

Ask the Expert:

Are There Risks or Benefits To Plant-Based Eating?

Written by Niah Patel, Purdue University Biochemistry '26

Plant-based eating is when a person limits animal products in their diet. There could be some benefits to limiting meat, eggs, and dairy but there could also be some risks.

Foods from animals like meat, eggs, and dairy include many vitamins and minerals. For example, calcium is a nutrient that is found mainly in dairy products like milk and cheese. Calcium is important for healthy and strong bones. Another nutrient, iron, is important for your body to be able to make enough red blood cells to carry oxygen to all body cells. Iron that comes from meat like beef and chicken is more easily used by your body compared to when it comes from plant foods. You can still get these nutrients in certain plant foods like figs, lentils, and leafy greens, but you will need more of those foods to get the same amount of nutrients that you would get from animal foods.



Vitamin B12 is important for making red blood cells. Without B12, a person can feel fatigued, weak, and lightheaded. B12 is **only** found in animal products. It may be especially difficult to get enough vitamin B12 following a plant-based diet. Vitamin B12 supplements might need to be taken in order to get enough of this nutrient if animal products are limited in the diet.

Aside from these risks, less animal foods in the diet might help lower intakes of saturated fat that can help lower cardiovascular disease that chances of obesity. Choosing more plant-based foods might also save money and be more sustainable for the environment.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends varying protein sources, including plant sources like beans, lentils, split peas, and tofu. Including these proteins in your weekly menus might help save money and help you improve your overall health. However, making sure to include some animal products like lean meats, low-fat dairy, and eggs in your diet will also help you to meet vitamin and mineral needs without putting your health at risk.

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Food Safety: E.Coli in Leafy Greens

Written by Emma Araya, Purdue University Nutrition and Dietetics'26

Vegetables are essential for a healthy diet. Leafy greens like lettuce, spinach, kale, and cabbage have nutrients that help lower the risk of heart disease, stroke, and cardiovascular disease. However, it is important that they are cleaned and stored properly. Leafy greens might harbor harmful germs. Since some leafy greens can have different textures and lengths, it's easy for bugs and bacteria like E.Coli to hide on them, making it difficult to remove the E.Coli by washing it away. E.Coli can be spread through contaminated food, water, and even people who are infected. Eating E.Coli can make you very sick. Symptoms include diarrhea, food poisoning, and even pneumonia which can be fatal.

Avoid the spread of E.Coli and harmful bacteria with these tips:

- **Rinse well.**

Make sure to wash leafy greens by rinsing them under clean, potable, water. It is important to use clean water because E.Coli can also be spread through dirty water. Avoid using bleach or other disinfectants to wash your greens.

- **Use different cutting boards and utensils to avoid cross-contamination.**

Have separate cutting boards for raw meat, poultry, eggs, and vegetables to avoid moving germs from one type of food to another.

- **Pick your produce well.**

Avoid buying leafy greens that are bruised, damaged, or wilted.

- **Refrigerate at 40F or lower**

Store all pre-packaged, pre-cut, and washed leafy greens in a clean refrigerator at 40F or lower. Make sure to store leafy greens separately from any raw meat or poultry.



Sources: <https://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/communication/leafy-greens.html#:~:text=Lettuce%2C%20Other%20Leafy%20Greens%2C%20and%20Food%20Safety%201,raw%20meat%2C%20poultry%2C%20seafood%2C%20and%20eggs.%20More%20items,https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/e-coli-infection>

Rainbow Bell Pepper Boats

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 375F.
2. Cook brown rice according to the package directions.
3. Meanwhile, slice the bell peppers in half (vertically). Remove all the seeds.
4. Mash half the can of garbanzo beans and save the other half to use for another day.
5. Mix the mashed garbanzo beans mixture with the rice, chopped kale, chopped walnuts, salt, and pepper.
6. Fill bell peppers with the mixture. Place in a baking dish and cover with aluminum foil.
7. Bake for 30 minutes or until crispy. Enjoy!

Ingredients (12 servings)

- 2 cups brown rice*
- 4 medium bell peppers
- 2 cups kale (chopped)
- 1 can garbanzo beans*
- 1/2 cup walnuts (chopped)*
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon pepper



Nutrition Facts (per serving)

Calories: 330
Protein: 11g
Carbs: 48g
Fat: 11g

**foods included in the
TEFAP (The Emergency Food
Assistance Program)*

Source: <https://www.myplate.gov/recipes/myplate-cnpp/rainbow-bell-pepper-boats-garbanzo->

Eating Right:

Making Affordable Plant-Based Meals

Written by Julia Balbach, Purdue University Public Health, Spanish, and, Foods and Nutrition '26

Including more plants in your diet is easy and cost friendly. Including a few plant-based meals a week can reduce your grocery bill and motivate you to eat different foods.

- **Focus on a variety of whole foods.**

Vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and legumes are all great ingredients to create nutritious and colorful meals. Canned, pre-cooked, or frozen provide the same vitamins and minerals as fresh foods.



- **Make sure you include all the food groups:**

Foods such as lentils, peas, beans, nuts, and seeds are a way to get more plant-based protein in your meals. Although the protein content of plant source foods might be lower than animal-based sources, these alterna-

tives can help you get an important variety that supplies nutrients.

- **Get creative!**

Try making your own soups with a variety of different vegetables, grains, and legumes. Switch up simple dishes like pasta and lasagna with different vegetables and tofu as a protein source.

- **Buying with the season.**

When shopping for fresh fruits and vegetables, try looking for produce in season. Most of the time the seasonal produce will be on sale and can be more affordable.



- **Stock up on pantry staples.**

Long-lasting pantry staples such as beans, chickpeas, canned tomato products, whole grain pasta, and frozen whole foods are an affordable way to have ingredients on hand. When you see a bulk item that you and your family like that is on sale, stock up! Store these staples in air-tight containers and they can last up for up to a year.



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This newsletter is edited by Emma Araya and Heather A. Eicher-Miller, PhD and is created by the Eicher-Miller Lab in the Department of Nutrition Science at Purdue University. This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

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In The News: Enjoy Citrus This February!

IN THE NEWS

Written by Madison Wathen, Purdue University Nutrition and Dietetics '25

If you are missing summer in these dreary winter months, eating citrus food might help brighten your day! Winter is when citrus fruits such as lemons and oranges are in season. When a food is in season, it means that the food is at peak levels of tastiness. Foods that are in season might also be more affordable and more likely to be on sale.

Winter may also be a time when sickness is more common. Citrus fruits contain vitamin C that is important for healthy skin and tissues and a strong immune system.

During February specifically, lemons, limes, and oranges are at their peak in the citrus season. These three are great examples of citrus fruits that are available at most supermarkets. Here in Indiana there are not a lot of large farms that produce citrus fruits but you might be able to find good deals on imported citrus from states like California, Florida, Texas, and Arizona.



Sources: <https://www.luxuryfruitbaskets.co.uk/news-34/february-is-the-best-time-to-enjoy-citrus-fruit.htm>, https://www.indianagazette.com/food/oranges-101-what-you-need-to-know-during-citrus-season/article_ba1d7af4-6809-5211-9ef0-22a4e1dec6df.html, <https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/citrus-fruit-benefits#:~:text=What%20Are%20Citrus%20Fruits%3F%20I%20I.%20They%E2%80%99re%20Rich,...%207%207.%20They%20May%20Protect%20Your%20Brain>