

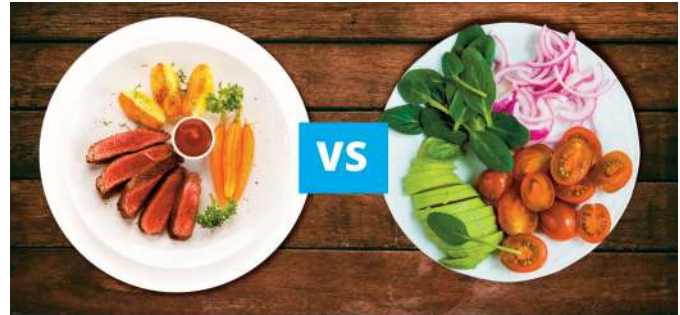
Does your 'plant-based diet' include meat? HERE'S WHY IT SHOULD.

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There is a great deal of talk, and dare I say, perhaps confusion over the term 'plant-based' diet, which is big news these days. Most of us don't eat enough fruits, veggies or fibre, so encouraging more consumption of plant foods may indeed provide health benefits in the prevention and treatment of certain diseases.

But confusion arises when we equate a plant-based diet with one that excludes meat.



What is a plant-based diet, anyway?

Simply put, a plant-based diet is one that includes more plant than animal foods. A person can eat a plant-based diet ranging from eating 100% plant foods (fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes) to eating some plant- and some animal-based foods.

Any diet pattern, whether it be meat-containing or not, can be healthful if diligently planned and executed. Of course, just because a food is plant-based doesn't necessarily make it healthy. Cookies, French-fries, potato chips and pop are all plant-based foods, but eating too many of these, or other refined, processed and nutrient-poor foods will not contribute to your health!

What people eat is a very personal choice. However, at present, we live in an environment of negative messaging around many foods and nutrients – especially, lately, about foods of animal origin.

I believe it's important to educate people on what they are giving up when they choose to give up meat. Meat gives us high quality protein, easily-absorbed iron and zinc, an impressive range of B vitamins, and more – nutrients that are difficult to get enough of from plant foods. And you don't need to eat a large amount of meat to reap the benefits. A serving of meat is only about the size of your palm or a deck of cards.

Consider some examples... Since iron is not well absorbed from plant-based foods, vegetarians need almost twice as much iron as meat eaters. See our iron brochure for more information about this topic. Vitamin B₁₂ is found only in animal products, so if you don't consume animal foods, you need to take a vitamin B₁₂ supplement to prevent deficiency. Meat is also particularly protein dense. You would need to eat 3.5 servings of almonds (over 700 calories) to get the same amount of protein you would get in 1 portion of beef (less than 200 calories). And since nuts, unlike meat, are not a source of complete protein, you need to combine them with other protein foods to get the full protein benefit. See this blog for more examples of how meat stacks up against plant proteins.

Nature has given us a basket of foods to enjoy, chockfull of health-giving nutrients that support our optimal health. I believe this is no mistake. The nutrient content of nature's whole foods differ immensely and it's why our grandmothers told us to emphasize variety.

Planning a healthy plant-based meal? For maximum nutrition, flavour and satisfaction, use the 'balanced plate' method: put vegetables and/or fruit on ½ of your plate, whole grains or unprocessed starchy food on ¼ of the plate, and lean protein, such as beef, on the other ¼ of your plate.

Brought to you by Canada Beef. Written by Karine Barlow, RD

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