

# The life-enhancing power of whole food, plant-based diet

Setting trends and ethics aside, people are switching to whole food, plant-based diet for its holistic health benefits



A whole food, plant-based diet allows you to eat unpolished grains, unrefined flours, fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds and all fibre-rich foods. (Pexels/Mikhail Nilov)

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much to care why your best friend and co-foodie turned – not even vegetarian – but vegan!

Whatever the reason you consume dairy, meat or poultry – you will meet at least one person who is grappling with changing to a whole food, plant-based (WFPB) diet or is slaying the internet with recipes that, they claim, will save lives and help reverse diseases. Recently, it's been raining vegan events, plant-based potlucks and vegan markets in Bengaluru.

There is a rise in the number of vegan restaurants. The online world is bursting with classes on WFPB baking or peanut curd making. To find out what the buzz is about, I spoke to some of the early adopters of this gathering food revolution. How come there's, slowly but surely, more place on the table for people following plant-based diets? And why are people even making this change?

Susmitha Veganosaurus recalls that when she became vegan, “exactly 20 years ago, people thought it was a phase.” Now, due to awareness and availability, “even non-vegetarians try vegan food. It is a cuisine,” she says. While earlier, the only reason to embrace veganism was ethics or animal rights, now people are choosing plant-based for the holistic health benefits, she points out.

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Now an entrepreneur who coaches people on various aspects of vegan life, Susmitha says she conducts courses on dairy alternatives just to see the “wow reaction” of participants when they make creamy plant-based curd. “Being vegan, you can still eat a lot of packaged, unhealthy, processed foods,” says Shubhada S, a vegan activist who emphasises that veganism does not necessarily mean more wellness. Including more “home cooked plant-based foods, and having fruits and vegetables” is what makes a difference, she observes.

Many choose veganism because of climate change or animal rights but choosing a WFPB journey is usually about reclaiming wellness. It means choosing to consume only unpolished grains, unrefined flours, fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds and all fibre-rich foods, rather than their extracted and polished versions. This also means: dates ace jaggery, even wood-pressed oils are out the window, tried and tested cooking methods have to be tweaked and eating out is out. Sounds nuts? Yet, this is exactly what many people and families have chosen to give their bodies a chance to heal from diseases and medications that seriously threaten their well-being.

### **Helps disease reversal**

When Priya Barua set off on a WFPB journey last July, she believed it would be temporary. Her

husband's chronic kidney disease was at the third stage. Allopathic solutions were at a dead end.

They consulted

Dr. Nandita Shah, founder, Sanctuary for Health and Reconnection to Animals and Nature (SHARAN) in Auroville, Pondicherry. After a year of following her advice and attending SHARAN's courses, Barua says that she understands wellness like never before. Whenever they stopped following the dietary changes there was a flare up. So even while travelling, they now find ways to eat what keeps them safe and well.

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Dr. Nandita Shah, who was in Bengaluru to conduct workshops on disease reversal, says that she's astounded when people tell her they've reversed diabetes simply by following her book, 'Reversing Diabetes in 21 Days'. The raised awareness about wellness through plant-based nutrition is thanks to the collective work of many doctors and activists, she says. More people understand now that "milk and meat are both high fat and no fibre" and that "humans are essentially herbivores."

Shah and her team of doctors and nutritionists from SHARAN have found good results in disease reversal through nutritional changes. If there is still a lag, it is because people are yet to find support mechanisms in their personal lives to sustain the WFPB lifestyle, she says. Understanding the need for support mechanisms, Dr. Achyuthan Eswar, founder, Sampoorana Ahara (a comprehensive WFPB food service provider) and his team constantly create more varieties of snacks, sweets, cakes, desserts, meals and even pizzas that can be safely consumed with zero health hazard. All festivals and celebrations are covered by Sampoorana Ahara's offerings.

"Availability of alternatives is key to making and sustaining lifestyle changes," he says. He points out that though there are currently excellent facilities and options for medical emergencies, prevention is not prioritised. Janani Eswar, co-founder Sampoorana Ahara, didn't just stay on the WFPB diet during both her pregnancies but is also raising her children on the same. She observes that her children are active, not obese and recover quickly from the usual illnesses.

Mumbai based Joanita Figueiredo, a professional nurse, was already following a plant-based diet when cancer struck. "Food changes are 200% responsible for my surviving cancer without undergoing conventional treatments," she says. Now a nutritional coach with Sanjeevani Life

Beyond Cancer, she recalls that many cancer patients experienced a break in treatment during the pandemic. “When those on plant-based nutrition went back for treatment two years later, the doctors could not find the cancer in their bodies,” she says.

Tradition, climate, communities and native wisdom once determined food. Now, market forces sit heavily on our plates while we strive to eat healthy and tasty. In such an environment, is it surprising that many people are losing no speed in switching to a diet that serves optimal health on a plate?

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