

Increasing Plant-Based Foods in School Nutrition Programs

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Plant-based is great!

Maybe you've heard that meatless meals are a trend. Not only are they trendy, they can be really healthy too! Plant-based foods are some of the best sources of several nutrients, such as potassium, vitamin C, and folate.

There are many reasons why people are choosing to eat plant-based meals, such as for personal health benefits, environmental concerns, or because it can be less expensive than eating meat. Some people even choose to eat an entirely plant-based diet, which is usually referred to as a vegetarian diet. So how can we eat a more plant-based diet? Why should we?

Turn the page to learn more!



Did you know?

Getting the benefits from plant-based foods doesn't mean you have to be 100% meat-free! It just means focusing on healthy plant-based foods!



Are all vegetarian diets the same?

Nope! There are many different types of vegetarian diets. Here are a few of the most common ones:

Vegetarian: A diet that does not include meat, poultry, or fish, but might include eggs, dairy, or both.

Semi-vegetarian: A diet that is mostly vegetarian, but includes small amounts of poultry, eggs, dairy, or fish from time to time.

Pescatarian: A diet that includes fish, but not other types of meat.

Vegan: A diet that does not contain any animal products including meat, poultry, fish, eggs, dairy, or gelatin.



Going Plant-Based for Your Health

Benefits of a plant-based diet

Plant-based diets have many potential health benefits. Research shows that vegetarians have a **lower risk** of developing heart disease and certain types of cancer.

This might be because vegetarian diets often have **more fiber** and **lower saturated fat** compared to diets with meat.

Let's not forget all the great nutrients in plant-based foods including **dietary fiber** and **phytonutrients** (which aren't found in animal foods at all!), as well as **calcium**, **iron**, **potassium**, **folate**, **vitamin A**, and **vitamin C**.

Most Americans aren't eating enough fruits, vegetables, and whole grains and eating plant-based meals is a great way to add more of these foods to your diet!

Plant-based diets are also a way to introduce children to fruits and vegetables at a young age to help them start **healthy habits** that last a lifetime!

Delicious Dunking Dip Recipe!

This recipe is a great plant-based snack that goes well with a variety of fresh veggies and whole grain crackers or pitas.

Recipe serves 4-6 people



Dunking Dip:

- 1 15-oz can cannellini or garbanzo beans, drained
- 3 cloves garlic, roughly chopped
- 1 cup spinach
- 2 tablespoons tahini (sesame seed paste)
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice from 2 lemons
- 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons rice vinegar
- 1/2 teaspoon salt



Dunkers:

- Carrots sliced into large medallions (baby carrots work great too!)
- Broccoli, cut into bite-size florets
- Radishes, sliced
- Cauliflower, cut into bite-size pieces
- Asparagus, sliced into bite-size pieces
- Whole wheat pita bread, cut into pieces
- Whole wheat crackers

These dunkers are just some suggestions. Try it with your favorite fresh veggies!

Directions:

1. In a food processor or blender, blend all Dunking Dip ingredients for approximately 2 minutes until smooth.
2. Place bean dip in a serving bowl.
3. Scoop bean dip with various vegetable and whole grain dunkers to enjoy!

Recipe courtesy of Cooking Up Healthy Choices. For more information about this curriculum, please visit: <http://cns.ucdavis.edu/programs/shcp/cooking.html>.



What is fortification?

Fortifying foods with nutrients means that more is added to the original amount. For those that go entirely plant-based (such as vegetarians or vegans), fortified foods are important. For example, vegetarians who don't eat dairy should get calcium from a combination of foods that are calcium-fortified. In fact, schools that serve soy milk in the lunch or breakfast program need to make sure that the soy milk they serve is fortified so that it has the same amount of nutrients as regular milk.

Five Tips for Planning Plant-Based Meals



1 Build your meals around protein: Use sources that are naturally low in fat such as: beans, lentils, and rice. Avoid overloading meals with high-fat cheeses to replace meat.

2 Use calcium-fortified, soy-based beverages such as soy milk: These can provide calcium in amounts similar to milk, and also be lower in saturated fat.

3 Choose complementary foods: Complementary foods such as beans and brown rice, lentil soup and bread, tofu or tempeh with quinoa, or even a peanut butter sandwich (but don't forget to go whole grain) allow the right combinations of essential protein to be included in the diet.



4 Turn meat-based dishes into plant-based dishes: Many recipes that contain meat can be adapted to be plant-based by substituting tofu, beans, or lentils for meat.

5 Try ethnic cuisines: Indian, Middle Eastern, Hispanic, and Asian foods have many plant-based dishes that have plenty of protein from beans, nuts, and high-protein grains.

Getting Your Nutrients from Plant-Based Sources

Protein: Beans, nuts, quinoa, tofu, and other soy-based protein foods

Iron: Dried or fortified beans, cereals, spinach, chard, and dried fruit

Calcium: Collard greens, spinach, almonds, calcium-fortified orange juice, fortified cereal, fortified soymilk, and tofu

Vitamin B12: Vitamin supplements,

fortified breakfast cereals, fortified soymilk, and nutritional yeast

Vitamin D: Fortified breakfast cereals, fortified soymilk, and fortified orange juice

Omega-3 Fatty Acids: Walnuts and ground flaxseeds

Zinc: Whole grains, nuts, and legumes

Test your knowledge with the plant-based foods quiz!

1. What does it mean for a food to be fortified?
 - a. It is unprocessed.
 - b. It has fewer calories.
 - c. Nutrients are removed in processing.
 - d. More of a nutrient is added to the original amount.
2. Which of the following is generally true about vegan diets?
 - a. They contain small amounts of eggs and dairy.
 - b. They include small amounts of poultry and fish.
 - c. No animal products of any kind are included.
 - d. They only include raw foods.
3. True or false: Walnuts are a source of omega-3 fatty acids.
 True
 False
4. Which of these foods is a good source of protein?
 - a. Quinoa
 - a. Dried fruit
 - b. Orange juice
 - c. Bell pepper



The Results are In!

If you got all four right:

You really know your plant-based foods! Keep on learning more and trying new foods.

If you got two or three right:

You're on the right track! Try finding the information you missed in the other pages of the newsletter to become a nutrient master.

If you got one or less right:

It just means you have more chances to learn! Try reading through this newsletter again to learn more about what you missed.

Check your answers at the bottom of the page!

1. d; 2. c; 3. True; 4. a.