

WHAT VEGANISM ACTUALLY MEANS



Many people that are not vegan don't even know what it means to be vegan. Vegans eat all fruits, vegetables, grains and legumes (and other plants). They do not eat animal flesh – either meat or fish. Nor do they eat dairy products like milk or cheese; eggs, honey or any other animal by-product.

Animal by-products include: gelatine, which is collagen from skin, tendons, ligaments and bones of horses and cows (1). It is used as a gelling agent in food items such as sweets, yogurts, puddings and jellies.

Animal fat is another animal by product sometimes used in the production of margarine or butter substitutes (2). Whey powder is an odourless white powder that comes from cow's milk. It is a concentrated source of protein often found in processed foods like baking mixes, bread and salad dressings to name a few examples. (3) Casein is another milk protein which is in imitation cheese (4).

Being a responsible vegan means not using anything that contains any part of an animal. Sadly bits of animal are also found in many non-food items such as: soap, lipstick and make-up. These include beeswax and cochineal (made from thousands of beetles) or lanolin from sheep's wool. Moisturisers and anti-aging serums often contain elastin from animal muscle or stearic acid from farm animal's stomachs.

When buying a hair brush or false eyelashes, check the small print on the pack carefully as these can also contain real animal hair.

Shockingly the glitter in nail polish could contain shimmery fish scales and a product made from the oil of a shark's liver has powerful anti-aging

properties. I sincerely hope such a majestic creature as a shark didn't give its life just so my skin can look a bit better (5).

Fancy a romantic vegan meal? Better make sure the candles don't contain beef tallow or beeswax! (6)

Vegans do not wear anything that has come from an animal either. The skin of an animal is used to make leather items such as shoes, belts and bags. Sadly demand for fur clothing means that millions of animals, such as foxes, raccoons, mink and chinchillas are kept for this purpose alone. They are bred on farms and then killed just for their furry skin. Thankfully many countries have banned this barbaric trade but it still exists in China, US and Canada (7).

People of all walks of life are choosing to be vegan, for various reasons. Some do so because they feel that eating animals' flesh and drinking their milk promotes an unhealthy lifestyle while simultaneously hurting the environment. This is because raising animals contributes to greenhouse gases into our atmosphere when produced industrially in contravention with sustainable agriculture principles (8).

Being a vegan is a way of life that promotes respect towards other living sentient beings. The whole essence of being a vegan can be summarized in five words: "nothing is taken from an animal".

People seem to think that vegans only eat salads and vegetables. But they also eat fruit, cereals and bread. There's no need for meat because there is so much more variety in plant foods now than ever before! To a vegan, a Portobello mushroom or plant derived burger can be as delicious as a steak.

Just because they don't eat meat doesn't mean they don't enjoy eating vegetables at all! In addition, there are vegan options for meat-style foods such as burgers, sausages, chicken and even mince. More and more food companies are jumping on the vegan bandwagon. (9)

Vegans are actually healthier than people that eat meat. In addition to being less likely to develop diseases such as diabetes and osteoporosis, vegans also have lower cholesterol levels and blood pressure! (10)

Veganism is rapidly growing in popularity partly due to the health benefits often associated with a vegan lifestyle but also largely due to their opposition to animal cruelty which has become much more widely publicized now than ever before. Most people know that many dairy cows never see the light of day or eat grass. They also realise that thousands of hens can be cramped together in sheds for the whole of their short lives. But did you know male chicks are killed at just one day old because they can't lay eggs? Or that whales and dolphins are killed because they are caught up in huge fishing nets but not going to be eaten? (11)

Veganism is an ethical stance against the suffering of animals for the benefit of humans. This is foremost for food and clothing, however vegans also make a stand against any product that has arisen after experimentation on animals. These products are primarily cosmetics or medication. (12) In the name of beauty some animals are subjected to what literally amounts to torture. What they go through is horrific. Vegans believe that humans do not have any right to exploit animals. And rightly so!

Vegans are not associated with any religion in particular, being a lifestyle choice rather than a faith. In fact, the word veganism usually only comes up in conversation when discussing dietary preferences or animal welfare. However, many vegans are extremely passionate about veganism and have got somewhat of a bad reputation. This is because they are often very verbal about their choice to be vegan.

Practitioners of Jainism, founded some 2,500 years ago, follow one of the oldest philosophies of non-violence known on Earth. The respect for all life is central to this religion and requires vegetarianism from its practitioners. Some sects have also embraced vegan ideals, with laypersons being encouraged but not obliged to follow this diet. (13) Further east, Buddhist monks also follow a meat free diet.

In the last few years there has been a great increase in awareness of veganism, as well as an increased number of people adopting the lifestyle as a result. There are lots of resources on the internet for anyone wishing to adopt a vegan diet, with many so-called influencers and celebrities demonstrating plant-based recipes on social media. Veganism is fast becoming more accessible and more acceptable as vegan foods become available in many supermarkets and restaurants across the world.

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