

# Whole-Food Plant-Based Lifestyle: How is it different from Vegetarian or Vegan?

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As a Registered Nurse of 35 years, I've held many positions and received a tremendous amount of education. And yet, with all that education, I don't recall ever having had any significant discussion, or being taught, about nutrition and how food affects the body in terms of wellness or disease. How can medical teaching institutions get away with this? How do students not realize what's missing?

Have you ever heard the old saying "you are what you eat", and laughed? The irony in the joke is that it is sadly very true. Generally, people are either healthy or ill in accordance with the nutrients they consume or lack. In recent years there has been [growing evidence](#) that a heavily carnivorous diet is unhealthy for the modern human, and that certain diets and lifestyles contribute to obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, kidney disease, liver disease, stroke and colon cancer. The main culprits are [animal fat and saturated cooking oils](#). These types of fat are not usually passed in the stools, so whatever is not used for immediate need as fuel (energy) is stored in the body as fat. In arteries (heart, legs, brain) it becomes clogging plaque, and lipid deposits turn into those unwelcome "lumps" in all the wrong places. Adding to this insult is what we consume second-hand by what is being fed to, or injected into, the animals, birds and fish that we eat.

Although saturated fat is the main culprit, there are other things that we consume that are wreaking havoc on our bodies. Refined sugars, bleached and processed flour, as well as packaged processed foods ("ready to eat, just heat") that are mostly preservatives, are destroying our health and bringing on a type of physical death long before we are ready to die. Did you know that when a package says "low fat" or "fat free" that product is usually infused with sugar or corn syrup, otherwise it would taste awful? Fat adds a lot of flavor - ask any Jewish balabusta (homemaker) who has cooked with shmaltz (rendered chicken fat)! This is [why we are so addicted](#) to fat and why it's so hard to give it up. Before I became aware of this information, that was my life. I loved beef and poultry in almost any form, and the juicier the better. I also enjoyed creamy butter, ice cream and almost all varieties of dairy products, especially cheese.

So where am I going with this horror story? I watched my parents, grandparents and late husband not care about what they ate and witnessed the awful consequences of

their choices: All the illnesses I listed above, and I was experiencing similar problems myself.

I was obese, on statin drugs for high cholesterol, drugs for high blood pressure, drugs for diabetic neuropathy, drugs for diabetes, medication for severe acid reflux and meds for gout. I was a mess. I was also taking pain medications for severe osteoarthritis. When I started having leg and foot problems, I neared panic mode because of my family history. My maternal great-grandmother and grandmother, plus my father, were all bilateral leg amputees, condemned to wheelchairs, dependent on others and subject to “stump revisions” due to poor healing. My late husband and my maternal grandfather succumbed to colon cancer. They were all diabetics on insulin injections.

When I was 16 I weighed 188 pounds. My mother dragged me to Weight Watchers and after a number of months on a rigid regime, I lost 40 pounds and gained a boyfriend (who later became my husband). That was the beginning of my yo-yo dieting career.

Fast forward about 50 years. And approximately 40 different dieting attempts. I hit an all-time high of 240 pounds after my husband died. I absolutely hated myself for failing to stick to any plan. I despised how I looked and felt, I knew I was destined to wind up like my family, and it scared the daylights out of me. I knew I had the motivation but not the determination. I had the “want” but not the “will”. I was miserable and depressed.

I heard about the ketogenic diet (a “new and improved” revamp of Atkins). Even a family member, as well as a friend, was on it. Years earlier I had tried the [Atkins Diet](#) and had some success but also developed a mild kidney problem. I was advised to stop Atkins, which I did, and the kidney healed. This time I was on the ketogenic diet for two and a half years and lost over 60 pounds. I weighed a happy 137 pounds. When my sister saw me, she said I was “too thin and looked gaunt”. That was enough to discourage me. In reality, I was getting bored with it. I was craving “not allowed” foods. I just wanted to add some variety. Over a four-year span I gained back 30 pounds plus all the aches and pains.

Over time, several people recommended a few documentaries for me to watch. They were shockingly revealing - real eye openers which demanded my personal re-evaluation. These were: [What The Health\\*](#), [Game Changers\\*](#), [Forks Over Knives](#), as well as the book [How Not To Die](#), by Dr. Michael Greger, M.D. \*(available on Netflix)

These inspired me to begin a search for the perfect “diet”. Given the incredible complexity and diversity of the human body, there probably isn’t one perfect diet for everyone, but I believe that I did finally find the most near-perfect diet as could be found in the modern era. It’s called a Whole-Food Plant-Based diet, or WFPB for short.

“What’s that?” you ask. In the broadest scope it is a type of vegetarianism within a subset of veganism.

### **What is “Whole Food, Plant-Based”?**

The *Whole Food* part refers to what groceries you buy, and how you buy them in the store or market. (“Whole” does not mean *only* eaten raw.) It basically means not-at-all to minimally-processed *before* you bought it - does not mean never eating processed food (unless you choose to) but eating it sparingly and in the least commercially processed manner possible. Look for as close to garden-fresh as you can, without preservatives or artificial ingredients.

The *Plant-Based* part is pretty intuitive. What originates from the ground: tubers, grains, legumes, vegetables, berries, fruit from vines, bushes, bogs (ok, technically not the earth, it’s water but it’s vegetation and biologically organic) or trees, etc. WFPB excludes all dairy products in any form, eggs, meat, poultry and fish. However, nothing is ever “forbidden”, especially when transitioning. For instance, I know a couple who are transitioning from carnivorous to WFPB. The wife and daughter are pretty strict, but the husband wants his fish and chicken on Shabbat. The main thing is that they are progressing toward better health and wellness. This isn’t a “diet”, it is a healthier lifestyle.

### **How is this different from Vegan or Vegetarian? Isn’t it the same? (Almost but not quite)**

**Vegetarian** diets also exclude animal meat, poultry, game, fish, shellfish or by-products of animal slaughter. The inclusion of dairy, honey and eggs depends on the type of diet a person follows:

1. Lacto-ovo vegetarian - avoids animal meat but does consume dairy and egg products
2. Lacto-vegetarian - avoids animal meat and eggs but does consume dairy products
3. Ovo-vegetarian - avoids all animal products but does eat eggs
4. Vegan - vegetarian who avoids all animal and animal-derived products
5. Pescatarian - does consume fish
6. Whole-Food Plant-Based - avoids all animal and animal-derived products. And also avoids overly processed or refined products and limits (saturated) fat intake

**Vegan** is also similar in as much as it is plant-based but *not necessarily* whole foods. Originally the term was used to indicate non-dairy-eating vegetarians and later changed to “excluding all forms of animal exploitation” - [Vegan Society](#). Their definition did not address eliminating highly processed food, nor highly saturated cooking fats and oils, nor “junk food”. It's better but not best.

I started on this journey as a way to improve my future state of being. I didn't want my health to deteriorate to the point of my family's history. I also wanted to lose weight and finally feel in control.

In 7 months I have:

- Lost 21 pounds,
- Decreased 3 of my medications
- Blood sugar tests that range from 70 to 93 (had been around 130 )
- Normal blood pressure at 128/60.
- Decreased cholesterol to within normal limits
- A regular “constitution”
- Learned that natural foods taste so good and I do not miss animal foods at all
- Became creative with recipes
- Learned how to eat in a restaurant
- Mostly learned to be kind to myself

My body has experienced major degenerative changes in the past 5 years due to age, and while I may not see a complete reversal in these conditions (although many people have), I can minimize future issues as I approach improved overall wellness. By taking care of what I can control, I gain the upper hand in avoiding more serious setbacks.

Check it out and decide for yourself if your health can benefit from this choice.

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