju, 35. "I had to remind myself that my taste buds are not more important than a living being's life."

Think About It

Milk-giving cows are repeatedly made pregnant so that they remain in lactation mode. Animals reared for meat—pigs, chicken, fish—in industrial feedlots are pumped with growth hormones and additive-laden foods, to accelerate muscle growth.

How To...

Subbaraju devoted the first couple of months to research and experimentation - both for taste and nutrition. She began reading up on nutritional deficiencies, "because when you cut out milk, your family becomes extremely concerned." When travelling, she carries packets of soya milk and makes sure there is a good mix of sesame seeds, ragi, almonds, greens and local grains for calcium and iron in her meals.

..FOR DISEASE REVERSAL

In December, 2013, Rose Alapatt, a 35-year-old IT professional in Pune was diagnosed with diabetes. "I didn't want to be on medication for my entire life," she says. Her cholesterol and blood sugar levels are now healthy.

Think About It

"You're cutting out saturated fat from your diet the moment you quit dairy," says Shonali Sabherwal, a Mumbai-based macrobiotic nutritionist. "Heredity is a 20 per cent risk factor; the rest is diet. So you can reverse these conditions with food," she adds.

How To...

Alapatt now avoids all red meat, chicken, most dairy, processed and fast foods. She still eats honey and cake once in a while and fish once a week-she begins her day with a green smoothie, experiments with raw foods, wholegrains and flavours, and packs her own office lunch. "I don't eat cafeteria food and get my meals customised when eating out," she says. Every three months, Alapatt gets a blood test done to stay motivated.

..FOR SUSTAINABILITY

"The impulse to veganism came from a spiritual retreat I attended in Rishikesh in 2012," says Kanika Kohli, former management consultant and now founder of Vegalyfe.com, an online retail platform for vegan products.

Think About It

A 2013 report by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization states that greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions associated with livestock rearing and transport, add up to 14.5 per cent of all human-caused GHG releases. Think CO2, nitrous oxide and methane.

How To...

"Go back to basics-three generations ago our ancestors were closer to nature and we weren't thinking about greenhouse debt, carbon miles and Vitamin B12, D and K deficiencies. We just don't have that kind of immunity anymore," says Kohli. Her vegan mantra: be more mindful of what you're consuming to preserve our earth for a better tomorrow.

Deficiency Slam Down!

Integrated stress management and health expert, Dr Pramod Tripathi's checklist to avoid nutrition deficits.
Calcium: Curry leaves, oranges, okra, sesame, dal.

Iron: Betel leaf (in smoothies), figs, fenugreek, beetroot, sunflower seeds. A 1-2 punch of lime + greens enhances iron absorbability.

B Vitamins: Greens, B12 from fermented foods (like idli, kanji, dhokhla).

Proteins: Sprouts, dal, greens.

Vitamin D: Go out in the sun for 10-15 minutes every day. Spine and back absorb it best.

Omega-3 Fatty Acids: Walnuts, flax seeds, greens.

GET TESTED: Yearly for B12 and D3, or if you feel tired and your muscle aches.