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# THE PLANT-BASED DIET – A BEGINNER'S GUIDE

By Kimberley Paré, Registered Dietitian, Medisys Health Group



A plant-based lifestyle has become increasingly popular, and for good reason: it can help optimize health and minimize our carbon footprint. Reducing or eliminating animal products effectively reduces greenhouse gas production, deforestation and is more ethically sound for the welfare of livestock. What's more, the plant-based diet, including vegan and vegetarian approaches, has been increasingly researched over the last few decades, with scientists examining its effects on heart disease, diabetes, cancer, GI health, weight loss and more. The consensus? A plant-based diet has several positive impacts on these diseases and on overall health outcomes. Ultimately, a diet consisting mostly of plants such as fruits, vegetables and legumes is greatly encouraged as part of a healthy lifestyle.

It's important to note that there are certain nutritional considerations to keep in mind when removing animal products from one's diet. Some nutrients are more available to the body when in animal form than in plant form, however it is entirely possible to meet all of your nutrient needs with a plant-based diet. Here are the most important nutritional considerations when adopting a total or partial plant-based diet:

- **Protein:** Include a plant-based source of protein at each meal and snack. Portions vary based on individual needs and type of protein, but aim to consume around 3/4 - 1 cup of legumes (beans, lentils, chickpeas) or 150g tofu/tempeh per meal. Vegetarians must add 10% more total protein to their diets to compensate for the fact that vegetarian diets are high in fibre, which can reduce the body's ability to digest and use protein. However, preparation methods such as soaking and sprouting help make proteins easier to digest and some nutrients easier to absorb. There are several resources including [www.urbainculteurs.org](http://www.urbainculteurs.org) that help teach safe soaking and sprouting methods for beginners.

- **Iron:** Iron can be found in most protein-rich foods such as legumes, tofu, pumpkin and squash seeds, as well in breakfast cereals and some green vegetables. Iron-rich foods are best absorbed when paired with a vitamin C-rich food. Good sources of vitamin C include green, orange, red and yellow fruits and vegetables.

- **Omega-3s:** Vegetarians require double the dose of plant-based (ALA) omega-3s than omnivores. This equates to 2-3 tbsp of ALA-rich seeds like flax, hemp and chia, 1/2 cup of walnuts or 1/4 cup of tofu or soybeans. Tip: ALA-rich seeds should always be kept in an airtight bag in the fridge or freezer.

- **Vitamin B12:** Vitamin B12 is found in enriched soy and plant-based beverages, fortified breakfast cereals and Red Star nutritional yeast. An adequate amount is found in 2-3 portions of these foods per day. If you are unable to obtain this amount through dietary sources, be sure to include a 50-100 mcg/day B12 supplement (in cyanocobalamin form) in your daily routine.

- **Vitamin D:** It is very hard to meet our daily vitamin D requirements from food sources alone, and Canadians typically don't get enough of it from sunlight, so I recommend a vitamin D supplement of 1000IU/day for everyone over one year of age, whether they follow a plant-based diet or not.

## HOW TO START A PLANT-BASED DIET

I recommend making gradual changes and building your repertoire of plant-based recipes. Here is a list of weekly ideas to jump start your switch to plant-based eating:

- Cook one or two new meatless recipes per week, or think of vegetarian recipes you already enjoy and add them to your meal plan more often.
- Adapt your recipes to reduce the meat and either fully or partially substitute it with plant proteins like lentils or tofu, for example.
- Learn one or two new ways to cook vegetarian proteins – whether that be tofu, tempeh, lentils or beans.
- Choose to eat at least one plant-based meal per day – either at breakfast, lunch or dinner.
- Build a meal around a salad and a plant-based protein.
- Invest some time into exploring new recipes, ingredients, food blogs and plant-based restaurants for inspiration.
- Start with one substitution at a time, such as replacing cow's milk with a soy beverage, trying cashew cheese, replacing yogurt with coconut or soy yogurt etc.

The best plant-based approach is always one with a whole foods focus. This means eating unprocessed foods most of the time – think dried or canned beans, lentils and chickpeas, soy products such as edamame, soy milk, tofu and tempeh, fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds and nutritional yeast. I recommend using processed vegan options (like commercial veggie patties, ground meat substitute, Beyond Meat burgers, isolated soy or pea protein products, faux meats and cheeses) as little as possible.

Overall, making the change to a more plant-based lifestyle can be done one step at a time. But it can be difficult to navigate a dietary change – and the grocery store – on your own. Our team of Medisys dietitians can help take the confusion out of plant-based eating and work with you to design a plan that takes your schedule, food preferences and budget to heart. [\*\*Click here\*\*](#) for more information about our nutrition services.

### Sources:

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# CONNECTING WITH FOOD: HOW TO NOURISH FROM THE INSIDE OUT

Meghan Wilton, Lily Elizabeth Lam, Registered dietitians, Medisys Health Group

March is nutrition month in Canada and this year's campaign theme is "More than Food". We couldn't agree more with the philosophy behind this mantra. Food is more than just fuel. The way we connect with it can provide the foundation for nourishing our bodies.

But it can take time to break down the walls of 21st-century "diet culture", which equates thinness to health, promotes weight loss, demonizes foods and oppresses people who don't match the picture of "health".

Most of us have a good idea about what types of food are best for us, but let's dive a little deeper into our relationship with food – how we connect with it, how it makes us feel, and how to incorporate more food mindfulness into our lives.



## HOW DOES FOOD MAKE YOU FEEL?

The foods we eat affect our mood, behaviour and brain function. Feeling grouchy, angry, tired or sad can be a result of not nourishing our bodies in a supportive way. It may take years to see physical health consequences of poor nutrition, but our mental and emotional health can be affected immediately.

The body of evidence linking diet and mental health is growing at a rapid pace. Studies show reduction in the risk for major depression and anxiety disorders in people who regularly consume a diverse and balanced diet consisting of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and high quality meat and fish. On the other hand, a diet high in refined or ultra-processed foods is associated with an increased likelihood of depression.

Food can play a vital role in how we feel, so it's important to build this awareness and work towards optimizing your diet.

## WHERE TO START?

- 1) Focus on whole foods instead of processed foods. A great place to start is by having a piece of fruit and some nuts instead of a fruit and nut granola bar.
- 2) Incorporate more colour and variety across your day and/or week.
- 3) Try incorporating more local and seasonal produce into your diet.
- 4) Visit local farmers' markets, talk to farmers and get to know what's seasonal and local.
- 5) Experiment in the kitchen by starting a cookbook club, trying a new recipe weekly or monthly, and by getting your whole family involved in cooking.
- 6) Make small, realistic, sustainable changes that work for your lifestyle.
- 7) Seek advice from a Registered Dietitian to help achieve your personal goals.

Of course, there are many barriers to eating well. Time, stress, accessibility, cost, lack of education and skills, preferences, fatigue – the list goes on. Some of these barriers can lead to us experiencing different types of hunger.

## DIFFERENT TYPES OF HUNGER

- **Stomach hunger:** The physical need for food. This is when your stomach begins to growl and you are eating for the well-being of your body.
- **Mouth hunger:** Craving the pleasure of food. For example, you stand in the kitchen, looking for something to eat: "Where are those salty chips? No, I want creamy...where is that ice cream?"
- **Heart hunger:** Eating in response to habits, emotions or how you're feeling mentally, not physically.

When faced with these different types of hunger, how can we respond mindfully?

- Be aware of hunger and fullness cues. Appetite is a natural cue we get from our bodies.
- Try to enjoy your food by eating slowly and chewing food thoroughly without distractions
- Ask yourself "am I hungry?" and identify the type of hunger that you're feeling (is it stomach, mouth or heart?) If you are hungry, identify "what am I hungry for? Or what would make me satisfied?" Tune into what your body is craving; is it a specific taste, texture, aroma, temperature?
- Aim to eat primarily for physical hunger versus boredom, stress, fatigue or emotional reasons. Determine if food or another strategy is required to satisfy your need.

Here's a glimpse at how our team of dietitians here at Medisys connects with food on a personal level:

"I have really enjoyed exploring how food can work to support my day to day life. Sure, there are days when I may miss a meal due to my schedule, but when I notice the cues of hunger, my aim is to tune in and respond to that need to the best of my ability. When it is time for a meal I love to explore what it is that I may need to feel satisfied and nourished." – Alissa Vieth, Registered Dietitian, Medisys Toronto

"Growing up with a big family, we shared and celebrated with food. In my practice as a dietitian, I connect with food through its complex nutrition properties and healing powers. Most recently, food has connected me to people on the other side of the world when communication was extremely limited. I traveled to Japan in 2017 and despite my inability to speak the language, I loved every experience I had. I credit much of this to our ability, as humans, to connect through food. Appreciating the artistry of a dish, the flavours of ingredients, and a meal shared between people creates a connection that, sometimes, not even words can do." – Jessica Tong, Registered Dietitian, Medisys Vancouver

"My connection to food is very much associated with love. I find that I show love through food, whether it be cooking for loved ones, sharing a meal amongst friends or showing myself love by nourishing my body with good food – while also treating myself to the occasional cookie. Food has an emotional connection for all of us, the more mindful we are of that connection, the more positive our eating experiences can be." – Kimberley Paré, Registered Dietitian, Medisys Montreal

Bottom line? Listen to your body, and eat what will make you feel your best in the long term. There is no perfect path to change, but having patience and compassion for yourself is important.

Do you have questions about your diet? [Click here](#) to contact one of our Medisys dietitians.





# 5

## REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD COOK WITH YOUR KIDS

By Ryan Ghorayeb, Intern,  
Medisys Health Group



I lingered around my mother in the kitchen and watched her cook while I was growing up. Regularly, she would ask me to try the food and tell her what it was missing, even though she knew I was guessing. I would proclaim the missing ingredients and she would always humour me. As with any skill, practice lead to improvement. I owe my knowledge in the kitchen to my mom, who always urged me to help her prepare dinner no matter how much I slowed her down. Had it not been for her countless cooking invitations, I would rely more on fast and pre-made foods like many young adults.

Here are five reasons why you should cook with your kids:

### 1. COOKING IS A CREATIVE OUTLET

It's important for children to create things and express themselves as they grow up. Cooking is the ultimate creative outlet because it requires so much imagination and innovation (not to mention basic math skills, trial and error practice, patience, and other vital qualities). Teaching your children to cook affords them the skills and opportunity to partake in this art-form.

### 2. IT CAN CREATE A WONDERFUL BOND

Cooking with your children is going to be the first time they are exposed to working in the kitchen, so do your best to make it exciting (and prepare for a mess from time to time)! If they enjoy cooking with you, they will look forward to it as they grow older, and cherish the memories you made together for years to come.

### 3. IT SHOWS KIDS EXACTLY WHAT THEY ARE EATING

When we eat at restaurants or purchase pre-made foods, we can't always grasp exactly what we are

consuming. Reading labels will not have the same impact on your child as actually watching half a stick of butter being used to baste one steak. When you learn to cook, you control the ingredients and portions. Humans are incredibly visual and seeing the cooking process helps us to understand what we are eating.

### 4. IT TEACHES THE PRICE OF FOOD AND THE IMPORTANCE OF BUDGETING

Part of cooking is grocery shopping, and when you do this with your children, encourage them to look for items that are on sale. Your children will learn the value of different food items and likely gain a greater appreciation for the food they eat. This can also be a great opportunity to teach them about budgeting!

### 5. IT ENCOURAGES A HEALTHY LIFELONG RELATIONSHIP WITH FOOD

Unfortunately, eating disorders are incredibly common among Canadians, especially among teenagers and young adults. The National Eating Disorder Centre states that prevention can be as simple as living a healthy lifestyle by including your children in meal planning, shopping and food preparation. Cooking meals using nutritious ingredients will influence your children to live in a more healthful way, and help establish a powerful connection between eating well and feeling great. Furthermore, if cooking becomes an enjoyable experience for your children, they are more likely to associate food with positive emotions rather than negative ones.

Learning to cook is often intimidating for young adults, but it's less so if they've had practice as children. Cooking with your kids from a young age is truly a life-long gift.




TOP



# FOOD AND NUTRITION TRENDS FOR 2020





Trends in the food and nutrition world seem to change as quickly as the 52-week fashion cycle, but there's good reason to get excited about the food movements you're going to see in 2020! Keep reading for my roundup of five positive trends to look forward to this year:

### 1. FERMENTED GRAINS

Despite the low-carb trend in recent years, fermented grains are bringing bread back into the spotlight! The fermentation process pre-digests the grains, making them easier for us to digest. Fermentation also reduces the grain's phytic acid content, an anti-nutrient that can reduce mineral absorption. We should start feeling good about enjoying a slice of locally-made fermented bread!

### 2. SEASONAL POP-UPS

Like a pop-up shop, but for the season's most delicious crops, pop-up restaurants and dinner events that focus on seasonality and local ingredients are making it easier for people to feel the planet-to-plate connection. Check your community's local food blogs for information about dining experiences near you!

### 3. ENVIRONMENTALLY-CONSCIOUS EATING

What we recognize as healthy eating also happens to be what's best for the planet, but there is going to be an even greater focus on environmentally-conscious eating in 2020. As Chef Charles Michel, a champion for conscious eating, says: "Infinite growth does not work in a finite planet." - Expect to see foods packaged in fewer single-use plastics, beeswax wraps will become even more popular (for wrapping cheese and produce), and your neighbours might even start growing their own produce. It's about time we saw – and, more importantly, participated in – changes like these!

### 4. NUTRIGENOMIX®

Rather than following an existing dietary trend, imagine knowing exactly what to eat in order to optimally nourish your body at a cellular level. This is a reality in 2020! It's called Nutrigenomix®, a personalized nutrition analysis to help you eat according to your genes. Using a simple saliva sample, we can test 45 genetic markers to assess nutrient metabolism, cardiometabolic health, body composition, food intolerances, eating habits including fat, sugar, starch taste perception, and physical fitness. Dietary planning is, then, tailored to prevent, manage, or improve various areas of health based on the body's genetic makeup.

### 5. THE FLEXITARIAN DIET

Also called "semi-vegetarian diet", this flexible diet encourages mostly plant-based foods while allowing meat and other animal products in moderation. If you're looking to adopt a healthy and unrestrictive diet, a flexitarian eating pattern may be for you. The concept invites you to follow healthy principles, such as eating mostly fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains, emphasizing plant-based proteins, enjoying occasional meat dishes, and limiting added sugar and highly-processed food. Interested in learning more about the possible benefits of this diet on your health? [Click here](#) to book a consultation with a Medisys registered dietitian.

It's going to be a marked year for food and nutrition advancements. At once, expect to see the industry embrace a slower and more mindful pace with more local, environmentally-conscious choices available to consumers, while also celebrating cutting-edge science as the study of nutrigenomics becomes more mainstream. Would you like to learn more about Nutrigenomix at Medisys? [Click here](#).



A close-up photograph of a bowl of Golden Temple Soup. The soup is a thick, creamy yellow color. It is topped with roasted chickpeas, pieces of roasted cauliflower, and a sprig of fresh thyme. A fork is visible on the right side of the bowl.

# GOLDEN TEMPLE SOUP

By Christine Shaddick, Registered Dietitian, Medisys Health Group

This cozy, bright, and nourishing “golden temple” soup is loaded with anti-inflammatory ingredients like turmeric, cauliflower and cashews. While super creamy – without any cream – you also get great texture from the crispy chickpea topping. So delicious!



Serves 4

## SOUP INGREDIENTS

- 1 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 large head of cauliflower, chopped into chunks or florets
- 2/3 cup raw cashews
- 1 1/2 tsp ground turmeric
- 7-8 cups water
- 2 tsp salt
- 1/2 tsp ground black pepper
- Optional garnish: squeeze of fresh lemon, parsley, cilantro

## CHICKPEA TOPPING INGREDIENTS

- 1 can (19oz, 540mL) chickpeas
- Olive oil
- Ground cumin, to taste
- Smoked paprika, to taste
- Salt, to taste

## INSTRUCTIONS

### For the Soup:

1. Heat the oil in a deep soup pot. Add the onion, garlic, cauliflower, cashews, and turmeric. Sauté for 10 minutes or until very fragrant.
2. Add 4 cups of water, salt and pepper. Simmer until softened.
3. Using an immersion blender or high powered blender, blend the soup to a smooth and creamy consistency.
4. Add any additional water (remaining 2-3 cups) if you need to thin it out.

### For the Chickpea Topping:

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees F
2. Drain and rinse chickpeas. Spread them on a baking sheet. Sprinkle chickpeas with a dusting of cumin, smoked paprika and salt (or any other spice combination you want).
3. Drizzle with olive oil. Stir right on the pan, then roast for 30-40 minutes or until semi-crispy.

### To Serve:

1. Drizzle soup with a squeeze of lemon and top with spiced chickpeas and parsley or cilantro
2. Serve with a simple mixed green or arugula salad and crusty bread for a complete meal!

## NUTRITIONAL INFORMATION:

Per serving, includes soup + spiced chickpeas

Calories (kcal)	370	Protein (g)	16.4
Carbohydrates (g)	45.2	Fat (g)	16.6
Sugar (g)	11.3	Saturated Fat (g)	2.6
Fibre (g)	13.2	Sodium (mg)	662.3

For more healthy recipes, [click here](#) and download our recipe booklet.





Do you feel sluggish after eating certain foods?  
Are you drinking too much coffee? Would a  
high protein diet help you lose weight?



## THE ANSWER MIGHT BE IN YOUR GENES!

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