



# Nutrition News - April 2022

## What Is A Plant-based Diet?

A plant-based diet focuses on eating foods primarily from plant sources. This includes not only fruits and vegetables, but nuts, seeds, oils, whole grains, legumes, and beans as well.

It doesn't mean that you are vegetarian or vegan and never eat meat or dairy; rather, you are eating a greater amount of foods that come from plant sources.

### The benefits of following a plant-based diet

Plant-based foods are naturally high in fiber and rich in vitamins and minerals. They're also low in calories, saturated fat, and cholesterol. If you eat a variety of foods, you can typically meet your protein, calcium, and dietary requirements. However, to ensure that you obtain enough vitamin B12, you should take a daily supplement or eat fortified cereals, plant milks, or nutritional yeasts.

A plant-based diet can also lower your risk of serious health complications such as:

- **Heart disease.** Research shows that plant-based diets can help prevent or reverse heart disease, decrease cholesterol, and lower blood pressure.
- **Diabetes.** Type 2 diabetes can be prevented, managed, and reversed with a plant-based diet. This is because this diet can help you to lose weight, improve insulin function, and enhance your body's blood sugar control.
- **Cancer.** You can reduce your risk of cancers such as breast, prostate, ovarian, and colorectal cancers by eating mostly plant-based foods and avoiding animal products as well as high-fat foods.

- **Obesity.** Plant-based diets can lead to weight loss, even if you don't exercise often or count calories. That's because when you swap high-fat, high-calorie foods with fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes, you'll naturally reduce your calories, which can help avoid obesity. Fruits and vegetables generally have high water and fiber content, which provide volume and weight to your dishes with minimal calories.

- **Alzheimer's disease or other cognitive conditions.** Many dairy, meat, and fried products contain saturated and trans fats, which can raise your risk for Alzheimer's disease and other brain disorders. On the other hand, plant-based foods have high levels of antioxidants, folate, and vitamin E, which may improve brain function.

Following a plant-based diet also helps the environment by conserving water, preserving forests, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and protecting biodiversity.

### Ways to get more protein

Older adults are at risk of not getting enough protein, but fortunately, it's quite simple to maximize your intake on a plant-based diet. Here are some high protein plant-based options to consider:

- Beans (black, pinto, chickpea, navy, etc.)
- Lentils
- Nuts (walnuts, pecans, almonds, Brazil, etc.)
- Seeds (pumpkin, sesame, chia, hemp, flax, etc.)
- Soy milk (higher in protein than almond, rice, or coconut milk)
- Tempeh (fermented soybeans)
- Tofu
- Whole grains (quinoa, whole wheat pasta, wild rice, oats, and beyond)
- Meat alternatives (veggie burger, beyond meat)

*(continued on back page)*

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## Easy Recipe: Balsamic Roasted Carrots

### INGREDIENTS

1 pound carrots, cut into 2-inch pieces

2 tablespoons olive or avocado oil, divided into two 1-tablespoon portions

2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar

1 tablespoon pure maple syrup

Optional: parsley for garnish

Optional: 2 tablespoons chopped hazelnuts

### INSTRUCTIONS

**1. Preheat oven to 400° F. Whisk vinegar, maple syrup and 1 tablespoon oil in a small bowl; set aside.**

**2. Combine carrots and the other 1 tablespoon oil in a large bowl; toss to coat. Season with salt and pepper. Spread in a single layer on a rimmed baking sheet.**

**3. Roast the carrots until almost tender but not completely cooked through, about 16-18 minutes. Drizzle the balsamic mixture over the carrots and toss to coat completely. Continue roasting until the carrots are tender and glazed, about another 5 minutes. Add parsley and hazelnuts if desired.**

### Nutrition Facts

*Serving Size: about 1/2 cup*

*Per Serving: 130 calories; protein 1.1g; carbohydrates 15.6g; dietary fiber 3.2g; sugars 9.6g; fat 7.3g; saturated fat 1g; vitamin a iu 18944.3IU; vitamin c 6.7mg; folate 21.5mcg; calcium 44.8mg; iron 0.4mg; magnesium 15.6mg; potassium 382.5mg; sodium 226mg; thiamin 0.1mg; added sugar 3g.*

*Exchanges: 2 vegetable, 1 1/2 fat*

*Source: EatingWell.com via Lewis County OFA*

### Getting started with a plant-based diet: 6 tips

- 1. Include more vegetables.** Aim to fill half of your plate with vegetables for lunch and dinner. Snack on fresh vegetables and pair them with guacamole, hummus, or salsa for extra flavor.
- 2. Reduce your meat intake.** Think of meat as a side dish instead of your main course. Join the Meatless Monday bandwagon.
- 3. Have fruit as a dessert.** A ripe mango, fresh berries, or an apple can satisfy your sweet tooth.
- 4. Choose more heart-healthy fats.** Use healthier fats in your meals such as olive oil, nuts, seeds, avocados, nut butters, olives, or even plant-based butter.
- 5. Keep it simple.** Plant-based meals don't need to be complex. Some easy meal ideas include: Bean burritos, vegetarian chili, peanut butter and banana sandwich, veggie stir-fry, smoothies, salad, etc.
- 6. Start slow.** Try starting with 1-2 meatless days per week, then increasing that as you get more comfortable with plant-based eating. Slowly replace your dairy with non-dairy alternatives such as almond milk, vegan cheese, non-dairy creamer, coconut milk yogurt, etc.

Whether you go all-in or decide to make a gradual shift, the time to start making the change is now. Over time, eating a plant-based diet will become second nature.

- Danielle Kauffman, OFA Dietetic Intern

## Dutchess County Office for the Aging

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