



COMMON CONCERNS

on a plant-based diet

Let's face facts! When changing from a traditional diet to a plant-based diet, your body undergoes an incredible transformation. For the most part, the changes are easily accomplished. However, some people experience temporary effects that can be quite challenging so it is important to know the facts and the remedies.

Hair

Some people may experience hair loss/hair thinning and, whilst this can be disconcerting, please be aware that this is just a temporary phase. It usually occurs in the first 12 months of the change to a vegan diet and is due to a number of factors:

1) **Iron** deficiency is a well-known cause of hair loss. Make sure you are consuming iron-rich foods such as beans, seeds, lentils, seeds, dried fruits and leafy greens on a daily basis. To ensure that the iron you consume is actually absorbed by your body, you should combine plant-based iron foods with foods containing vitamin C as this significantly enhances iron absorption. In fact it can increase it by as much as six times. Eat beans, grains and seeds along with foods high in vitamin C, such as bell peppers, berries, broccoli, kale and citrus fruits. Be careful also not to hinder iron absorption by drinking coffee or tea whilst eating as they contain tannins that will inhibit your iron uptake.

2) **Zinc** is an essential mineral that plays a significant role in maintaining healthy hair. The good news is that zinc is widely present in many plant foods (see food suggestions in the Nails section below) but, once again, you need to pay particular attention to the absorption issue. Remember consumption does not necessarily equal absorption. The amino acid L-lysine plays a significant role in the absorption of both iron and zinc. High amounts of L-lysine is found in legumes, and a vegan who doesn't eat many legumes could find themselves deficient in L-lysine. So, if you do experience hair loss issues, make sure that you consume legumes on a regular basis.

3) **Protein** is essential for strong, healthy hair. Plants which contain all 9 amino acids are known as complete proteins and these foods are: chia, quinoa, soy, buckwheat, amaranth, hemp seed and nutritional yeast. Other plant-based foods provide some of the essential amino acids but not all 9 in the same plant. However, it is very easy to ensure you consume all 9 essential amino acids by combining proteins in a complementary manner, eg, when legumes like beans, peanuts, chickpeas and lentils are combined with grains like wheat, oats, rice and corn you will have complete proteins or when legumes are combined with nuts and seeds, you'll have complete proteins.

Nails

Hair and nails are made up of a strong, protective protein called keratin and, generally speaking, the nutrients that benefit your hair are also beneficial for your nails. So, if you are experiencing problems with your nails follow the information given in the section on Hair above. There's also an extra little clue on your nails. If you get white spots on your nails, that can be indicative of a zinc deficiency. So include foods in your diet that are high in zinc such as pumpkin seeds, hemp seeds, sesame seeds, tahini, soybeans, tofu, lentils, chickpeas, cashew nuts, quinoa and fortified cereals. Protein and calcium help keep your nails healthy. Eat kale, collards and dark leafy greens for calcium and make sure you are getting complete proteins. See the section on Hair for more information about complete proteins and amino acids.

Hunger

It is possible that you may feel more hungry on a vegan diet. This can be attributed to not eating enough nutrients and calories to give you sufficient energy to see you through the day. You will likely find that you need to eat larger meals or have several smaller meal portions throughout the day. It is important to choose foods that are high in protein such as peanuts, hemp seeds, pumpkin seeds, chickpeas, lentils and edamame - all of these can form part of a larger meal or be used as snacks. Another way to stave off hunger is to add variety into your diet. Aim to eat many different types of plant-based foods to ensure you are getting all your essential amino acids throughout the day. Often times people will stick to a small number of foods but this is a mistake. You should enlarge your repertoire and increase your palate.

Skin

You may be familiar with the phrase: "it gets worse before it gets better" and this is certainly true when it comes to skin issues. When you are going through the dietary transition phase, you may find that your skin becomes more problematic. However, you need to be patient, as this will pass and then you will experience healthy, glowing skin if you have been eating well. Initially your body needs to go through a detox and this releases all the toxins into your bloodstream. When the detox is intensive, your body can become overwhelmed and it may not be able to expel the toxins quickly enough. This is especially true for those who have problems with candida and an excess of adverse bacteria in their gut. As a result of the increase in toxins and inflammation, this can manifest as breakouts. Fortunately this should be a short-lived event and, although it can be disfiguring, keep your mind on the end goal. This detox has to take place if you want to experience shining, healthy skin which glows from the inside out. Naturally, along with your diet you need to treat your skin well, protect it from the harsh sun and use only natural skin-care products. You should also make sure that your vegan diet is a healthy one full of organic fresh fruits, vegetables, seeds and nuts with the bare minimum of processed foods.

Vitamin B12

There is a lot of hype around vegans and vitamin B12. Vitamin B12 is produced by bacteria, not by animals as is commonly assumed, so both animals and humans must obtain it directly or indirectly from bacteria. In the past, vitamin B12 was more reliably present in plant foods due to organic and gentler farming practices but nowadays as a result of high-sanitation practices like irradiation, which aims to extend the shelf life of foods by eliminating microorganisms, the vitamins in the food are destroyed. Additionally, the soil is exposed to antibiotics and pesticides meaning that most plant foods are now no longer reliable sources of this bacterial product but don't despair because there are some plant foods that still contain vitamin B12. These foods are: nori and chlorella seaweeds and certain mushrooms like shitaki and lion's mane. Fortunately many plant-based food products are fortified with vitamin B12 such as: nutritional yeast, vegan spreads, plant-based milks, cereals, tempeh and certain plant-based meats. A bonus here is that the fortification of foods is achieved via a crystalline form of B12 which is actually better than the form found in animal foods because it is easier for our bodies to absorb. Whilst it is possible to achieve your recommended daily amount of vitamin B12 via the plant-based foods mentioned above, it is also a good precautionary measure to take a vitamin B12 supplement. The best supplement for vegans is called cyanocobalamin as it is not made with any animal-based filler materials.

Enjoy this discussion with long-term vegan, Madeline Tuttle. We cover the following topics:

- 1) Why she decided to adopt the vegan diet
- 2) Her visionary artwork
- 3) How she began playing the flute and the album she has created along with Dr Tuttle, titled 'Inspiration'
- 4) Cooking tips for those new to the vegan diet
- 5) How to sprout your own seeds and beans
- 6) Gardening tips for those with small or no outdoor gardens
- 7) Her experience of living out of an RV and the benefits of minimalism

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