



A bowl of mouthwatering vegan cheese

Vegan for life

The compassionate vegan diet is capturing the imagination and hearts of people across the globe. **Dr R Sarvanan** starts a three-part series on how to transition to such a diet

The vegan diet is becoming a new trend these days, gaining popularity among Hollywood and Bollywood celebrities, athletes, political icons, business tycoons, and New Age spiritual teachers.

What is so special about a vegan diet and why do people choose this way of eating, even though it seems extreme?

A vegan diet is totally free from all animal products such as meat, fish, egg, dairy and honey. It includes only foods from plant sources, which Mother Earth

bountifully provides. Veganism has its roots in ancient cultures. Concepts like *jeeva karunya* (compassion for life) and *ahimsa* (non violence) exist in Indian philosophy.

Dr William Lambe, FRCP (1765-1848), was the first medical doctor to recommend a vegan diet for his patients. He could be considered the father of vegan nutrition. He started eating a vegan diet from the age of 41.

The word vegan was coined by David Watson and his spouse, Dorothy Morgan. David Watson established the Vegan Society in Birmingham during 1944.

The abundant health benefits of a vegan diet

A healthy vegan diet comprises the following five food groups

1. Whole grains
2. Legumes
3. Vegetables and greens
4. Fruits
5. Nuts and seeds

A healthy vegan diet can provide high fibre, complex carbohydrates, proteins, healthy fats and is rich in health-giving nutrients such as vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and phytonutrients.

Research studies reveal that a healthy vegan diet can help prevent and reverse various lifestyle diseases such as obesity, diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and certain types of cancers. In the book, *Rethink Food - 100 plus doctors can't be wrong*, 102 medical doctors and eight nutritionists from around the globe recommend vegan diet for healthy living!

In a nutshell, a healthy vegan diet strengthens immunity, improves vitality and increases longevity.

A plant-based diet is planet-friendly too!

Besides offering abundant health benefits, a plant-based eating plan has also got enormous benefits for the environment.

Livestock production contributes to adverse climatic changes and deforestation. Animal agriculture accounts for 70 per cent of global fresh water consumption, 38 per cent of the total land use and 19 per cent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. On the other hand, a plant-based (vegan) diet is ecologically sustainable because of the following reasons:

- *Reduced carbon footprint and pollution
- *Reduced water footprint
- *Reduced soil degradation and deforestation
- *Conservation of environmental resources and biodiversity.

Each individual's food choice can have a greater impact on the environment!

Kind and compassionate

A vegan diet does not include any animal products and is a cruelty-free choice of food. By choosing a vegan diet we are not involved in the torturing or killing of sentient animals for food.

A vegan diet and lifestyle is the best way to express our love, kindness and compassion for the animals who share this planet with us.

It's time to think and act consciously. Let our food choices be beneficial for our health, the environment and the animal world.

Making the transition

In order to make the transition easier, here are the plant-based alternatives for commonly used animal-based foods.

Meat: Mushrooms, raw jack fruit

Egg: Tofu, nutritional yeast

Milk: Plant-based milk alternatives

Curd/buttermilk: Curd and buttermilk made from plant-based milks

"The lower your diet is on the food chain, the more Earth friendly it is."

- John Robbins , Author and plant-based diet advocate

Butter: Nut butters

Ghee: Cashew paste

Cheese and paneer: Vegan cheese and tofu

Most people are able to drop most other animal products except milk and its derivatives. For many dropping dairy is the hardest part of the transition. The reason for this is that dairy products are addictive. But if we are willing to let go of milk and milk products we can explore many good alternatives, which are readily available these days. For those who prefer home-made alternatives to dairy products, here are some easy-to-follow recipes.

Almond milk

Ingredients:

12 whole almonds

Water - 1 glassful

Soak 12 almonds overnight in water. Next day drain the water and blend these soaked nuts in a blender with a glass of water. Almond milk is ready!

If you want to add more flavour, blend two dates (deseeded) and a pinch of organic vanilla powder with this nut milk.

Coconut milk

Ingredients

1 cup grated coconut (matured)

1 cup water

Blend the grated coconut with water in the blender. Strain the mixture and extract the coconut milk.

Peanut milk

Ingredients

Whole peanuts- 1/2 cup

Water - 1/2 cup



Delicious dahi vada made from peanut curd

Soak a cup of whole peanuts overnight in water. Drain the water and blend them in a blender with a cup of water. Strain this in a sieve or cloth to get peanut milk.

Soy milk

Ingredients

Soy beans (preferably organic): 100g
Water: 1 cup

"There is no way to overstate the magnitude of the collective spiritual transformation that will occur when we shift from food of violent oppression to food of gentleness and compassion."

- Dr Will Tuttle , Author of *The World Peace Diet*

Soak the soy beans overnight, drain the water. Blend the beans with a cup of water in the blender. Using a sieve or cloth, strain the mixture to get soy milk. Boil this soy milk and use this as a milk alternative.

Soy/peanut curd

Ingredients

Soy milk or peanut milk: 1 cup

Starter (fermented rice drink): 3-4 tsp

To make the starter: Take one handful of cooked brown/red rice in a bowl and add 100 ml water. Cover the bowl with a cotton cloth, and leave it overnight to ferment.

Creamy tofu cheese:

Ingredients

1 litre homemade soy milk

2 lemons

Heat the soy milk in a pan and when it starts bubbling, remove from heat. Add juice from 2 lemons to 100 ml water and mix this diluted lemon juice to the soy milk. Mix well and close the pan with a lid. Wait for 10-15 minutes. Soy milk will get curdled. Transfer

the curdled milk to a cheese cloth or nut bag and gently squeeze out most of the liquid. Creamy tofu cheese is ready! Chill this for a firmer texture.

Nut butter

Ingredients

Whole peanuts or almonds
100g

Method: Dry roast the peanuts or almonds in slow

flame till the skins crack. Put them in the grinder and grind to get nut butter. Add rock salt for taste.



Dr. R. Saravanan, is a holistic health professional associated with the vegan nonprofit organisation, SHARAN. He is also the contributing author of the book "RETHINK FOOD - 100 plus doctors can't be wrong"

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