



A Taste of Life

1,000 Vegetarian Recipes from Around the World



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Table of Contents

Introduction	6
The Original Diet: Getting Back Down to Earth	7
How to Cook Ethnic Food	8
Basic Cooking Techniques	10
Tips and Tools for Healthy Eating	14
Meat vs. Vegetables True/False Quiz	15
How to Become Vegetarian (in 8 Steps)	16
A Simple Meal Plan	18
North and South American Recipes	23
A Taste of the Americas	23
Appetizers.....	23
Sides	38
Sauces and Dressings	43
Entrees.....	45
Soups & Stews	58
Salads.....	66
Desserts	68
North America	74
Appetizers, Snacks & Sides	74
Sauces.....	83
Entrees.....	85
Sea Greens.....	89
Totally Tofu.....	90
Soups	93
Salads.....	99
Desserts	101
A Taste of Mexico	105
Appetizers & Snacks	105
Mex-Tex Entrees.....	110
Caribbean & Latin American	133
Appetizers.....	133
Sides	135
Sauces & Spices	139
Entrees.....	139
Soups	141
European Recipes	147
A Taste of Italy and the Mediterraneans	147
Appetizers.....	147
Sides, Sauces & Standalone Items.....	158
Entrees.....	162
Simply Italian/Pasta Dishes	172
Salads.....	185
African Recipes	181
A Taste of Africa	181
Appetizers, Sides & Small Items	181
A Taste of Ethiopia & East Africa	185

Appetizers	185
Soups & Salad.....	191
A Taste of Egypt	193
Appetizers & Side Items.....	193
Spice Blends	198
Soups, Stews & Salad	199
Greek and Middle Eastern Dishes	204
Appetizers	204
Snacks & Sides.....	211
Entrees	216
Soups from the Middle East.....	222
Salads	229
Desserts.....	230
Asian Recipes	233
A Taste of Asia	233
Appetizers	233
Entrees	241
Stir Fry Dishes.....	247
Tofu & Tempeh Dishes Stir-Fried.....	255
Sauces, Spreads and Dips.....	259
Soups.....	261
Salads	261
A Taste of Indonesia	262
Entrees	262
Seitan, The Vegetarian ‘Wheat Meat’	264
Stir-Fry Recipes	271
Dessert	275
Taste of Thailand.....	277
Appetizers	277
Entree.....	278
Curry Pastes	282
Soups.....	283
Salads	283
A Taste of Japan	284
Appetizers, Snacks, Sides	284
Entree.....	285
Soups & Stews.....	291
Salads	292
A Taste of the Philippines and Pacific Islands.....	293
Entrees	293
A Taste of India	296
Appetizers, Sides & Small Items.....	296
Sauces & Spice	306
Entrees	306
Soups.....	314
Salads	315
Dessert	315

Australian Recipes	318
A Taste of Australia	318
Appetizers & Side Items	318
Sauces & Dressings	319
Entree	320
Salads	322
Drink to Your Health: Milks, Smoothies, Juices & Teas	329
Drink to Your Health	329
Milks & Smoothies	329
Do-it-Yourself Milk	329
Almonds - Sprouted, Blanched	330
Smoothies & Shakes	332
Earthly Pleasures	338
The quickest way to break free of addictions is to drink green juices	338
Green Juices	339
Fruits, Vegetables & Leafy Green Juices	340
Aloe Vera	344
Organic Herb and Spiced Teas	345
Chai	346
Ultimate Juice Cleansers	349
Top 10 Juice Fast Recipes for Liver Detox	350
How Much Does It Take: Conversion for Cooking, Weights & Measures	353
Conversion for Fruits, Veggies, & More	355
All The Other Stuff You Need To Know	358
The Healing Power of Fruits	358
The Healing Power of Vegetables	360
Are You Eating Enough Fruits and Vegetables?	362
The Restorative Power of Fresh Juices	363
Quick Vegetarian Cooking Tips	365
Spending Less To Feed More	367
When All Else Fails: Healthy Fast Food?	370
The Essential Vitamin Guide	373
The Essential Mineral Guide	376
Animal / Non-Animal Derived Ingredients	379
Ingredient Sources and Uses	384
Index of Recipes	397

Introduction

by SUPREME UNDERSTANDING

This is not your ordinary cookbook. This isn't even your ordinary vegetarian cookbook. While other cookbooks focus on a specific region, or offer only a smattering of selections, this book is filled to the brim with over 1,000 delicious and exotic recipes from the cuisines of over 200 nations. And we've worked countless hours to select recipes that are not only tasty, but affordable and easy-to-prepare, so that just about anyone can change their diet with this book!

We've even included articles that will help a novice cook become a master chef in no time: We'll show you how to set up your kitchen, how to cook using a variety of methods, how to plan your meals, and how to shop so that you can feed more while spending less.

We're doing all this because we know people need alternatives to the diet they're eating nowadays. And it's not that people don't WANT to eat better, it's just that many of us simply haven't figured out HOW. When we published *The Hood Health Handbook*, it was an awakening for thousands of readers who realized just how sick we are here in the Western world, particularly among the poor and people of color. Poor people, especially those in the South, tend to eat worse and die sooner. Yet unlike other groups, Blacks and Latinos tend to eat the same unhealthy diets no matter what income level they're at.

This is why we spent considerable time in *The Hood Health Handbook* discussing the roots of disease, the downright disgusting facts about fast food, and the benefits of eating at home, and eating less meat. After all, studies have shown that a plant-based diet can help reduce the risk of many preventable diseases, and plant-based fiber can actually allow you to eat more without gaining weight. Yet, for many people, this wasn't enough.

It's one thing to WANT to eat differently, and another thing to have the knowledgebase and skillset to actually DO it. This is what led us to publishing *A Taste of Life*. We know this book will change lives in ways few other cookbooks can. By taking considerable time and effort to dig up the healthiest and tastiest of recipes from all over the planet, we're sharing the culinary habits of the majority of the world's inhabitants, most of whom eat very little meat or none at all. Outside of the Western world, we eat a fairly consistent diet, one that is nothing like the one we eat here in the U.S.

As we noted in *Hood Health*:

“You see, everywhere in the world where you find Black and brown people with some remembrance of their original way of life, we eat similarly. We eat a grain with a legume as our staple dish. In East Asia, it's rice and soybeans. In South Asia, it's rice and lentils. Among Native Americans, it's corn (or quinoa) and beans. In Africa, it's millet (or sorghum, tef, etc.) and lentils. We eat a ton of vegetables with our meals, and we eat fruit separately as a snack or a dessert.”

This is why the oldest and healthiest people in the world eat the kinds of foods you'll find in this book. While we know that many people throughout the world also eat meat and fish, we would recommend that you consider the toxic environment and industry practices that affect those items before they make their way to your plate. Your best bet – in our opinion – is to eat a diet heavy in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, and to buy your ingredients organic as often as possible.

In *The Hood Health Handbook* we provide a nutritional guide to the health benefits of over 100 fruits, vegetables, mushrooms, legumes, and spices, as well as a guide to the essential vitamins and minerals and the foods where they can be found. You'll find abridged versions of those guides here in *A Taste of Life* as well.

Together with *The Hood Health Handbook*, this book has EVERYTHING you need to change the way you and your family eats and lives. Take it one day at a time, and you WILL be able to do it. So let's change our world together. Please share these recipes (and the book you found them in) with your friends and community...and – above all – BE the change you want to see in the world! You owe it to the future!

The Original Diet: Getting Back Down to Earth

by PATRA AFRIKA

One of the most beautiful aspects of a vegetarian diet is you can eat all the pure foods you want, requiring a lot less to satisfy your appetite. Eating at will (whatever and whenever you want) can have serious consequences. However it's only true when the foods you choose to overload your system with are fattening and contain unhealthy substances. But as you begin to incorporate more raw foods and vegetables into your diet, no matter if you're traveling, dining out or cooking at home, a knowledgeable vegetarian can find very creative and soul-satisfying alternatives to unhealthy eating. And there's plenty here to inspire your next great food experience.

Unearthing Naturally Great Tasting Foods. While “non-foods” are things that we consume, whether solid or liquid, that have no nutritional value, nutritional foods are alive and supports the healthy function of the body. When food has been processed to the point where important minerals and vitamins have either been destroyed or removed, food becomes non-food. When we talk about live foods in *A Taste of Life*, we're talking about naturally prepared foods that are minimally processed and having more nutrients to help protect you from free radicals which can later become cancer causing. The less food is tampered with, the healthier it will be for you.

Soul Food, It Doesn't Have to be Unhealthy. As soul food conjures up ideas of “rich” flavors, it doesn't necessarily mean it has to be created with fat, oil and high levels of salty spices, as perceived by many ethnic food surveyors. The term soul food originated in North America during the ethos of the 60's when southern chefs would offer their cooking to soldiers and out-of-towners. This caught on to mainstream America, and became associated with “down home” cooking and Black cuisine. By the mid-1960s, when the Civil Rights Movement peaked, there were terms like soul brother, soul sister and soul music, with the word ‘soul’ emphasizing the essence and collective experiences of Africans in America. However, the most local examples of soul food is also commonly found deeply-rooted in Southern, Creole, Indian as well as Caribbean cultures.

Today, just about every ethnic group has their own equivalent of soul food, which includes specific dishes that remind them of home, for some it may be iced tea with cheese grits and fish, while for others it could mean a beer, burger and fries with ketchup. Loosely speaking, it's a term meaning deep satisfaction that reminds you of where you come from. Traditionally, many aspects in the preparation of soul foods

tend to be very high in starch, fat, sodium, calories and cholesterol. But soul food does not have to be unhealthy nor does it have to have meat in it to be tasty. As you'll find in the vegetarian culture, herbs and spices are the basics to making any soul food dish.

Because bland and soul food should never be used in the same sentence, the following multi-purpose blend of spices and flavors can be used regularly to prepare robust, vegetarian dishes. Flavors, mostly dried/powdered herbs and spices, often used together in soul food are: Garlic, onion, chili, paprika, sea salt, black pepper corn, red/cayenne pepper, lemon pepper, parsley, thyme, bay leaves, oregano, mint, basil, whole cloves, all spice, chipotle, cumin, turmeric and coriander; to include vegetable and olive oil. So ethnic food does not have to be unhealthy to be rich and flavorful.

Lowering Cholesterol. Basically, cholesterol is a protein which comes from two sources that is either produced in our bodies (mostly the liver); or is found in animals and animal-based products. If what we eat does not come from an animal (like fruits and vegetables), then it does not have cholesterol. Though our body requires cholesterol, only a small amount is needed in the formation of cell membranes and the manufacturing of hormones. The three main factors that raise blood cholesterol level are saturated fats, cholesterol and obesity.

Foods with the highest amounts of cholesterol are eggs and liver. Other high cholesterol foods include: whole (cow's) milk dairy products, butter, cream, ice cream, cream cheese, certain shellfish (such as shrimp), organ meats (such as kidney and brain), duck and goose (which have more cholesterol than chicken or turkey; the skin on these animals is high in cholesterol), beef, veal, pork and lamb. Foods that lower cholesterol are dark leafy vegetables such as *kale and collard greens, blueberries, whole grains, oats, almonds, walnuts, pistachios and flaxseed oil, pomegranate juice, (also avocado, olives and olive oil are a good source of fat and protects against diabetes and heart disease).

Satisfying Your Craving. Have you ever grabbed a pint of ice cream and told yourself you were only going to eat half...but didn't stop until it was all gone? Or ever eaten your way to the bottom of a bag of salt & vinegar potato chips and found yourself still craving? That's because sweets and spices cause an endorphin rush, just like caffeine, fat and an array of other chemical compounds which target the brain's “bliss” system to further reinforce our cravings. But by mastering TASTE, you

A Taste of LIFE: 1,000 Vegetarian Recipes from Around the World

can actually feel better AND be satisfied, just by adding the proper BALANCE of flavor to your food. Ask yourself, if you're craving a food, what is it you really want? Well we can start by defining the experiences. The word 'taste' is defined as a sense that distinguishes the five basic tastes: sweet, sour, salty, spicy and bitter, plus a distinct smell, texture and flavor. So how do we get the taste we're craving and keep it healthy?

The sources of the *sweet* taste are many, most fruits, many vegetables, nearly every grain (as well as eggs, dairy and meat products), and of course, sugar and honey. Though its essence is cooling and soothing, you can literally become addicted, and the health effects of excessive sugar intake are well-known. *Sour* is the predominant flavor in lemons, limes, vinegar, yogurt and fermented foods which promotes digestion and weight gain in equal measure and is also related to emotions. *Salt* is found in the earth, in sea salts, in seaweed and kelp, and of course in flesh and blood – which is why many of think we're craving meat when we're really just craving a particular taste (or nutrient). Salt is warming to the body, stimulating to the appetite and promotes tissue development. Salt helps the body retain things like calories, fluids, and information. Salt also has an emotional connection, and is said to increase motivation. Most of us get too much of this taste, however. One teaspoon of salt a day is the perfect prescription, while 2 to 3 tablespoons is nine times more than we need. *Bitter*, the flavor most lacking in our diet, is found in green leafy vegetables such as spinach, kale, and mustard greens, as well as in turmeric, coffee and aloe vera. It's a detoxifier with particular benefit to the liver. Bitter is cooling and anti-inflammatory and helps reduce overall body fat. *Pungent* can also be thought of as "spicy" which is your garlic, onion, chilies, ginger, cayenne and other foods that are hot on the tongue. The pungent taste is heating and stimulating to the body, strengthening metabolism, circulation and digestion. Pungent is also known to fire

us up, but an overdose can cause anger and irritability. Last but not least is a sixth taste, *astringent*, the flavor found in beans, berries, Brussels' sprouts and broccoli. These are anti-inflammatory foods that cool the body and aid the process of detoxification and are great for fostering meditative states. Careful though, as astringents are thought to pull the senses inward, causing excessive inward focus and feeling of isolation.

The phrase "*A Taste of Life*" could mean anything from experiencing that which nourishes our existence...to becoming acquainted with the savoring of any substance perceived by the senses. Our goal, with this book, is to offer you that wide range of possibilities...with all the best tastes and flavors the world has to offer. Take control of your cravings and you can truly enjoy the best natural foods life has to offer. Our 1,000 flavorful and diverse recipes are gourmet dishes that can be created right in your own kitchen. We'll show you how to incorporate fresh produce in your diet until you've transitioned to where it is you want to be. At the same time you'll be totally eliminating the toxins that your body can't process or isn't meant to digest. Again that's totally up to you as to when and at what pace you want to do that. But you can start now just by incorporating extra servings of vegetables on your plate.

We've also included fresh juices for more satisfying flavors and it's detoxification properties. We imagine after reading it, most people will want to get away from sugary drinks, perhaps to lose weight, while others will simply want to add more years to their lives. For some very excellent tips, techniques and to examine some of the historical food facts around our vegetarian inspired recipes (which are all part of the global vegetarian cuisine) just keep reading, try things out and ENJOY!

How to Cook Ethnic Food

by SUPREME UNDERSTANDING

Cooking food from foreign cuisines isn't as scary as you might think. In fact, if you learn some of the basic staple foods, cooking techniques, and seasonings of your favorite culinary cultures, you can not only reproduce the amazing dishes in this cookbook, but you'll also be able to create your own takes on traditional ethnic cuisine. So here are some basics to some of the world's most popular fares.

Chinese

A balanced Chinese meal involves two elements: (1) the *fan* element made up of starches and grains, normally white rice in the southern provinces, and noodles or

dumplings in the north where wheat is common, and (2) the *tsai* element containing the protein and vegetable element, all cooked in a variety of ingredients and methods (such as sauteeing, stir-frying, deep-frying, and steaming), producing a large range of flavors.

Staple Foods. Most Chinese dishes are made with rice or noodles (made from egg, wheat, or rice). Common ingredients include bok choy, Chinese eggplant, Chinese cabbage, Chinese broccoli, bean sprouts, snow peas, white radish, straw mushrooms, bamboo shoots, and bean curd or tofu.

Staple Seasonings. Common Chinese condiments include garlic, ginger, green onions, chilies, cilantro, soy sauce, sesame oil, five spice powder (made of ground peppercorns, star anise, cloves, fennel and cinnamon and sometimes coriander seeds), chili sauce, chili paste, rice vinegar, plum sauce, and black bean sauce.

Thai

Thai cuisine places emphasis on lightly prepared dishes with strong aromatic components. Thai cuisine is known for being spicy. Balance, detail and variety are important to Thai cooking. Thai food is known for its balance of the five fundamental taste senses in each dish or the overall meal: hot (spicy), sour, sweet, salty, and (optional) bitter.

Staple Foods. Thai food typically offers a spicy curry or stir-fry served alongside a plain rice, sticky rice or Thai rice noodles to counteract the spiciness of the dish. Commonly-used Thai vegetables include bamboo shoots, Chinese broccoli, spinach, eggplant, green onion, and mushrooms.

Staple Seasonings. Thai food is often served with a variety of sauces and condiments. These may include sweet chili sauce, sliced chili peppers in rice vinegar, sriracha sauce, or a spicy chili sauce or paste called nam phrik. Common herbs include cilantro, lemon grass, Thai basil, and mint. Some other common flavors in Thai food come from ginger, galangal, tamarind, turmeric, garlic, soy beans, shallots, white and black peppercorn, kaffir lime and, of course, chilies. Thai food is known for its enthusiastic use of fresh (rather than dried) herbs and spices.

Japanese

A typical Japanese meal is based on combining a staple grain, typically rice or noodles, with a soup and okazu (dishes made from fish, meat, vegetable, or tofu). These are typically flavored with dashi, miso, and soy sauce and are usually low in fat and high in salt. A standard Japanese meal generally consists of several different okazu accompanying a bowl of cooked white Japanese rice, a bowl of soup and pickled vegetables. Japanese methods of food preparation include raw, grilled, simmered/boiled, steamed, deep-fried (sometimes coated in tempura), pickled, vinegared, or dressed.

Staple Foods. Traditional Japanese dishes are heavy on seafood. Meat-eating has been rare until fairly recently, but strictly vegetarian food is also rare since even vegetable dishes are flavored with dashi stock, usually made with katsuobushi (dried skipjack tuna flakes). Rice is Japan's most common staple. Japanese rice is short grain and becomes sticky when cooked. Noodles are an essential part of Japanese cuisine usually as an alternative to a rice-based meal. Soba (thin, grayish-brown noodles containing

buckwheat flour) and udon (thick wheat noodles) are the main traditional noodles and are served hot or cold with soy-dashi flavorings. Common Japanese vegetables include seaweed (there are several kinds, cucumber, daikon (Japanese radish), Japanese eggplant, Napa cabbage, spinach, sweet potato, bamboo shoots, and pickled vegetables. Several mushrooms are also common.

Staple Seasonings. Many Japanese foods are prepared using one or more of the following: Dashi stock made from kombu (kelp), katsuobushi (flakes of cured skipjack tuna, sometimes referred to as bonito) and/or niboshi (dried baby sardines), negi (Welsh onion), onions, garlic, nira (Chinese chives), rakkyō (a type of scallion), sesame, shōyu (soy sauce), miso, wasabi (and imitation wasabi from horseradish), karashi (hot mustard), red pepper, and ginger.

Mexican

When conquistadores arrived in the Aztec capital Tenochtitlan (now Mexico City), they found that the people's diet consisted largely of corn-based dishes with chiles and herbs, usually complemented with beans and tomatoes or nopales. The diet of the indigenous peoples of pre-Columbian Mexico also included chocolate, vanilla, tomatillos, avocado, guava, papaya, sapote, mamey, pineapple, soursop, jicama, squash, sweet potato, peanuts, achiote, huitlacoche, turkey and fish. In the 1520s, while Spanish conquistadors were taking over Mexico, they introduced a variety of animals, including cattle, chickens, goats, sheep, and pigs. Rice, wheat, and barley were also introduced as were olive oil, wine, almonds, parsley, and many spices. The imported Spanish cuisine was eventually incorporated into the indigenous cuisine. Further, it should be noted that "traditional" Mexican food is different from its American relatives, such as Tex-Mex and "Americanized" Mexican food. For example, the chimichanga and chalupa are not authentic Mexican dishes.

Staple Foods. The staples of Mexican cuisine are typically corn and beans. Most corn is used to make the masa dough for tamales, tortillas, gorditas, and other staples. The most common beans used in Mexican cooking are pinto beans and black beans. Many Mexican dishes also incorporate squash, tomatoes, and peppers.

Staple Seasonings. The most important and frequently used spices in Mexican cuisine are chile powder, oregano, cilantro, epazote, cinnamon, and cocoa. Chipotle, a smoke-dried jalapeño chili, is also common in Mexican cuisine. Many Mexican dishes also contain garlic and onions.

Middle Eastern

The so-called Mediterranean diet is really a mix of Greek, Turkish, Middle Eastern, and some Southern Italian cuisine. These cuisines are light on meats, and heavy on greens and lentils. One of the Mediterranean diet's strongest influences, Middle Eastern cuisine, is known for its blend of healthy ingredients and savory flavors.

Staple Foods. Many Middle Eastern dishes are made with a paste called tahini, a sesame paste. Chickpeas are another staple, used to make hummus, falafel, and other common foods. Common grain dishes include couscous and pita bread. Other commonly used ingredients include olives and olive oil, eggplant, onions, nuts, and tomatoes.

Staple Seasonings. Common seasonings include tahini, garlic, sesame seeds, mint, parsley, cumin, black pepper, paprika, mint, dill, lemon juice, honey, oregano and thyme.

Ethiopian

Ethiopian (and Eritrean) cuisine consists of a combination of injera (flatbread) with different wats (stews), yet each diverse cultural group has their unique variation. Most Ethiopian dishes are cooked through simmer or sauteeing the ingredients in a pot. Ethiopians eat with their right hands, using pieces of injera to pick up bites of entrées and side dishes. No utensils are used. Ethiopian cuisine contains many dishes that are vegan.

Staple Foods. Legumes and lentils are common in Ethiopian food. Most vegetarian wats consist of onions and spices simmered with split peas, lentils, potatoes, carrots, or chard.

Staple Seasonings. Berbere, a combination of powdered chili pepper and other spices, is an important ingredient used in many dishes. Also essential is niter kibbeh, a clarified butter infused with ginger, garlic, and several spices.

Indian

Indian cuisine has changed considerably over the past 5,000 years. One thing that's been consistent has been the reliance on grains and lentils, and the limited use of meat, particularly taboo meats like beef and pork. Indian meals typically involve a number of separate dishes that can be eaten together.

Staple Foods. The staples of Indian cuisine are rice or a flatbread made from whole wheat flour, and a variety of pulses, the most important of which are masoor (red lentil), channa (bengal gram), toor (pigeon pea or yellow gram), urad (black gram), and mung (green gram). Most Indian curries are cooked in vegetable oil.

Staple Seasonings. The most important or frequently used spices in Indian cuisine are chilli pepper, black mustard seed, cumin, turmeric, fenugreek, asafoetida, ginger, coriander, and garlic. There are also popular mixes like curry powder and garam masala, a powder that typically includes five or more dried spices, especially cardamom, cinnamon, and clove. Some leaves are commonly used, including bay leaf, coriander leaf, fenugreek leaf, mint leaf, and curry leaf. Sweet dishes are seasoned with cardamom, saffron, nutmeg, and rose petal essences.

Basic Cooking Techniques

by EBONI JOY ASIATIC, from THE HOOD HEALTH HANDBOOK

I understand that if we're going to recommend that you eat less fast food, less processed food, and less microwave meals...many of you will have a hard time because you think you don't know how to cook. The following is a breakdown of basic cooking techniques. Once you know a little about them, you will be much less intimidated to try new things in the kitchen.

Boiling

To boil food all one must do is cook it in liquid, usually water, that is boiling – rapid or “rolling” bubbling and the breaking of the bubbles into steam – at a temperature of 212° F. By putting a lid on the pot that the liquid is in one can bring the liquid to a boil faster, and also prevent

evaporation. If a pot of boiling liquid is left uncovered, the liquid will evaporate quicker than it will if covered – creating a greater risk of burning one's food. If the pot is too full the liquid will boil over onto the stove top.

A cook should start with cold water, rather than hot, if using water from the tap. When a starchy food – grains like rice, couscous, or quinoa or potatoes, or meat alternatives like TVP and wheat gluten/seitan – are placed in boiling water they expand by absorbing the water. So, once they're cooked they will take up about twice the space they did (if not more as is the case with rice) before being prepared.

When boiling vegetables, the water/liquid should be brought to a boil first, and once the vegetables are added

they should be watched closely. However, boiling vegetables is a sure way to destroy nutrients in your food. Steaming veggies was the method I was raised on.

The advantages of boiling one's food is that it is relatively safe (no chance of a grease fire) and simple, it is the best means to producing a flavored stock, and tough leafy greens (like collards and turnips) become edible and still retain their nutritive value when not boiled for too long. The disadvantages, however, is that generally soluble vitamins are extracted out of the food and into the water it has been boiled in, also boiled foods can become limp and withered looking. When I do boil foods I strive to retain the water turned juice as a broth.

Steaming

Steaming works by allowing water to be heated to its boiling point and maintaining a rolling boil as the water vaporizes into steam. The steam then carries heat to the food that has typically been placed in a circular metal or bamboo steamer basket and a lid placed on top during cooking. By keeping the food separate from the boiling water, it is cooked by the steam and maintains many of its nutrients, enzymes and moist, yet crunchy, texture. The only foods that cannot be cooked by steaming are mushrooms – they will get water-logged. Steaming veggies shouldn't take longer than 5 minutes, including time to sprinkle on a little sea salt and ground black pepper.

Frying

Frying is the technique of cooking food at high temperatures in oil or fat – the difference being their melting point and that fats are solid at room temperature. The crispy surface that develops in fried foods allows for moisture to be retained under the surface so that fried foods are both crispy and juicy.

Technically, shallow frying, deep frying, stir frying, sautéing, and pan searing are all common frying techniques that require more or less oil, and are categorized based on what kind of pan or fryer the food is cooked in – a frying pan, deep fryer, griddle, or wok.

Shallow frying is placing food only halfway covered in pre-heated oil inside a shallow frying pan or skillet. In deep frying, the food is submerged in oil that has been pre-heated in a deep fryer. After deep frying, the cooking the oil can be strained, refrigerated and re-used a couple of times before being discarded. Some fried foods are battered or breaded before frying, allowing the outside to become golden and crispy, yet maintaining tender juiciness underneath.

Both of these frying techniques cooks food relatively fast – but time spent deep frying is less than half that spent

pan or shallow frying because the food does not need to be flipped from one side to the other. Another difference between these techniques is that food is not quite as greasy when deep fried. Proper frying temperature depends on the thickness and toughness of the food being prepared (think sweet potato vs. eggplant), but most food is typically fried at 350–375° F.

Stir Frying

This technique involves frying quickly at very high temperatures, requiring that the food be stirred continuously to prevent it from sticking to the wok and burning. This cooking technique originated in China, and by cooking bite-sized chopped tofu and vegetables (or whatever you choose) in a wok very quickly and at high heat, followed by a quick steam-in sauce you can cook a complete one-pot wonder meal. When stir frying, your oil must be heated in the wok first, the foods that take longest to cook should be placed in the wok next – for instance, you would first fry your meat or meat substitute, then add onions and carrots after about 4 to 5 minutes, and then broccoli and squash for the last couple minutes of cooking. And when the food is about two-thirds done, add your sauce, cover the wok, and your food should steam for a minute or two.

Because your food is cooked so rapidly when stir frying, and on high heat, all ingredients must be prepped (washed and cut) before you start cooking to prevent burning and sticking. And because you are cooking at high heat, you will need to use an oil that has a high smoke point like peanut, safflower, corn or canola.

The stir frying sauces I use most are either some spicy concoction I created, teriyaki sauce, or Bragg's liquid aminos. Other stir frying sauces include soy sauce, hoisin sauce, peanut sauce, tamari, and chili sauce – of course you can always create your own too.

Sauté

Sauté in French means “to jump” and the French called this technique “to jump” because you don't want your food sitting too long in the pan due to the very high heat. You've probably seen professional cooks sauté by flipping their food in the air while still in the skillet.

Sautéing and pan frying (or searing) vary only slightly in that in searing you use less heat and cook larger portions of solid food like half an eggplant, a chicken breast, or a fish steak. In searing, you do not have to stir, toss or flip your ingredients as frequently as when sautéing either. Because the heat index is lower when sautéing, you can even prepare foods in butter – or a vegan butter-like product (Earth Balance for instance) – without fear of burning, but foods that require less cooking time must

only be prepared with butter because it burns much more easily than oil. Non-stick pans are good for sautéing in light oil or butter, however, if you are creating a sauce a metal pan helps to better create browning.

Common mistakes made when sautéing is that many cooks do not let their pan get hot enough before adding their fat/oil and cold ingredients to it. Not preheating your pan before adding oil and cold foods causes the juices in the food to be released as the pan heats up, and your food becomes dry. Another benefit of pre-heating your pan is that when you add cold butter, you don't have to wait for it to melt, as soon as you add your fat or oil you are ready to start cooking. Also, as fats heat they start to degrade once they reach 140° F.

Baking

In general, the term baking is used in reference to cakes, pies, pastries and breads; and what it means is “immersing the object to be cooked in an environment of still, hot air.” This is why we pre-heat our ovens before placing our food in it to bake, so that all of the air in the oven reaches the same temperature and the food being prepared cooks evenly.

In baking, the food is cooked through two processes – the heat transfer from oven to food, and the heat transfer from baking dish to food. Baking in convection ovens require less time and less heat (25-50 degrees less). Baking in high altitudes requires more time and higher baking temperatures.

In preparing your desserts, follow the recipes exactly until you are skilled enough to create your own. It is said that cooking is an art, but baking is a science, so in baking, it is very important to be exact.

Roasting

Roasting is the baking of food – not bread and desserts – in an open pan, uncovered. When roasting meat (which I have never done being that I've been a vegetarian for all of my adulthood) the meat is usually placed on a rack that fits inside a fairly shallow pan, so that the meat does not sit in its “juices.” The difference between roasting and baking is that you typically roast food that has structure already, like meats and vegetables. And baked foods are those that require rising, or whose structure changes during the baking process, and you have a different structure once baking is complete, like cakes, pies, breads, and casseroles.

Roasting is often considered a healthier method of cooking foods because of the need for less oil and fat in the preparation process – however, basting is oven required to keep foods from drying out. When I make my

vegan soy-fish and roasted root vegetables I put clumps of vegan butter in a small amount of seasoned water to create a juice for that dish. Poultry should be cooked breast down to start and finished on the flip side so that the fat (“juice”) drips into the breast meat. Roasting “juices” can also be used to create gravies and sauces.

You must always pre-heat your oven before roasting, and in roasting your thermostat is usually set at a high temperature (375-450° F), this seals the outer layer of your food and prevents the loss of juices while also caramelizing the surface. After about 20 minutes, the temperature can be lowered to about 350° F for the remaining cooking time.

Choosing a roasting pan is of vital importance – if it is too big your food will burn, too small and your food will stick to the pan, too deep and your food will steam (not roast), and too shallow and the juices will splatter all over the oven causing a horrible mess and difficult clean-up job.

Braise

Braising is a cooking technique in which the main ingredient is seared, or browned in fat, and then simmered in liquid on low heat in a covered pot for a relatively long range of time – from 1 to 6 hours – depending on what you are cooking. The best equipment for this process is a crock pot, pressure cooker or Dutch oven, and can be done on the stove top or in the oven. Braising is typically used as a means to cook less expensive, tough cuts of meat. The end result is said to be tender and flavorful. However, since we are building on “hood health” we recommend that you refrain from eating cheap, tough cuts of meat – as inexpensive cuts are almost always higher in fat which causes heart health problems, and tougher meats are harder to digest and begin to decompose in your intestines and colon before they can be digested – leading to colon cancer. Vegetables that are ideal for braising include squash, sweet potatoes, leeks, parsnips, carrots, beets, cabbage and onions.

Stew

People tend to think of stew as a dish rather than a cooking method, but it is actually both, and the dish itself is defined as “meat or fish and vegetables cooked by stewing.” Stew, the cooking method, is “a moist heat cooking process by which meat and vegetables are slowly simmered in a flavorful liquid.”

There is really very little difference between braising and stewing. In a braise, the meat and/or vegetables are typically left whole. In a stew they are cut in chunks. In a stew the ingredients are completely submerged in their cooking liquid. When braised, the liquid doesn't come further than halfway up the food being prepared.

Did you know that chili is a stew? And French Ratatouille is simply stewed vegetables. Vegetables ideal for stewing include eggplant, tomatoes, celery, celery root, leeks, cabbage, fennel, carrots, potatoes, onions, garlic and almost any tough greens, such as collard greens, chard, kale or mustard greens. I make a great vegan stew – similar to beef or lamb stew – with brown TVP chunks. In a food processor, or with my sick blender in the pot itself, I puree the vegetables that have cooked so thoroughly that they practically dissolve in your mouth. This is how I thicken my stew and also create a vegetable broth; adding fresh vegetables to my pot of stew about 30 minutes (depending on their toughness) before the stewing process is complete adds nutrients to the dish.

Grilling

All too often the terms grilling and barbecuing are used interchangeably, when they are quite different, and true barbecuing is rare. Traditional barbecue is done slowly, with low cooking temperatures, with lots of smoke accumulating over an open (preferably wood fire rather than charcoal) pit. A gas grill cannot accomplish this goal.

Grilling, however, requires a higher temperature to sear what's being cooked in order to preserve the food's juices. In fact, if you are comparing grilling to any other cooking method, the most similar would be broiling – as they both use a high heat source, however the grill's heat comes from below, where as the broiler's heat comes from above. They are both ideal means of cooking tender cuts of red meat, poultry, fish and vegetables – and let's not forget our meat alternatives like seitan, tempeh and tofu. Whatever you're grilling, you want to ensure that it isn't too thick to cook properly on the interior otherwise be stricken with a food borne illness.

Although grilling is considered by many to be a healthier way to cook because the fat drips off of the food and into the fire, inhaling smoke is never good for the lungs, and the charring process isn't particularly good for our intestinal tract or digestive system. When grilling, you must also be careful to avoid flare-ups – don't want to burn your food or yourself!

Vital Notes on Grilling

- ❑ Bring your food to room temperature before placing it on the grill.
- ❑ Start with a clean grill. The best time to clean (remove residue from) a grill is immediately after you finish cooking and the grate is still hot.
- ❑ Brush or spray the grill with oil to prevent food from sticking.

- ❑ The grill must be pre-heated 15 to 30 minutes before food is placed on it.
- ❑ Put all of your cooking utensils, seasonings and sauces near the grill before you put the food on it, and have a spray bottle filled with water on hand in case of flare-ups.

Every grill is different and will have different hot and cool spots. It's important for you to learn where they are and use them to your advantage. Marinating your food to be grilled for as long as possible is the best way to ensure a flavorful meal – but your food must be patted dry before being placed on the grill in order to reduce dripping which prevents flare-ups. Our favorite “hood” marinade – barbecue sauce – which is nothing more than the perfect combination of pureed tomatoes, vinegar, onion, mustard and brown sugar – it is so easy to create your own by also adding your preferred spices (mine are spike, with salt, and powdered jerk seasoning). The time frame for which it takes your ingredients to grill differs – refer to your favorite cookbook for timing guidelines.

Broiling

Broiling is cooking food in the bottom compartment of your oven, and allowing it to be cooked via infrared radiation from the oven's top burner, so your food is being cooked from above rather than below, as in baking and grilling. The downside to broiling is that lots of splattering occurs causing a mess and smoke can repeatedly set off the fire alarm. This is why most people prefer to grill, and why, when broiling, it's imperative to make sure the broiler pan, which catches excess liquid and grease, is in place before you start to broil any food.

The upside to broiling if you are a meat eater is that the broiler does not have to pre-heat, and is a fast method for cooking meats, poultry and fish, and gives it a nice dark char. The broiler is actually located in a compartment beneath the oven, pull the drawer all the way out and it usually folds down for easy removal of the broiler pan or the flipping of food. Every oven's thermostat knob has a “broil” position.

Blanching

Blanching is a cooking term that “describes a process of food preparation wherein the food substance, usually a vegetable or fruit, is plunged into boiling water, removed after a brief, timed interval, and finally plunged into iced water or placed under cold running water (shocked) to halt the cooking process.” Many fruits and vegetables can be frozen and preserved once they have been blanched (I have done this with leeks, onions and celery). Blanching literally means “to whiten” but often, its purpose is to soften a food, remove an overwhelming taste, or even

preserve the original vibrant color of a food before cooking it in another manner. Upon blanching nuts, the skin of the nut becomes softened by blanching and can be removed once cooled.

Live/Raw

Yes, you're right, preparing live/raw food is not "cooking." So why mention it? Because it's an important aspect of food preparation, and eating fresh, uncooked vegetables, fruits, grains, nuts, seeds, and sprouts is necessary in bettering health for ourselves and our families. Incorporating raw foods into your diet doesn't require special tools or special knowledge (but a few recipes that go beyond salads can help!). Raw foodists can create amazing meals with a dehydrator that can heat food without cooking it. A seasoned raw foodist will have a frequently used juicer and food processor in their kitchen as well.

Be Prepared

Finally, the last bit of best advice I can give as a professional cook is about *mise en place* (pronounced MEEZ ahn

plahs), which translates from French as "to put in place" – which means before you start cooking have all of your ingredients prepared. Have them on hand for one (to avoid running to the grocery store at the last minute), and have them washed, peeled, deseeded, chopped, diced, julienned, etc, etc.

All too often, I've delved into a recipe and halfway through the cooking process I realize I'm missing an ingredient and I have to substitute with another or run to the grocery store in mid process. I have also found my food burning uncontrollably as I cut vegetables while another ingredient is cooking and the entire dish is ruined. Trust me when I say you will save yourself a world of hurt by making a comprehensive list of ingredients before you start cooking, double check to make sure you have them on hand, and prep them as need be before turning on a single burner on your stove. And keep in mind one of the greatest sayings in the culinary world – cooking is an art, so experiment with flavors and textures and turn your favorite recipe into your own unique creation; baking is a science, stick to the blueprint and you can't go wrong!

Tips and Tools for Healthy Eating

by BRYANT TERRY, author of VEGAN SOUL KITCHEN

Look, I won't pretend that I make every meal from scratch. I enjoy eating out and being served as much as the next man. But I do realize the costs (and I'm not just talking about money). Food eaten outside the home ultimately drains our pockets and takes a toll on our overall health. So we up spending too much money and ruining our bodies all while making food corporations, hospitals, and insurance companies rich in the process.

Food eaten outside the home has more salt, more sugar, more fat, and almost twice the calories of meals prepared at home. Why, you might ask? 'Cause salt, sugar, and fat taste good! And most of us are addicted to them. Those ingredients don't cost that much either. So think about it, if you are selling food for mass consumption, overloading your products with inexpensive salt, sugar, and fat makes good business sense. Processed, packaged, and fast food is cheap to make; this type of food can last a long time without rotting once you add preservatives to it; and you can turn major profits by selling a lot of it. That's why you are much more likely to see an advertisement for a 500-calorie hamburger that you can swoop up from the drive-through than for some collard greens and lamb chops that you need to hook up at the crib. It all works out for the four corporations that control most of the food that we eat. They make money and take ours.

The long-term costs of eating out a lot can be extremely high, too. Preventable diet-related illnesses such as hypertension (high blood pressure), heart disease, and certain cancers will end up costing you and your family lots of money if you land in the hospital. And the emotional toll of having loved ones sick or dying is immeasurable. Think about your spouse and kids going bankrupt to pay for your medical bills 'cause you wanted to eat a double cheeseburger 5 days a week. Suddenly that dollar menu isn't looking as appealing, right.

Now cooking at home, on the other hand, is an easy way to save money, particularly if you focus your meals around whole unprocessed ingredients instead of packaged foods: You know exactly what ingredients are going into your meals; making food from scratch is a great way to impress that special someone (especially if you plan the meal and y'all cook it together); and kids love cooking with their parents. The best thing about cooking at home for me, though, is that I get to have my preferred dishes exactly how I like them. When I'm depending on a restaurant to make my favorite meal, they might mess it up and disappoint me. So I do for self.

If you did not spend a lot of time in the kitchen with grandma growing up, I know it can be intimidating. But the best way to get better at cooking is practice. If you

love eating, the more you experiment in the kitchen and learn from your mistakes the better home chef you will become. Here are some equipment suggestions that might help you work it out.

Some Equipment to Help You Become a Better Cook

Baking Sheets: Whether you are heating frozen fries, roasting carrots from scratch, or baking canned biscuits, you should keep a baking sheet handy. And a good oven glove will keep you from burning your hands.

Blender: You can find a good blender for less than 20 bucks. Use it for making smoothies before and after workouts and blending soups made from scratch. Remember not to fill it more than halfway if you are blending hot liquids or you will get burned.

Colander: Keep a large colander (12-inch) handy for draining (and washing) vegetables, beans, grains, and pastas after cooking.

Cutting Board: I won't pretend that I have never cut straight onto a counter before. But after getting cursed out by moms for scratching up her surfaces I made sure I used a cutting board after that. In order to avoid getting food poisoning you should keep at least two: one for preparing fish and meat and one for cutting vegetables. Use woodcutting boards since bacteria can't thrive on them. Plus they won't make your knife as dull as other types of cutting boards.

Grater: These are perfect for shredding cheese for tacos and vegetables for salads.

Knives: If you are serious about throwin' down in the kitchen you should invest in a good chef's knife. If you take good care of it, your knife should last for a couple of generations.

Measuring Cups and Spoons: Unless you already feel comfortable enough to freestyle when you are cooking, owning some plastic or metal measuring cups and spoons (for dry goods) and glass cups (for liquids) will help you follow recipes with ease.

Peeler: A solid Y-shaped swivel peeler is great for peeling the skin off potatoes and other vegetables and fruits.

Pots and Pans: Unless you choose to invest in a set of pots and pans, you should decide what is a priority in your kitchen and slowly build your arsenal. Here are a few options to consider:

- 10-inch fry pan
- 4-qt. saucepan with lid
- 3-qt. sauté pan with lid
- 7-qt. stockpot with lid

Salad Spinner: Assuming that you will be eating more salads after reading this book...invest in a salad spinner to wash your greens before dressing.

Spoons: Next to the stone axe, a wooden spoon is probably the oldest tool known to man. Get one or two.

Tongs: Think of these as your metal fingers when cooking. Whether on the stove or the grill, a pair of tongs is great for frying, roasting and barbecuing.

Meat vs. Vegetables True/False Quiz

Still not convinced about letting go of meat? Take this quiz and see how much you know. Answers below. Don't cheat!

1	T / F	Millions of people get sick each year from eating contaminated meat and fish, and thousands die. For example, 98% of all broiler chicken carcasses have levels of E. coli bacteria that indicate fecal contamination.
2	T / F	Meat-eaters are more likely to have parasites, worms, and bacterial infections, some of which can survive in even well-cooked meat.
3	T / F	Every product that is put into the animal's system becomes a part of the meat-eater's system, which leads to diseases, chemical imbalances, and hormonal problems, such as how girls are beginning puberty younger and younger each year.
4	T / F	Well-planned vegetarian diets provide us with all the nutrients that we need, minus all the saturated fat, cholesterol, pesticides, dioxins, hormones, antibiotics, bacteria, and other contaminants found in animal flesh and by-products.
5	T / F	Meat-eaters are 9 times more likely to be obese than vegans.

6	T / F	Vegetarians are 50% less likely to develop heart disease than meat-eaters.
7	T / F	Vegetarians have a cancer rate 60% lower than meat-eaters, even if they're smokers.
8	T / F	Scientists haven't yet proven that animal fat and cholesterol cause heart disease, or that animal protein causes cancer.
9	T / F	Consumption of meat, eggs, and dairy products has not been strongly linked to osteoporosis, Alzheimer's, asthma, and male impotence.
10	T / F	Vegetarians have stronger immune systems than meat-eaters, which further reduces their risk of disease.
11	T / F	Vegetarian children grow taller and have higher IQs than their meat-eating classmates.
12	T / F	Older people who switch to a vegetarian or vegan diet cannot prevent and even reverse many chronic ailments.
13	T / F	Experts agree that healthy vegetarian diets support a lifetime of good health and provide protection against numerous diseases, including our country's three biggest killers: heart disease, cancer, and strokes.
14	T / F	Meat-eaters are typically stronger than vegetarians, and better fighters and athletes.
15	T / F	Vegetarians and vegans live, on average, 6 to 10 years longer than meat-eaters.*

*All the statements are true, except numbers 8, 9, and 12.

How to Become Vegetarian (in 8 Steps)

by MENTAL SUN and AIYA ABRIHET of Vegan Hood TV, from THE HOOD HEALTH HANDBOOK

There are many reasons why people decide to transition away from a meat-based diet towards a plant-based one. Whatever your reason, how you transition can determine whether or not you end up sticking to your new diet, or falling off. Transitioning is different for everyone. Some find it very easy to cut meat out of their diet right away, while others need more time to make the transition permanent. Here are some tips and tricks that will help you make the journey a smoother one.

1. Do Your Research

Learn as much as you can about the vegetarian/vegan diet. Study the human body and the immune system. Learn about everything you are now putting into your mouth, as well as all the foods that you're leaving behind. By taking in as much as you can on the topic, the change will become an informed and genuine one and you won't have to worry about relying only on willpower. Don't simply stop eating something because someone told you not to. Get hands-on, do the research and learn the information for yourself. Fortunately, this book should help you with most of that process, but don't stop here.

2. Swap Out Old Choices for New Ones

Transitioning is all about getting healthier, not simply eliminating things. Many people find it easy to transition by eating vegetarian meat alternatives. You can find vegan burgers, vegan hot dogs, and even vegan "chunks" for

stir-fry dishes, and those may help you kick the "meat" addiction. However, don't get stuck there, and don't think that eliminating meat is all it takes to be healthy. Other transitions are necessary as well. Instead of white rice, look for brown rice, quinoa or black rice. Instead of white bread and other varieties, look for whole grain bread or spelt bread. And instead of white sugar, try agave nectar or maple syrup. For those transitioning away from dairy, look for a vegan product called Daiya cheese. Replace cow's milk with almond, hemp, coconut or rice milk. If possible, the best thing to do is use a blender to mix up some almonds and water and make your own milk. By swapping out your old choices for new ones, you won't feel like you're missing out or deprived.

It's also important to constantly add new foods to your diet. Meat-eaters typically have very limited food choices (which make it especially ironic when they ask vegetarians, "So what DO you eat?"). As a vegetarian, you'll need to expand your tastes. Not only should you try the cuisines of other cultures (Indian, Thai, and Ethiopian are good places to start), but you should start trying new fruits and vegetables. Add a new fruit, vegetable, or grain to your diet every week. Learn how to prepare it and work it into the new recipes you're learning. To really eat healthy, color-coding can help. Set a goal of eating 4 or 5 different colors (natural colors, not food coloring colors!) at every

meal, and you'll be getting the full range of nutrition you need.

3. Don't Be a Starchetarian

People transitioning often make the mistake of becoming starchetarians. Make sure that you don't attempt to make up for the meat you're not eating with more bread, pasta and potatoes (or "veggie meat" made from wheat or soy). A diet overemphasizing starch is almost as dangerous as a meat-based diet. Replace meat with more fruits and vegetables, preferably leafy greens. Remember to be strong like the cow (or bull), don't eat the cow, eat what the cow eats (in its natural environment of course).



4. Make Smoothies

Get in the habit of starting your day off with a smoothie. Use lots of frozen fruits, bananas, nuts and one of the milk alternatives mentioned above and get busy with your blender. There's no special formula, just mix in your favorites and try to make enough so you can take some with you for your morning commute. Smoothies are a great way to increase your fruit intake and because everything is blended up and easy to digest, you can get a lot of ingredients down that you probably wouldn't be able to eat whole in one sitting. Eventually, if you're feeling adventurous you can even throw in some fresh spinach and some avocado (you won't even be able to taste them if you have enough fruits in there). Get your kids involved and make it a family thing. They will love preparing them and you'll feel good knowing that you're getting closer to your goals and helping your children to be healthy at the same time. Also, look into the benefits of juice fasting. (See "Living the Fast Life")

5. Don't Bring Junk into Your Home

If you control what comes into your kitchen and refrigerator, don't allow unhealthy food to enter your home. What often happens is people end up eating whatever they're surrounded by. Eat apples instead of cookies, get nuts instead of chips, and treat yourself to a non-dairy sor-

bet/ice cream instead of that scoop of lactose intolerance. Better options make for better choices.

6. Try Not to Go Hungry

It's usually when we're hungry that we're likely to cheat on our diet. This is especially true when you're driving. When you're hungry, the fast food spots you pass on the street look extra tempting. By eating before you go out you will avoid any added temptation to go back to your old eating habits. This also goes for grocery shopping. Junk food items will almost seem to fall off of the shelf into your cart when you go to the grocery store on an empty stomach. With all those options enticing you, it makes it very hard to resist. Try to do all of your shopping after you've had a meal, write out a list before you leave and try your best to stick to it. Same goes for when you're watching television. Watching TV and junk food often go hand-in-hand. Sometimes when you're distracted you don't realize how much you eat and all the food commercials make it even worse. Be sure to always have healthy snacks and lots of fruit around for moments like this.

7. Eat Out

Many people think that they won't be able to eat out like they used to now that they are a vegetarian or vegan. This couldn't be further from the truth. Try out local veggie spots in your neighborhood.* It's a great way to keep you motivated and help you get creative when it comes to repairing your own food. Plan ahead. Research what restaurants offer vegetarian/vegan options. Call a restaurant ahead of time to make sure that they have satisfying choices that you can eat. Learn how to analyze menus when you go out. There are always options, even if you have to get the chef to customize something for you. Read online menus before you go out if you're someone who gets easily tempted. If you know what you're going to order ahead of time, you don't have to even bother opening the menu and will eliminate unnecessary temptation. At first it may be awkward going out with friends and family who might expect you to get "the usual." Surprise them with a healthier option along with info that might help them to eat better as well.

8. Stay Strong

No matter how good you feel or how good you think you're doing, be prepared because there will always be someone there to scrutinize your actions. Usually these people mean well, but for the most part they are usually misinformed when it comes to proper nutrition. Don't let someone who doesn't share your discipline, talk you out of doing the right thing.

Prepare to block out negative responses to your new diet from others. Remember that to some, this diet is strange so you may not always get the support you're looking for from the people around you. If you're used to having burgers and fries with your friends everyday at lunch, understand that they might find it weird that "all of a sudden" you don't want to go with them anymore.

Find as many healthy people in your circle as you can and surround yourself with them. Join online vegetarian/vegan social networks, a great place to meet people

with common interests, ask questions and look for new recipes. The greater the support system around you, the greater your chances for success.

Try to think of your transition as a lifestyle change rather than a diet and don't be hard on yourself. You didn't get to where you now are overnight, so don't expect things to change overnight either. Remember, small permanent changes are better than big changes that don't last for very long.

* Check out www.happycow.net for a world-wide listing of vegetarian/vegan restaurants, health food stores and more.

A Simple Meal Plan

by JUSTICE RAJEE, from THE HOOD HEALTH HANDBOOK

One of the easiest ways to take control of your diet and get more bang for your buck is make a meal plan. The hard part is developing a habit of sticking to the plan. What we choose to eat has a huge impact on our health, it is deliberate and it should be planned. I am going to provide you a simple method that you can use to get started. On the reverse side of this page, you'll see a template for a weekly meal planner (make copies as needed). For each day of the week, write what you are going to eat. In the ingredients list, write down what you will need to create the meals you have listed. Place the completed chart on your fridge or a kitchen cabinet so you can see it clearly.

Now I know what you are thinking. How will this work? It will work because the first step in changing behavior is creating a means to hold yourself accountable to the new standard. Writing it down allows you to remember what you promised yourself you would do. If you are reading this book, you are more than likely looking for ways to gain control of your health. By changing what you eat into something you plan instead of something you just run out and do, you pull the motivations for your choices out of your subconscious mind to your conscious mind. Instead of choosing food on impulse you will eventually follow the plan you have set for yourself.

When you go shopping with a list and menu, you are less likely to come back with items you did not plan to purchase. Stores are designed to get you buy things you never wanted. The layout, coupons, signs, and even the

lighting are all focused on getting you to think with your stomach. When you have a counter to the emotional cues found in the store, you have a better chance of limiting your spending to just what you need. That is also why you include days you intend to eat out. Eating out in our world of fast food dollar menus and cheap processed snacks can quietly lead to far more spending than you may notice. Creating a plan and sticking to it will give you a leg up in changing your eating culture.

Following a meal plan makes it much easier to incorporate modifications to your diet. When you don't have a plan, changes to your eating habits creates a greater feeling of uncertainty because you don't have any gauge of how adjusting to add more fresh fruits or cutting your dairy intake will really affect your life. Since you are operating without a standard it is hard to predict how buying a bag of apples every two weeks will differ from buying a jar of applesauce. When you have a plan and you condition yourself to following your plan you get a better hold of what you are eating, how much you are spending, and how fast you go through those items. With a greater understanding of your eating habits you will be able to make comfortable and sustainable adjustments to meet your ultimate diet goals.

There are far more complex meal planning methods you can use, from Excel spreadsheets to detailed food logs – you name it (you can find many examples online). Whatever you do, start out simple and work your plan.



A Taste of the Americas



North and South American Recipes

A Taste of the Americas

Appetizers

Spiced Lentil Tacos

1 tablespoon olive oil	1 package (2.25 oz.) taco seasoning
1 cup finely chopped onion	2½ cups vegetable broth
1 clove garlic, chopped	8 taco shells
½ teaspoon salt	1¼ cups shredded lettuce
1 cup dried brown lentils, rinsed	1 cup chopped tomato
	½ cup shredded reduced-fat (2%) cheddar



Optional:

- ½ cup fat-free sour cream
- 1 chipotle chili in adobo sauce, finely chopped (use half for less heat)
- 2 teaspoons adobo sauce

1. Heat oil in large skillet over medium-high heat.
2. Cook onion, garlic and salt until onion begins to soften, 3 to 4 minutes.
3. Add lentils and taco seasoning. Cook until spices are fragrant and lentils are dry, about 1 minute.
4. Add broth; bring to a boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer until lentils are tender, 25 to 30 minutes.
5. Uncover lentils and cook until mixture thickens, 6 to 8 minutes. Mash with a rubber spatula.
6. Spoon ¼ cup lentil mixture into each taco shell.
7. Top with favorite taco fixings, lettuce, tomato and cheese.
8. **Optional:** Mix sour cream, chili and adobo sauce in a bowl and top lentils with mixture of sour cream, chipotle and adobo

Veggie Pockets

Serves 6-8

1 package of Smart Ground	1 tbsp. Adobo
½ red onion	2 tbsp. basil
1 green bell pepper	1 can black beans
1 red bell pepper	1 package of pita bread (pocketed)
1 tsp. Adobo	olive oil or Smart Balance salt and pepper to taste

1. Dice red onion, red and green bell pepper in to quarter inch slices.
2. Coat medium frying pan with Extra Virgin Olive Oil (or Smart Balance) and put on low-medium heat.
3. Once heated add the onions and bell pepper. Cook until onions are transparent.
4. Add basil and 1 tsp. adobo. Increase to medium heat.
5. Add the smart ground and mix in the remain adobo and basil.
6. Drain 1 can of black beans and add salt and pepper to taste.
7. In a separate pan add Smart Balance and heat over high heat.
8. Add the pita bread and continue to turn until brown on both sides.
9. Let cool slightly and stuff with 'meat' mixture. Enjoy!



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