

HEALTHY BENEFITS OF A VEGAN LIFESTYLE



They say that 85% of land used for food production is used for farming livestock or to grow food for that livestock. And that is in the UK alone (1). That's an enormous amount, especially when you consider that there are millions of people across the globe who go without food every day.

Consuming meat is seen as an unnecessary luxury in today's society, with many believing that it has no place inside our bodies or on our tables. It doesn't help that the vast majority of animals grown in modern industrial farms live under conditions that would surely horrify most humans. The benefits of becoming a vegan are clear for all to see, and they don't just improve your health. They also benefit the health (and lives) of animals and the health of our lovely planet too.

Many people choose to avoid animal products by sticking to vegetarian options, while others go the whole hog (excuse the pun!) and move over into the world of veganism. If you're worried about becoming a vegan because of potential health problems, then think again!

As mentioned many people choose a vegan diet because they do not like the cruelty to animals (2). However, in this day and age most people change to a vegan diet for the health benefits.

I'm sure you have heard the phrase 'eat a rainbow'. This is because it ensures the biggest variety of vitamins, minerals, phytochemicals and polyphenols to boost your immune system. And guess where these are found? Fruits and vegetables! These nutrients stop you getting ill. They also play a part in preventing more serious chronic, life-limiting diseases (3). What better reason is there to munch your way through lots of lovely, fresh vegetables?

One of the causes of many life-threatening diseases is obesity. Many people who become vegan lose weight without even trying. That's because plant-based diets tend to be naturally higher in fibre. Lots of fibre in your diet makes you feel fuller for longer (4).

Plant fibre is also necessary for keeping the gut healthy because 'good' bacteria that live there, help us digest the fibre that we eat. More research is coming out showing that having plenty of good bacteria in your gut is great for your immune system, brain function and supporting good mental health. The gut is not called the second brain for nothing (5). Fibre from all those delicious vegetables also helps keep the digestive system moving which prevents constipation and other painful digestive complaints.

Good gut bacteria are also responsible for starting the production of many feel good hormones, specifically serotonin. This is great for good mental health. So eating a vegan diet, with plenty of fibre to feed those beneficial bacteria, not only keeps you slim but also happy.

When we think about anti-aging most of us reach for the lotions and potions. However, it's more important what we put into our bodies for an all-over effect, rather than just what we slather onto our skin. Anti-oxidants reverse the effect of compounds that cause the aging process. Plants are full of anti-oxidants so this is where a vegan diet comes in. Helping you slow down the aging process - one cell at a time (6).

The anti-aging benefits of the vegan diet make your skin look great along with reduced chances of acne, and other skin complaints (7). Cow's milk is a known cause of acne which, if you are vegetarian, is another good reason to make the final leap to a completely vegan diet (8).

Returning to the subject of weight management, a vegan diet tends to be higher in healthy fats. The fats I am referring to are mono-unsaturated and polyunsaturated fats (9). These tasty fats fill you up so you inevitably eat smaller portions. They are also much better for you than the saturated fats found in meat and dairy.

Including nuts, seeds and oils alongside the fruit and vegetables in a vegan diet, means you will get plenty of these healthy fats.

Vegetables are lower in calories than meat. What a great reason to pile that plate high without the guilt.

Many athletes are now following a vegan diet to improve their performance. The plant-based lifestyle is thought to give people more energy, and faster recovery after exercise. Eating a vegan diet can also maximize training for optimum results in competition. A great example of this is weightlifter, Kendrick Farriss who follows a vegan diet and is now an Olympian (10)

Now not everyone is an athlete, but for those of us who want to exercise alongside a healthy diet, the vegan diet is a great option.

Researchers have found that a low fat, plant-based diet may be beneficial to sufferers of migraine. (11). These debilitating headaches are often linked to eating chocolate and cheese, which both contain dairy, so are best avoided. Meat products can cause inflammation which is also known to lead to migraines.

Nobody likes the pain and suffering associated with migraine; they also tend to act as triggers for other negative health effects like depression or anxiety. Guess what? A vegan diet can help keep reduce the effects of anxiety too (12). Another great reason to choose this lifestyle. Vegetables, nuts and seeds are great sources of magnesium. Magnesium has a positive effect on anxiety due to its calming, relaxing effect.

Another calming, relaxing effect of the vegan diet due to the high intake of magnesium, is the reduction in the symptoms of fibromyalgia. This is another debilitating disease that can be made much easier to bear by following a vegan diet (13).

Arthritis is a painful condition that affects many people, especially those of advancing years. Most tend to rely on medication to reduce the inflammation but a vegan diet has been proven to also be very effective (14).

Now here is a benefit of the vegan diet I bet you won't have thought of! Did you know that eating meat can make your body odour smell worse? Meat is full of sulphur which gives off a pungent smell. Substituting meat with vegetables means you will smell much sweeter and be far more attractive to your partner (15).

To conclude, the healthy benefits of a vegan diet range from potentially saving your life, as well as that of animals and the planet; to simply becoming more attractive with sweet breath and a clear skin. With great mental health to boot I challenge you to find me reasons not to eat your veggies.

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