



Hands of Health Newsletter

November/December 2011

Hello, again:

Well as of my writing this newsletter we've dropped down into the 80's while the rest of the country is digging out of deep snow or battling the cold without any power. Guess we have it pretty good. It's a great time to get out and enjoy this ideal weather and the gifts of the desert. Health is something you attend to every day, not occasionally, and that goes for massage as well. Massage is not just for vacations or for a day of pampering although you can do that IN ADDITION. And of course exercising at least 4 or 5 times per week, cardio and strength training. You don't have to go to the extreme as if you're a bodybuilder but you need to do something for body maintenance. Just like massage. Also, it doesn't do you any good to put junk into your body. I had a colonic therapist once who said "If you put junk in your mouth, you're going to have junk in your head." What you eat affects how you think. I once took a nutrition class and the teacher, a naturopath doctor, showed us the physiology of how your food is assimilated and how it goes right to your brain. Fascinating. Furthermore, I'm enrolled in an intensive online course to become a Health Coach, essentially a Nutrition Coach so this fits right in with what I'm learning; to a degree. So I found this article in Natural Awakenings and thought it would be a good fit with what I'm going to be teaching in my practice once I start seeing clients. Enjoy.

A Flexitarian Diet for a Flexible Life On Your Mark, Get Set, Flex

By Dawn Jackson Blatner

This article appears in the June 2009 issue of Natural Awakenings

There's a new term in town, 'flexitarian', which gives us a handle on what many of us are likely doing anyway; we are inclined to eat less meat and more plant foods, but not ready to completely give up chicken or the occasional burger. According to a national survey reported in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, even the majority of vegetarians don't do it 100 percent of the time. But, the benefits of eating flexibly vegetarian are many.

First, there are no forbidden foods. Becoming a flexitarian is more about making healthful changes gradually, so they become a natural part of our daily routine. It doesn't require dramatically starting over by clearing out the fridge and cupboards or buying hundreds of dollars worth of special diet foods. The flexitarian diet I've devised relies mostly on common ingredients and cutting back on meat, while eating in a way that is familiar. When starting out, I encourage people to take it slow, with three steps:

Step One: Add, Don't Subtract.

Instead of trying to completely cut out meat, focus on adding beans, veggies, fruits and whole grains to current meals and recipes. For example, instead of giving up the family's favorite beef dish, boost its nutritional value by adding more chopped vegetables and kidney beans to the original version.

Step Two: Do the 50/50 Swap.

Now, aim to decrease the meat in daily meals by half and swap in plant proteins such as black beans, pinto beans, white beans, kidney beans, garbanzo beans and lentils.

A perfect swap is 1/4 cup of beans for each ounce of meat or poultry. For example, instead of tacos with 4 ounces of chicken, make chicken and black bean tacos, with 2 ounces of chicken and 1/2 cup black beans. (Use rinsed and drained canned beans.)

Step Three: Try Meat-Free Recipes.

Next, try at least one new completely vegetarian recipe each week, to build up the family's meat-free cooking repertoire. Get recipes from friends, websites, cookbooks and magazines. Find inspiration for vegetarian options at favorite local restaurants. The Flexitarian Diet serves up more than 100 fast and flavorful recipes.

One meat-free recipe a week can easily turn into an entire meat-free day. Expert flexitarians work up from a couple of meatless days a week, eating a maximum total at 26 ounces of meat or poultry per week, and wind up with five meatless days, or just 9 ounces of meat or poultry a week.

Direct Health Benefits

Dozens of scientific studies analyzed by Nutrition Reviews revealed that people who eat a 100 percent vegetarian diet generally weigh about 15 percent less than meat eaters. An article in the International Journal of Obesity and Metabolic Disorders reports that many other studies show that semi-vegetarians (or flexitarians) reap weight loss benefits, as well.

More, flexitarians enjoy lower cholesterol levels and blood pressure than carnivores. The American Institute for Cancer Research estimates that following a flexitarian diet can reduce the risk of cancer by upwards of 40 percent. Finally, a study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition has revealed that flexitarians live 3.6 years longer than non-vegetarians.

Achieving Nutritional Balance

Although it is possible to obtain total balanced nutrition from a plant-based diet, flexitarians need to pay particular attention to 10 vital nutrients: vitamins A, D, B2 and B12, iodine, iron, zinc, calcium, omega-3 fatty acids and protein. Following is a helpful, four-point checklist to ensure these specific nutrient needs are met every day:

- 1) Eat orange and green produce regularly for vitamin A.
- 2) Drink organic milk or almond milk regularly for quick calcium, vitamin D, B12 and riboflavin (B2).
- 3) Shake ground flaxseed on cereal, yogurt and salads, or use flaxseed oil on raw or cooked foods, for omega-3 fatty acids.
- 4) Include plant proteins such as beans and lentils to meet protein, iron and zinc needs.

Vegetarianism has long been recognized as the ultimate way to eat for weight loss and optimal health. Now, you can reap similar benefits without completely giving up meat. On your mark, get set, flex.

Dawn Jackson Blatner is a registered dietitian and national spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association. She is the online nutritionist for Lifetime Television, a food blogger with USA Today and a natural cooking instructor at The Chopping Block Cooking School. For information on her recipes and guidebook, The Flexitarian Diet, visit www.DawnJacksonBlatner.com.



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