

Young People Who Want to Change Their Diet!

Adapted from *A Teen's Guide to Going Vegetarian*, by Judy Krizmanic,
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What Will Your Parents Say?

When you tell your parents that you've decided to eat more low-fat, plant-based foods, they might not be as thrilled about it as you are. But you can make the transition go much more smoothly if you try to see things from their side. Here are a few things that they might be concerned about and what you can do to lessen their worries.

Parents' Concern - They might worry that you can't get enough protein, iron, calcium, or other nutrients when you start eating lower on the food chain.

What You Can Do - Read up on vegetarian nutrition and assure your parents that you know how to get what your body needs. Show them articles and brochures showing that health experts say young people can get all of the nutrients they need from a plant-based diet.

Parents' Concern - They might think you're just "going through a phase" or that your decision to eat plant foods is just some fad that you're following.

What You Can Do - Explain to your parents that you have

well-thought-out reasons for improving your diet. If you feel strongly about not eating animal products, taking care of the environment or preventing disease and you understand the consequences of food on your health, share your feelings with them. Make it clear that you're doing this because you want to.

Parents' Concern - They might feel like you're rejecting what they taught you.

One in four teenagers thinks that being vegetarian is "in," according to a poll by Teenage Research Unlimited.

—U. S. News and World Report

What You Can Do - Many parents take it personally that their child has decided to change her or his diet. They might feel like you're saying the food they've raised you on isn't good enough for you. Try to assure them that your decision to eat lower on the food chain isn't a reflection on them and that you're concerned about your health. Point out that the values they taught you have helped shape you into who you are.

Parents' Concern - They won't know what to cook for you.

What You Can Do - Offer to help with the shopping and cooking, and find recipes that the whole family can enjoy.

Remember...

Above all, be patient. It may take a while for them to come around and understand exactly why you've decided to change your diet. Don't expect everyone to join you in eating a plant-based diet. Just as you decided when to improve your diet, they have to decide when they're ready to make the switch. But chances are, pretty soon you'll have your whole family eating more healthy plant foods.

Out in the Real World

Face it. The United States is set up for people who mostly consume animal products. Although it's getting easier to find animal-free and dairy-free options everywhere you go, you'll still find yourself in tough situations where it's difficult to find something to eat. Here are some tips:

In the Fast-Food World - When the rest of the gang is ordering burgers or beef burritos you might go for:

- Salad bar
- Baked potatoes

- Bean burritos
- Burgers without the burger (just toppings on the bun)
- Cheese-less all-veggie pizza
Better yet, talk to the manager of your favorite fast-food restaurant and request that more low-fat, plant-based options be made available.

Dining Out - What do you tell your waiter/waitress when it's time to order off a menu and you're not sure what contains animal products?

- Feel good about asking questions. Find out, for instance, if the vegetable soup is made with meat broth or not.
- Before you order, tell your waiter/waitress that you don't eat meat and/or dairy products. She or he may be able to suggest some foods that you hadn't thought of or that aren't listed on the menu.
- Be adventurous. Visit restaurants with more plant food cuisine on the menu. Try ethnic restaurants such as Thai, Mexican and Indian.

Traveling - The rule here is: Plan ahead.

- When making airline reservations, ask for a meal made without meat or dairy.
- Take your own food along when you're not sure what you'll find.
- Look for health food stores and vegetarian restaurants in the cities you visit. You can find listings in the Yellow Pages.

What Will Your Friends Say?

Your friends—and even people you meet for the first time—may also have something to say about your choice to change your diet. Some people will simply be curious. Some will be impressed with your commitment. On the other hand, it seems that some people will simply want to argue and debate with you. Here are some of the questions and comments you might hear:

“But what do you eat?” - People think that all vegetarians eat is salad, celery and carrot sticks. Explain to them that a

We do our children a wonderful service when we support them in maintaining healthy eating habits. We are fulfilling the genuine call of parenthood when we help them never to feel ashamed or afraid of being different, but rather to take pride in doing what they know is wholesome and good.

—John Robbins, author
Diet for a New America

wide variety of delicious, hearty, satisfying plant foods are available. Better yet, let them sample what you're eating.

“How do you get enough protein?” - Even though protein deficiency isn't a problem in this country (and most people eat far too much protein) this is still one of the most common questions you'll hear. Read up on health and nutrition so you'll be able to set your friends straight on issues like this one.

“Don't you miss meat?” -

Some people wonder how anyone could possibly give up pepperoni pizza and bologna sandwiches. It's important to respect that people have their own connections with certain foods; everyone isn't going to change overnight. You can explain, however, that with so many wonderful non-cholesterol foods available, you don't have time to miss the meat.

You'll also run into people who want to debate. They may say that human beings are supposed to eat animals because that's the way the food chain goes or some other such argument. Your best way to

approach these folks is to educate yourself about various issues—like how animals are raised on factory farms or how vegetarians have lower rates of many serious illnesses or how there are simply not enough resources to feed the growing world population a meat-based diet. Speak intelligently and teach others about what's

really going on.

Many people will agree with you. Actually, one of the more common responses you'll hear from your friends when they find out you've decided to eat lower on the food chain is...

“Yeah, I really don't eat much meat myself.” - It turns out that more and more people today are understanding the benefits of a plant-based diet and are changing their diets for the better!