Plant-Based Eating

When you hear the term, "plant-based diet," what picture comes to mind? Only eating vegetables? Sweating off steak forever? A cow grazing on grass!? A plant-based diet is the scientific way of describing an eating plan mostly focused on vegetables, fruits, grains, and other foods we get from plants. It could apply to vegetarians, but it also includes people who mainly eat fruits, vegetables, beans, and grains, and also eat small amounts of meat.

With the daily fruit/vegetable and grain goals in the Dietary Change program, your eating pattern is probably moving in the plant-based direction. But if you’re often having trouble meeting your fat gram goal or eating enough fruits, vegetables, and grains, you may want to re-think meat’s role in your daily diet.

Some people are concerned that if they don’t eat meat, they won’t get enough protein in their diets. But all foods, except sugar and oil, contain some protein. Some plant foods contain more or less protein, so it’s important to eat a variety of fruits, vegetables, legumes and grains.

Plant-based eating has been linked to lower risk of both cancer and heart disease, but it’s not an all or nothing approach. You don’t need to be a strict vegetarian to improve your diet, protect your health, or meet your WHI eating goals.

Focusing on plant-based foods may take time, depending on how set your eating habits are. Here are some tips to help you reduce the meat in your diet and eat more plant foods:

- As you learned early in WHI, it’s best to limit your serving size of meat, poultry, and seafood to three ounces, about the size of a deck of cards. Fill the rest of your plate with larger servings of vegetables, fruits, and grains like bread, rice, and pasta. You can make a small serving of meat seem larger by fanning out thin slices on your plate.

- Try cutting down your meat serving to only one or two ounces by mixing the meat into dishes with lots of vegetables and grains, such as stir-fries, pasta, casseroles, or main dish salads. Meat becomes just another flavoring in these dishes, instead of the focus. Stretching meat this way also saves money.

- Go meatless a few meals per week. You may need to eat more healthy snacks to keep your energy up. When you leave out meat, try to eat a low- or non-fat dairy product or try alternatives to meat chill can be satisfying with plenty of kidney beans and tomatoes, while chickpeas (garbanzo beans) complement salads nicely.

Small amounts of tofu, other soybean products, nuts, and seeds also provide protein.

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Teacher Promotes Health Through Students

June Minakami uses her involvement in WHI to do more than improve her own health—she’s planting the seed of healthy eating in young minds to improve the health of future generations.

Like most good teachers, this Honolulu native looks for teachable moments in her life that she can pass along to her 8th-grade students. So after she joined a Dietary Change group at the Honolulu Clinical Center in 1996 and began to understand the basics of the WHI eating plan, she wondered how she could further apply her newfound knowledge.

June and the rest of her teaching team were beginning a program called “service learning,” where students perform community service and learn at the same time. The students were especially interested in health education. Since the local area, Waianae, has a high percentage of people with very poor health related to their diet, teaching the children about reducing fat seemed appropriate.

June was able to share much of what she was learning through WHI with her classes.

The 128 students in this program, called the Adolescent Community Health Education Squad (ACHES), learned about added fats in the foods they eat, how to read nutrition labels, how to analyze recipes, the importance of eating plenty of fruits and vegetables, and how much fat is in fast food.

“Our goal from the very beginning,” says June, “was to plant the seed and they [the students] could take it out to the community and spread the word at home. Then, as the years go by, at least one portion of our school would be planting the seed at home.”

After the first year, the teachers received extra funding to extend the program into a two-week summer school session. The students received more classroom training and visited a tofu factory and hydroponic farm. The students also volunteered in local grocery stores by helping shoppers inspect food labels. In later years, the students taught elementary school kids about the effect of healthy eating on school performance.

June finds that her classroom role keeps her accountable to her WHI goals. Her teaching team is supportive, too. Since June considers her commitment to the study a contract, her co-workers remind her to stick to her promises.

“Whenver I stray away,” she laughs, “they’ll say, ‘What happened to that contract, June?’”

Self-monitoring throughout the day helps June watch her fat grams. She also writes a list of everything she eats each day as she watches television in the evening. “I tend to want to snack at night,” she says, “so when I write down what I’ve eaten and add everything up, if I find that I don’t have enough fruit or grains, then that’s what I snack on to meet my goal.”

Though June has used her Dietary Change knowledge to help others, she knows she’s helped by the study too. “It’s made me very conscious of what I eat. I never knew how fatty certain things were, so I would just eat them without really thinking about it. This is good for my health.”
Bulgur-Beef Meatloaf

1 1/2 pounds extra lean ground beef (15% fat or less)
1 cup bulgur, uncooked (fine or medium)
1/4 cup finely chopped onion
1 egg
1/4 teaspoon ground black pepper
1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
1/2 teaspoon oregano
1 2/3 cup tomato juice (approx. 12 ounce can)

1. Thoroughly combine the ground beef, bulgur, onion, egg, salt, pepper, Worcestershire sauce, oregano, and tomato juice together.

2. Place the mixture into a nonstick loaf pan (or a loaf pan sprayed with nonstick vegetable cooking spray).

3. Shape the mixture into a loaf and bake in a 350° oven for about 1 1/2 hours.

Optional toppings: Tomato sauce, ketchup, or a low-fat gravy made from reduced-fat cream of mushroom soup.

Makes about 8 servings
Fat: 10 grams per serving
Fruit/Vegetable Serving: 1/4 per serving
Grain Servings: 1/2 per serving

Recipe from: Jane Brody's Good Food Book
Lemon Blueberry Pancakes

1 1/3 cups all-purpose flour
1/3 cup sugar
1 1/2 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon salt
2 large eggs
1 cup low-fat cottage cheese
1 cup skim milk
2 teaspoons freshly grated lemon rind
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
2 cups blueberries (fresh, or if frozen, thawed)

Nonstick vegetable cooking spray

1. In a large bowl, stir together the flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt.

2. In a medium bowl, use a whisk or hand-mixer to blend the eggs, cottage cheese, milk, lemon rind, and vanilla.

3. Make a well in the dry ingredients and add the wet ingredients and stir with a rubber spatula until just combined. Fold in blueberries.

4. Heat a large nonstick skillet over medium heat or an electric griddle.

5. Spoon about 1/4 cup batter for each pancake on the skillet and cook until bottoms are golden and small bubbles start to form on the top, about 3-4 minutes. Flip and cook until the other side is browned, about 1-2 minutes longer.

6. Adjust heat as necessary for even browning. Serve hot.

Makes about 16 pancakes
Fat: 1 gram per pancake
Fruit/Vegetable Servings: 1/4 per pancake
Grain Serving: 1/4 per pancake

Recipe from: Eating Well Magazine, July/August, 1998
WHI MEETS CHINATOWN

19 participants from several Dietary Change groups at the Sony Brook, New York, Clinical Center explored New York City's Chinatown last spring. The adventure was led by Chinese cuisine expert and WHI member Mabelle Lam (pictured, center). The outing included shopping for exotic ingredients at food and herb stores, followed by a low-fat lunch at a local restaurant. The group learned that low-fat eating at a Chinese restaurant is possible and enjoyable!

LOW-FAT BITES

Looking for an easy, meatless meal? Try a Gardenburger, sold in the frozen foods section of your grocery store and in some restaurants. Choose from the original Gardenburger, a low-fat blend of mushrooms, brown rice, onions, and macerata, or one of three new varieties: Fire Roasted Vegetable with Roasted Garlic and Shiitake Mushroom, Minced Chicken, and Wild Rice, and Classic Kalamata Olive and Feta Cheese. They can be warmed in a skillet or in an oven at 350 degrees for about 10 minutes. A box of four "burgers" sells for about $3.99 and each contains three grams of fat or less.

Low fat foods sometimes need extra seasoning to appeal to our taste buds. Adding onions is a delicious way to perk up food. If you need to use only part of a whole onion, leave the papery skin on the remaining portion to help keep the onion fresh. Cut onions keep best in a glass jar, where they can last for a week in the refrigerator.

Check out the new Pillsbury Light-a-Healthy Cookbook for quick, easy recipes. Ingredients are easy to find, and preparations are simple; most of the 350 dishes can be made in under an hour. Some recipes make use of items like instant rice to save time. Old favorites, like beef stroganoff, as well as creative dishes, such as grilled fish with corn, salsa, and rosemary chicken with grapes, are included. (Pillsbury Company, Clarkson Potter, $25)

Smells can be an easy and delicious way to remind you of your daily grain goal. Try mixing equal amounts of vegetarian refried beans (no lard) and salsa. Spread a small amount on scones or whole grain crackers and enjoy!

The information provided in this section is not an endorsement by WHI of specific food products.
Think about the meals you'd miss most the least. For many people, that meal may be breakfast or lunch, with a meat-based meal for dinner. It may be helpful when planning meals to choose certain days or meals to be meatless and shop accordingly.

Keep a variety of grains on hand, such as dry pasta, couscous, barley, and rice varieties like brown, wild, basmati, and white. Often, you can add a small amount of vegetables (such as peas, diced green or red pepper, or corn) to the grains while cooking and just use one pot.

Keep a variety of canned beans in your kitchen cupboard. Beans make wonderful additions to soups, salads, and casseroles.

I have precooked fresh vegetables and fruits on hand, as well as frozen and canned produce. Keep fresh vegetables in a covered bowl of cold water in the refrigerator, and they'll stay fresh for several days. When making a lunch or fixing dinner, you can grab what's needed and not have to prepare the produce each time.

Stock up on frozen vegetarian entrees, jarred or canned pastas sauces, and canned vegetarian soup, chili, or stew. If your supermarket doesn't carry many meatless choices, try a health food store.

Try a lower fat vegetarian entree when eating at a restaurant. Most restaurants, especially ethnic ones, have a number of meatless choices. Tasting new foods prepared differently or with interesting spices can later inspire you in your own kitchen.