

From the Nutritionist

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Plant-Based Diets

Are you interested in improving your health, losing weight, or adding years to your life? If so, you may want to consider eating less meat. Studies have found that by consuming more fiber, antioxidants, and phytochemicals, along with lower amounts of saturated fat and cholesterol, vegetarians and semi-vegetarians tend to weigh less, have fewer diseases like diabetes, cancer and heart disease, and live an average of 3.6 years longer than traditional meat eaters.

Since October is Vegetarian Awareness Month, it is a great time to learn about the range of plant-based diets and whether one could work for you:

- All vegetarian diets are based on plant foods such as vegetables, fruits, whole grains, nuts, seeds and legumes like beans, peas and lentils.
- Vegans consume plant foods only, and many avoid all foods related to any animal, such as honey and gelatin.
- Lacto-vegetarians consume dairy products like milk, cheese and yogurt, and ovo-vegetarians consume eggs. Lacto-ovo vegetarians, who consume both dairy and eggs, are the most common type of vegetarian.
- Many others consume a semi-vegetarian, or “flexitarian” (flexible vegetarian) diet — consuming meat, poultry or fish occasionally.

Health professionals agree that eating more plants is one of the keys to good health. Most Americans could improve their diets by increasing their intake of vegetables, fruits and other plant foods, even if they have no intention of becoming vegetarian. To boost your intake of healthy plant foods, think about ways you can increase your intake. Add vegetables to sandwiches, pizza and omelets. Have fruit for dessert. Add sunflower seeds to your salad, and granola to your yogurt. Switch to whole grain bread or pasta. Snack on carrots with hummus, or apples with peanut butter.

If you’re feeling more adventurous, try some of the vegetarian food available on campus. The Bistro and Neubig offer many tasty, plant-based dishes, including those at Nature’s Plate, the new vegetarian station in Neubig. Even the retail units like Hilltop and the Den have plenty of plant-based options — you can use the menu boards to help you identify vegetarian (V) and vegan (VG) items throughout campus.

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.