

PLANT POWER

In recent years, you may have noticed the rising popularity of plant-based eating. Plant-based (or 'plant-focused') diets have gained momentum as people around the world try to eat in a way that aligns with health, sustainability and/or ethical values. This includes eating patterns such as vegan, vegetarian, pescatarian and flexitarian diets.

The healthiest styles of plant-based eating include a variety of fruit, vegetables, legumes, wholegrains, nuts, seeds and healthy fats such as avocado or olive oil, while decreasing red meat and ultra-processed foods ⁽¹⁾. While diving right in and giving up meat altogether might be daunting, one or two meat free days each week provides a great place to start!

BENEFITS OF MEAT FREE DAYS

Some of the many health benefits from embracing meat free days include:

- 1 Reduced risk of heart disease:** reducing consumption of saturated fat from meat and animal products is linked with a decreased risk of heart disease⁽¹⁾.
- 2 Lowered blood pressure:** regular consumption of legumes is associated with reduced blood pressure ⁽²⁾.
- 3 Improved cholesterol levels:** eating a diet rich in legumes such as beans or lentils has been found to reduce LDL (or 'bad') cholesterol levels, which is likely due to the soluble fibre contained within these foods⁽³⁾.
- 4 Improved blood sugar levels:** plant-based diets are rich in fibre, which can slow down the release of sugars into your bloodstream after a meal⁽⁴⁾.
- 5 Improved gut health:** the fibre in plant foods contributes towards the diversity of bacteria in your digestive system. This may improve symptoms such as bloating, constipation and low energy levels⁽⁵⁾.



Access the Wellness Gateway for a range of resources including factsheets, video and handy links about other services available through the SMG Health Employee Assistance Program

ph: 1800 273 865

e: ruok@smghealth.com.au

w: smghealth.com.au

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TIPS AND TRICKS FOR INTRODUCING MEAT FREE DAYS

When we look at the evidence for health benefits, it makes sense for us to include more plant foods in our diet. Here are some strategies for getting started:

- 1** At the start of the week, **plan your meat free meals**. You can do this by gathering different recipes that you would like to try, and perhaps preparing some meals or components ahead of time.
- 2** Following vegetarian and vegan groups on **social media** can help with meal and recipe ideas.
- 3** Aim for the **balanced plate model** at lunch and dinner. Try to fill 1/2 your plate with low-starch vegetables (such as leafy greens, carrot, cucumber and tomato), 1/4 with a source of starch (for example potato, pasta, bread or rice) and 1/4 with a source of plant-based protein (tofu, tempeh, lentils, chickpeas etc.)
- 4** For days when you still want to eat meat, consider **halving the portion and boosting the vegetables**. For example, in spaghetti bolognese use 250g of mince instead of 500g and make up the other portion with lentils or lots of vegetables.
- 5** Especially if you are going completely meat-free it is important to have a good understanding of what nutrients your body needs. Vitamin B12, Iron, Vitamin D, Omega 3 Fatty Acids and Zinc are nutrients that can become deficient if you aren't careful. **Sometimes supplementation is required.**

How to get further help:

- ✓ Visit the SMG Health Wellness Gateway and reach out to the Employee Assistance Program for individual consultations or access to resources
- ✓ Visit your GP or an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) or nutritionist for personalised advice



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