

FROM THE NUTRITIONIST

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Green Your Diet

With Earth Day around the corner, you may be taking some time to reflect on how eco-friendly your lifestyle is. Did you know that your daily food choices can have a significant impact on the environment? Choices that are good for the earth are often good for your health too. If you haven't already, take a moment to consider how your eating habits affect the earth. Here are some key ways that you can eat a more "green" diet:

Choose more local, seasonal food – Crops intended for a local market are generally picked at their peak for best flavor, and a shorter time between the farm and your table means less nutrients are lost. Choosing local also helps to reduce the environmental impacts of shipping food across the country (or the world) – and supports your local economy!

Eat less processed food – Choose more foods as close to their natural growing states as possible. Highly processed foods take a lot of energy to produce, and often travel a long distance to the consumer, increasing pollution. Processed foods tend to be higher in sodium, sugar, and saturated fat, and lower in fiber and vitamins – so by eating less of them you'll improve your health too.

Choose organic or pesticide free – Although studies have questioned whether organic foods contain more vitamins and minerals than conventionally grown foods, they certainly contain lower amounts of pesticide residues. Organic farming methods also help protect the health of our water and soil and don't contribute to the growth of antibiotic resistant bacteria.

Eat less meat – The meat and poultry industries contribute significantly to global greenhouse gas emissions and consume large amounts of natural resources such as water and fossil fuels. Even if you don't go vegetarian, cutting meat out of a few meals per week can lessen your impact on the environment. Also, plant based diets have been shown in many studies to reduce the risk of chronic diseases like diabetes, heart diseases, and some cancers.

Grow something – Start a garden in your backyard, join a community garden, or a plant something in a pot on your windowsill. Even if you can't plant a large garden, find something you can grow to supplement the foods you buy. For "green" gardening, avoid using synthetic fertilizers and pesticides.

Reduce, reuse, recycle – Reduce packaging by buying food in bulk, use reusable water bottles, mugs, grocery bags, etc. to reduce waste, and recycle what you can. Also, since about 30% of food in the US is wasted, find ways to reduce your food waste! Do this by only putting as much food on your plate as you intend to eat, making use of leftovers, and composting food scraps when you can.

Andrea Hart, registered dietitian nutritionist and New York state-certified dietitian/nutritionist, is available for free, confidential, one-on-one counseling and as a speaker or facilitator for campus groups, panels or classes.