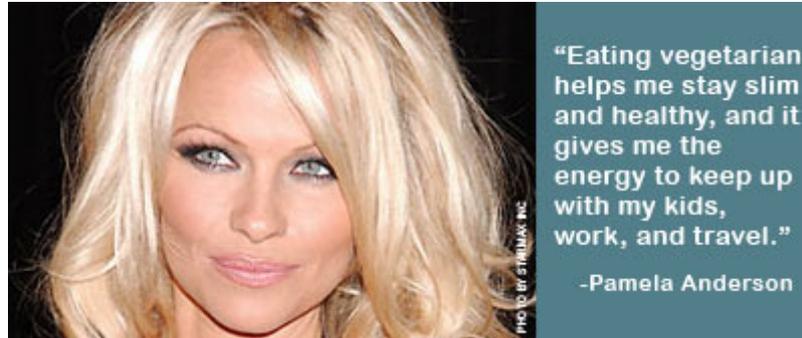


How to Become a Vegetarian, the Easy Way

While being a vegetarian isn't for everyone (and neither is Pamela Anderson), I talk to lots of people every day who tell me they'd like to become vegetarian, but it seems like it would be too hard, and they don't have the willpower.



But becoming a vegetarian, for me and for many others, is the easiest thing in the world.

If you're not interested in becoming vegetarian or vegan, please skip this post (and don't flame me in the comments). But I've had numerous people, just in the last week or so, ask me to post about becoming a vegetarian, as I seem to have become a poster boy for vegetarianism (move over, Pamela Anderson!).

So in this post we'll look at some suggestions and tips for becoming a vegetarian without too much difficulty, and some reasons you might consider it.

Why Become Vegetarian?

Again, let me state that vegetarianism isn't for everyone. If you are fanatically devoted to meat (and I was at one time, so I understand), you might not be interested. If you already eat healthy, or you're not interested in your health, you might not be interested.

But there are some reasons, for the rest of us, to consider it (and these are just a few — see these [49 reasons](#) or these [21 reasons](#) for more):

1. **Cut the fat.** While meat provides a lot of protein, it also provides a ton of fat — especially saturated fat. Which means that by cutting out meat, you'll be cutting out a lot of bad fat, and replacing it with things that are probably not only lower in fat, but that contain some good fats. This greatly reduces your risk of heart disease, and in fact numerous studies have shown that vegetarians tend to have a lower risk of heart disease, as well as hypertension, diabetes, cancer and other diseases. Read more [here](#).
2. **Less food poisoning.** Food poisoning gets millions of people each year — and many of them from meat, which is a good breeding ground for harmful bacteria, especially if not stored, prepared or cooked exactly right. Cut out meat and you lower your risk of food poisoning (especially if you also cut out eggs and dairy, but that's optional).
3. **Reduce the suffering.** You probably don't want to hear about the horrific treatment of animals that are raised for food, even before they are slaughtered for our benefit. But suffice it to say, there are great amounts of suffering involved, and by cutting out meat, you are reducing your involvement in that. Read more [here](#).
4. **Help the environment.** There are actually numerous ways that the meat industry harms the environment, from a waste of our resources (animals raised for food eat enough grain to feed the world), to a waste of fuel, to the pollution caused by their waste matter, and much more. Read more about that [here](#).
5. **Help your weight loss.** It's possible to be vegetarian and eat very unhealthy foods, including Coke and fries and fried stuff and pizza and chips. But it's much more difficult. Studies repeatedly show that vegetarians are slimmer and are less likely to be obese than meat eaters. If you're trying to lose weight, being a vegetarian can be a good part of your program.
6. **Get more nutrition.** In general (though not necessarily), vegetarians replace meat with more nutritious foods, such as fruits, vegetables, beans, whole grains, and so on. If you do that, you will be getting more of

the nutrients your body needs, giving you better health, less illness, and more energy.

20 Tips for Becoming a Vegetarian

So, if you'd like to become a vegetarian, without too much trouble, here are my suggestions:

1. **Have good reasons.** If you just want to become vegetarian for kicks, you probably won't stick with it for long — not because it's hard, but because any lifestyle change or habit change requires a little bit of motivation. You need to first think about why you want to become vegetarian, and really believe in it. The rest is easy.
2. **Read up.** Before starting anything new, I tend to read as much as possible about whatever it is that I'll be doing. I suggest you do so with vegetarianism. Check out a couple of good books from the library (or better yet, borrow from vegetarian friends). And there are tons and tons of good sites on the Internet. One of my favorites is GoVeg.com.
3. **Find good recipes.** You don't need to go out and buy a bunch of new cookbooks, although that's certainly an option. But again, there are many great recipes online. Try GoVeg.com ... another favorite of mine is [Post Punk Kitchen](http://PostPunkKitchen.com) (also see their forums). In fact, it can all be a little overwhelming ... but don't worry, you don't need to decide on anything. Just look through the recipes, take note of a few that look really good, and decide to try a few of them. You have the rest of your life to test out other recipes!
4. **Try one recipe a week.** My suggestion is just to try one new vegetarian recipe a week. If you like it, add it to your collection of staple recipes that you eat on a regular basis. If the recipe isn't that great, try another next week. Soon, you'll have a good list of 5-10 great recipes that you love to cook and eat. And really, whether you're vegetarian or meat eater, that's probably all you really eat on a regular basis anyway (for dinner, at least). Most people only have 7-10 recipes that they cook regularly. Once you have that many vegetarian recipes, you are good to go.
5. **Substitutions.** Also try your regular recipes that you love, but instead of using meat, use a meatless substitute. So if you love to eat spaghetti or chili, for example, substitute a ground-beef alternative from [Bocca](http://Bocca.com) or [Morning Star](http://MorningStar.com) and just cook it the way you normally would. There are alternatives for just about any kind of meat, and some of them are quite good. You can go on eating what you normally eat, but meatless.
6. **Start with red meat.** I suggest a gradual transition into vegetarianism ... although you can do it all at once, I've found that for many people, a gradual transition works better. There's no need to give up all meat at once. Try a few new recipes, maybe eat one vegetarian meal for the first week, two for the second, and so on. If you do this, start with red meat, as it is typically the least healthy.
7. **Then the other meats.** After a couple of weeks of going without red meat, try cutting out pork for a couple of weeks. Then cut out chicken, the seafood. With this two-week approach (and you can even make it 3 weeks or a month for each stage if you want to go more slowly), you'll hardly notice the difference. I've found that I don't crave meats anymore, although I did for about a week.
8. **Consider dairy & eggs.** Vegetarians vary widely on this, so there's no mandate to give up dairy or eggs if you're giving up meat. Do what feels right for you. But if you go meatless for awhile, and want to try to go a little further (in terms of health, the environment, and helping animal suffering), consider these foods. For one thing, they are often high in saturated fat, especially compared to soy alternatives. It was easy for me to give up eggs, as I've never been a huge fan, but transitioning to soy milk took a few days to get used to ... although I can't stand the taste of milk now. :)
9. **Think about your staples.** A useful exercise is to make a list of foods you regularly eat, for breakfast, lunch, dinner, desserts and snacks. Not meals, but ingredients. And then think about vegetarian alternatives, and make a new list. For example, instead of eating chicken in a stir-fry dish, you might try tofu. With a new list of staples, you should have no trouble stocking your fridge and pantry.
10. **All in one go.** Some people prefer to give up meat all at once. While this takes a little more determination than the gradual solution I advocate, it's not that hard, really. Just prepare yourself by taking some of the steps above (finding recipes, substitutes, a new list of staples, and reading as much as possible), and then give it a shot. It should only take a few days to get used to it, and then you'll have very little trouble after that. The only issues you'll have to work out, once you're used to going without meat, are things like eating out, eating at others' houses, and other similar issues. Read on for more on these.
11. **Adequate protein.** One myth about vegetarianism is that you don't get enough protein. Actually, meat eaters usually take in way more protein than they need. Protein requirements for the average adult are lower than people think. If you eat a varied diet (not just junk food, for example) that includes vegetables, grains, beans, nuts, soy protein and the like, you will be fine. It would be hard to create an eating plan where you're getting inadequate protein (the junk food example would be one). Another myth is that you need to eat

different types of protein within a single meal (or even a single day) to get complete protein from plants ... actually, as long as you eat varied proteins (such as those listed above) over a few days, you'll be fine. And soy protein is a complete protein, just like meat.

12. **Junk food.** Again, you can be a vegetarian and be very unhealthy, if you eat junk food. Being a vegetarian is not a license to eat junk food (although you can probably indulge yourself a little more often now that you're not eating meat). Try to stick with fruits and veggies, whole grains, beans, nuts, soy protein, low-fat dairy and other nutritious foods for the most part.
13. **Ethnic food.** One of the great things about becoming a vegetarian is that it often spurs people to try new and interesting ethnic foods (or reminds them of foods they love but don't eat much). Great vegetarian dishes can be found all over the world, from Italian pasta to many Indian dishes to spicy Thai food to Chinese, Ethiopian, Moroccan, Mexican, South American and more. It can be interesting to do a series of theme weeks, trying vegetarian dishes from a certain country for one week, and then moving around the world and sampling other great ethnic foods.
14. **Tell friends & family.** If you're really going to become a vegetarian, you'll have to talk to the people you know and love about it. You'll still be dining with them, at restaurants, at their homes, at social gatherings, at work, and so it'll be better for everyone involved if they know what you're doing (they might prepare a vegetarian dish for you, or you might bring one for them to try), and if they know the reasons why. Some people might have a hard time with it. Just try to explain it to them, without getting defensive or argumentative, and ask them to be understanding (and maybe to give some of your food a try). Don't try to force vegetarianism on anyone, or sound preachy, but do give them more information if they're interested.
15. **Have fun.** Most of all, don't make becoming a vegetarian be a restrictive, grueling ordeal. If you feel like you're depriving yourself, you won't last long. But if you feel like you're doing something good, and trying out some great-tasting food, you'll stick with it for much longer (for life, I hope). Have a great time along the way.
16. **Plan ahead.** Often what gets in the way of new vegetarians is that they go somewhere, and don't think of what they might have to eat. Going to a party or a dinner can be much better if you prepare a great dish and bring it along (let the host know about it first). An errands trip doesn't have to result in you going to McDonalds, starving, if you pack a lunch or bring some snacks.
17. **Cook ahead.** Another problem is when we don't have any vegetarian food ready to eat, and so we resort to whatever is easiest (if we don't feel like eating or are too hungry to wait). Instead, you could cook a big pot of vegetarian chili or soup or something, and have it in the fridge for when you're hungry and don't have time to cook.
18. **Vegetarian snacks.** I love to eat fruits and cut-up veggies, but there are lots of other great snacks you can eat. Roasted (or raw) almonds, hummus and pitas or veggies, blue corn chips and salsa, low-fat granola, berries with soy yogurt, whole-grain cereals, Kashi crackers ... dozens and dozens of snacks, actually, if you take a look around. Have plenty on hand, at home, at work, and on the road.
19. **Vegetarian restaurants.** There's only one vegetarian restaurant on Guam, and unfortunately it's closed on nights and weekends (it's a Seventh-Day Adventist joint, open for lunch on weekdays, and it's great). But you might live in an area with dozens of great vegetarian restaurants. Give them a try! You might discover some wonderful food, and thank your lucky stars you decided to give vegetarianism a try. Otherwise, most restaurants will have some vegetarian options, or can cook you a vegetarian dish on request.
20. **Vegetarian convenience foods.** In your supermarket's frozen section, you'll probably find a lot of vegetarian foods that can be microwaved. You might give some of these a try (I love the Amy's brand). Beware that, like most convenience foods, these are more expensive than home-cooked stuff, and most likely not as healthy. But you can find some fairly healthy foods there too. At any rate, it's always good to have a couple of convenience foods in the freezer, just in case.

Further Reading

There are tons of other good resource out there that cover way more ground than I can do in this post. Here are just a few to start you out:

- **Scott Young:** [How to Become a Vegetarian](#)
 - **Ask MeFi:** [Can a carnivore become a vegetarian?](#)
 - **VegCooking:** [Making the Transition](#)
 - **Vegetarian Society:** [Going Vegetarian](#)
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