

Reader Question:

I am so confused by all these different terms: vegan, vegetarian, plant based, pescatarian, lacto-ovo, flexitarian. What do they all mean? Can I just consider them interchangeable?

Answer:

Whooooaaa! To start with, these terms describing different types of diets people follow are not interchangeable. There are many trends out there today when it comes to eating and it can be confusing to someone who follows a traditional Western diet that includes meat, poultry, fish, dairy and other animal products. Here are the basic definitions of the terms you listed above:

- **Vegan** - a person who is on a vegan diet eats no animal protein - no meat, poultry, fish, dairy, eggs or (usually) honey. Some who follow a vegan diet take it a step further and it becomes a vegan lifestyle; not wearing or using any leather products, not using cosmetics that have been tested on animals, using only animal-friendly cleaning products etc.
- **Vegetarian** - this is similar to a vegan diet except that people who are vegetarians may also consume foods that come from animals, such as milk, eggs, dairy products and honey.
- **Plant Based** - this is not necessarily the same as a vegan diet. A plant-based diet is one that consists mostly or entirely of foods that are derived from plants with no animal or artificial ingredients. Some people who follow a plant-based diet do eat limited amounts of meat, poultry, fish and other animal-derived foods, so it is not the same as a vegan diet.
- **Pescatarian** - someone who follows this diet does not eat meat or poultry but will eat fish.
- **Lacto-Ovo** - people who adhere to this diet are vegetarians that eat eggs and dairy products.
- **Flexitarian** - this is a way to name a diet of someone who is cutting back on animal-based food sources but still eats meat, poultry, fish, dairy, eggs, and honey occasionally.

Reader Question:

Are vegan restaurants automatically kosher?

Answer:

The easy answer is that all vegan food is intrinsically kosher, but whether or not a vegan restaurant can be considered kosher really depends on what level of kashrut you keep. Unless the restaurant is under the supervision of a reliable kosher authority, the following things could render the food not kosher:

- Have the vegetables being used been inspected thoroughly for insects?
- Have the foods being served been prepared by non Jews? Certain foods must be prepared partially or wholly by Jews to be kosher.
- Are any of the ingredients processed foods that require kosher supervision?
- Is the kitchen and the equipment up to kosher standards? Have all of the pots, pans and utensils been appropriately kashered/toiveled? Are the ovens, sinks and counters kosher?
- Are the products that have wine or grape juice in them kosher? Wine and grape juice products must be prepared following specific laws of kashrut. In addition, there are laws concerning the handling of wine by non-Jews.
- Also of concern could be determining if the produce being used has been properly tithed or met the requirements regarding shmita.
- Was any of the food being served cooked by a Jew on Shabbat?

Before eating in a restaurant without supervision it is always best to ask your rabbinical advisor.