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A growing body of evidence also suggests veganism could lower the risk of lifestyle diseases.



Given the sudden surge in its demand, the traditional food industry is desperately trying to catch up and come up with offerings that deliver.

Veganism may well be the biggest trend this year, but compassion never really goes out of style. Ethical veganism is not just about making diet choices but also about a person's beliefs and attitude.

Veganism, the plant-based diet that shuns meat and dairy, is having its time in the sun. Once considered a lifestyle choice of hipsters, the diet found many takers for its similarities with the Indian diet and to seek a healthier alternative. Veganism originated in the 1940s when Donald Watson coined the term “vegan” to demarcate vegetarians that didn’t consume dairy from those that did. The following years saw it becoming the doctrine of holistic living, and the virtues of veganism resonated with the animal rights activists. In India, it didn’t quite garner the same acceptance, primarily because it was considered as a counter-cultural trend that would seem tedious to maintain. Fast-forward to 2018 and turning vegan is hailed as the most popular way to achieve a healthier way of life. So, what was once seen as a fringe movement has now permeated into the mainstream as it also ticks other popular heads — ethicality, sustainability, and eco-consciousness. Given the sudden surge in its demand, the traditional food industry is desperately trying to catch up and come up with offerings that deliver. The rapid explosion of the annual Veganuary campaign, in which curious omnivores and vegetarians sign up to attempt veganism for a month and are then plied with recipes and other advice, is a testament to the movement’s success. Veganuary was launched in 2014, with 3,300 people signing up it has grown to a staggering 1,65,000 this year. With numerous organisations and individuals facilitating this shift in lifestyle, people are hopping on to the plant-based train, now more than ever. Reyna Rupani, the Mumbai head of the vegan organisation Sanctuary for Health and Reconnection to Animals and Nature (SHARAN) is one such person who helps people look at veganism as a diet of celebration and not of deprivation. “We basically make people aware that if you change your diet and go vegan, you're not going to miss out on anything. Not only is it great for your body and health but for the environment too,” says Reyna.



📷 Reyna Rupani

Food for the soul

A growing body of evidence also suggests veganism could lower the risk of lifestyle diseases. It can improve blood pressure and lower the risk of type 2

diabetes, thyroid, and PCOD. But unless you do it the right way, you won't get the benefits of turning vegan. "The other thing that I would like to clarify is that in veganism, there is something called a whole food plant-based diet, where food is used as medicine to actually reverse lifetime diseases. Even your coke, French fries and vada pav is vegan. But when you follow the whole food plant-based diet, you are eating as close to nature as possible with minimal processing," says Vinita Contractor, a Mumbai-based nutrition coach, wellness chef and food consultant. Reyna also believes that the prognosis to any disease is a shift in diet and lifestyle. "Our health is in our own hands and it is possible to live a life without medicines if you start eating the way nature designed us to eat. We weren't designed to drink another mammal's milk. The fact that a child doesn't need to be breastfed after a certain period is another indication," she says. But a major misconception circling around a vegan diet is about what it constitutes as most people lack awareness about the concept. "I get questions like, 'can we eat dal rice?' or 'are rotis vegan?' because people confuse vegan with gluten-free or a diet constituting raw foods and salads. But the fact is 80 percent of Indian food is vegan, the only exception being curd, clarified butter and desserts that are pretty much milk-based. If you take your normal diet of dal-roti-sabzi, it's incidentally vegan and most people don't know that," says Vinita adding that another common fallacy about vegan lifestyle is that it is expensive. "It's a huge misconception that vegan diet is expensive as our basic meal is pretty much vegan. One cup of peanut can be used to make one litre of curd. So it's actually cheaper than your normal dairy milk and lasts a good 10 days. Peanut butter can be easily made at home, cheese is made from cashew and because it ferments, you get a good quantity. Plus, there are no additives and preservatives," says Reyna.