

The Meat-Cutters Guide
How to Safely Cut the Meat and Go Vegan

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©2016

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Published by CCA Media at Smashwords

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Table of Contents

Chapter One: Cutting Through the Myths & Prejudices

Chapter Two: What's a Vegan/Vegetarian

Chapter Three: A Few of Mary's Recipes

Chapter Four: Young People and Vegetarianism

Chapter Five: The High Cost of the V-way

Chapter Six: The Vegan Starter Kit

Acknowledgements

My Thanks to the writers of The Creative Exiles and Hubpages where much of my work has appeared and to the major online retailers where my books (especially “The Creature From the Bridgewater Triangle” and “Ghosts of Cape Cod” have found a comfortable home.

I recommend both of the above referenced websites for anyone wishing to read fresh and interesting works as well as for those who wish to gain valuable literary advice and engage in conversations with skilled authors from every part of the globe.

Chapter One: Cutting Through the Myths & Prejudices

It's not for everyone this vegan thing. And it's not a diet. It is a lifestyle. If you are certain that going 'green' will leave a huge hole in the middle of your plate that cannot ever be filled, then the 'V' is probably not for you. Please just turn around and leave the book.

For those of you who stayed, let's say again. This is not for everybody. Judging by its definition, even the dictionary looks down on vegetarians.

Here's what the popular online portal, "Dictionary.com" lists for the word, vegetarian:

"A person who does not eat or does not believe in eating meat, fish, fowl....but subsists on vegetables, fruits, nuts, grain, etc."

In case you missed it, I will point out the word 'subsists' in the definition. Subsist means to exist, but the connotation of the word conjures up images of abstinence and malnutrition. So, in essence, Dictionary.com is calling Vegetarianism, a diet and lifestyle of underfed and sickly people.

Dictionary.com uses an example of the word in two sentences that prove my point.

1. Why does the government think it is okay for school children to subsist on French fries and soda?

2. She announced her intention to subsist on a diet of water and fish broth – an estimated 200 to 400 calories a day.

The Oxford Dictionary plainly states that to Subsist, 'is to maintain oneself, especially at a minimum level.'

This would lead one to believe that Vegetarians are a vast army of ascetics, abstainers, and wearers of hair shirts

Vegetarians are often the brunt of jokes, such as 'If God did not want us to eat animals, he would not have made them out of food.'

Here's another, "A guy was at a bar having a beer and a burger when he was yelled at for eating meat, by a woman who loudly announced that she was a vegetarian. After berating the man for a minute she stormed out and the bartender said, 'who was that?'. The guy replied, I never saw herbivore!"

Why is there even a name for vegetarians? The meat eaters are not called 'meatetarians'. There actually is no name for meat eaters, prompting one vegan

wag to state that, “nobody who eats meat exclusively survives long enough for us to name them!”

Vegetarians fall into several categories. Some follow the lifestyle for religious or moral reasons, others for health concerns, and I am sure there are some who adopt the lifestyle simply because they love fruits, nuts, and vegetables.

I began my study of Vegans because my granddaughter, a senior in high school at this writing, has become one. I myself love vegetables but still eat chicken and fish. I rarely eat red meat. I do not know if in future, I will completely eliminate meat from my diet, but it certainly has become less important to me as the years go by.

Some decades ago, a woman opened a vegetarian restaurant near Boston. She did not call it a vegetarian restaurant. She chose instead a more marketable name - ‘Salad-Mania’. The shop was beautiful and spotless. I was employed within a five minute walk of the eatery, so I had lunch there, two or three times a week and enjoyed it very much. Everything was fresh and her menu featured every vegetable I knew and a lot I had never heard of. I usually bought tomato soup with an Italian salad.

One afternoon when I turned off Main Street to her shop just around the corner, I was saddened to see that the place was closed. I went again a few days later thinking that perhaps the owner of Salad-Mania had some sort of an emergency, and it would now be open as usual.

A note taped on the inside of the glass door explained the situation. The business simply didn’t make enough money to cover expenses. Salad-Mania was gone forever.

In recent years there have been a handful of successful vegetarian restaurants in around Boston. I assume the trend is nationwide.

Chapter Two: **What's a Vegan and What's a Vegetarian?**

A vegetarian does not eat meat. This means that a person who is a vegetarian does not eat any animal flesh including cows, pigs, chicken, and fish.

A vegan follows that same regimen and also does not consume eggs and dairy, and refrains from the use of, or wearing of, any product derived from animals.

Further on, we will share some great recipes but first here's an interview with a Vegan named Mary that pretty much shores up what I have been saying.

(Author) Hello Mary. I must say you sure don't look like what people think of when people think of a vegetarian. You are well dressed, very healthy looking, and if I may say so, quite attractive. How long have you been a vegetarian?

(Mary) Thanks for the compliments. I am a Vegan, by the way. I am 51 years old and have been free of all animal products for two thirds of my life. I stopped eating meat one day when the sight of a hamburger just made me sick. You commented on my looks. People expect us to look like hippies or some fanatic cult member who wanders around all day thinking up ways to save the cows or how to spring the lobsters from the super market death tank.

(Author) Do you feel that society has an unjust image of Vegans?

(Mary) Of course. One of the biggest injustices we face is what I was just talking about. That and the fact that people expect us to shove vegetarianism in everybody's face. The truth is that our lifestyle is pretty much like everybody else's. It's quite possible that everyone has in their circle of friends or work associates, someone who is quietly living the vegetarian lifestyle.

(Author) Well Mary here's your chance to educate the public about the negative stereotypes and to understand how a vegetarian actually lives. What is different about a vegetarian's life?

(Mary) The largest disparity in how a vegetarian lives is obvious. It is in how he or she eats. You will not find any meat in a vegetarian's kitchen if she lives alone. But this doesn't mean that a vegetarian cannot live in a family and be at peace with meat eaters. If the home has one vegetarian but others who are not, you will be able to tell from the presence of soy and perhaps more fruit and fresh vegetables.

(Author) So the belief that vegetarians cannot be around meat eaters is false?

(Mary) Of course it is. We can even be married to them! Vegetarians are peace loving and can live their lifestyle around others who do not have the same feelings that we do.

(Author) Shopping has to be challenging. Can you walk me through a trip to the market?

(Author) When I'm shopping for myself I don't spend much time at the super market. I buy grains and beans in bulk at a warehouse store. Back in the old country, Italy, my ancestors had little or no meat. They discovered that foods like lentils and beans gave them all the protein and other nutrients of meat, without the problems associated with meats. I am a patron of farmer's markets and also shop in a vegetarian specialty store for some high nutrition meat substitutes like tofu. When we are in the super market two things give us away. We spend a lot of time in the produce section and when we check out, our baskets are overflowing with fresh fruits and vegetables.

(Author) You mentioned the lifestyle. What else is different about it.

(Mary) I don't want to get preachy on you, but our movement is in harmony with many of the earth movements such as the organic movement and the green movement. So a vegetarian kitchen will have more organic foods on hand to reduce the presence of pesticides and other substances in the diet. Also vegetarianism affects the lifestyle beyond just the refrigerator. We Vegans don't wear any clothing made from animals such as leather and fur. We are sensitive to animal rights and don't want to see the skin of animals used for clothing. We don't believe in using animals for testing products. Also the vegetarian home hones in on recycling. We try to cut down on our waste. We have a compost pile. Along with recycling bottles and cans as you might expect, a vegetarian does a lot of other recycling right at home. Many Vegans have a compost pile in the yard that helps to support a spacious garden that uses the compost to grow organic foods. A properly planted and well tended 'V' garden can supply an amazing amount of food. I am able to 'jar' hundreds of pounds of tomatoes, squash, peppers and such, for the winter.

For obvious reasons, a vegetarian will have vegetarian friends and belong to social groups and attend functions that support the vegetarian lifestyle. Eating out with a vegetarian will mean going to more ethnic food restaurants and you will see a lot of creativity in how to order foods in a restaurant. And contrary to popular opinion, vegetarian eating is more flavorful and diverse than the normal diet.

(Author) Here's a chance to prove that Mary. Can you give us some of your recipes?

Chapter Three: **A Few of Mary's Recipes**

(Mary) There are hundreds of websites who will give you a wide variety of recipes. Anyone who wants to explore the lifestyle can find scads of them very quickly. But I will share a few special ones that I think will appeal to folks who are not yet full Vegan, but want to explore the topic more deeply.

Almost everybody loves Nutella, that sweet chocolate/hazelnut spread. Sadly it is not Vegan. But here's a way to make your own version of Nutella, that is is not only vegetarian, but is fun to make.

Here's what you need for ingredients.

2 tablespoons each of cocoa powder and soy powder

¼ teaspoon Vanilla

¾ cup sugar

1½ cups of skinned hazelnuts

1 Tablespoon of vegetable oil

Two things among the ingredients might frighten people away from the recipe: Where to buy soy powder and how to skin the hazelnuts: so let me talk about that. Soy powder is readily available. I don't like to mention store names, but I will give two examples. You can buy it at pharmacies like Walgreens or department stores like Walmart.

To skin the hazelnuts is easy. To four cups boiling water, very carefully add six tablespoons of baking soda. Use caution because it will fizz and fuss for a moment. After it settles down, put the hazelnuts in and continue the boiling for another five minutes. The water will get ruddy and muddy, disregard that and safely remove one of the nuts and pop it into cold water. The skin should be easily flicked away. If it is not easily removed, continue the boiling for another two minutes and try again. When the test nut skins easily, plop the rest of them in cold water and brush away the skins. Your nuts are now ready for the next step: roasting them.

Roast the nuts at 350 degrees for 20 minutes in your oven or toaster oven. They will need to be checked and turned frequently to prevent burned spots.

Whisk them right out of the oven and into the blender and keep grinding them until you have nut butter. During the grind, you need to add some of the veggie oil and all of the vanilla.

After blending for another 30 seconds or so, insert the remaining ingredients and blend to the desired consistency.

When the recipe is complete, spread the Hazelnut butter on toast for a delicious recipe that is 100 per cent Vegan. You can use it as a cake or pie topping, in between a pair of cookies, or simply (please excuse the term) wolf it down with nothing but a spoon!

(Author) That's a great recipe. I wish I had some of that right now. How about some more?

(Mary) As I said, Mr. Russo, you can get these recipes for free from a zillion websites. I just want to give people a better idea of the Vegan life. But since you asked, here's a Vegan breakfast sandwich that is approved by my meat eating hubby. He loves those sausage sandwiches that he gets at Dunkin Donuts and McDonald's; but he likes my Vegan 'Mary Morning Muffins' even better. For those of you who wish to try it, it takes about eight minutes to prepare a batch and seven more for cooking.

Here's what you need:

English muffins – your choice. My husband likes the ones with the nooks and crannies. I do just as well with the Stop & Shop brand or the Publix brand when I am in West Palm Beach, Florida.

One $\frac{3}{4}$ inch slice of soy vegan sausage for each sandwich (it comes in a rolled tube). Just cut your slices to the desired width. I use 'Gimme Lean' brand. My husband also likes one called 'Smart Italian Sausage', but I don't want to use that one because it has egg whites in it. You have to read the ingredients list carefully, even if the package says the product is vegetarian.

For each muffin, you will need two or three thin slices of bell pepper. I get them from my garden.

One tablespoon of vegan shredded cheese per sandwich. I use Daiya. It's pronounced day-ya. Daiya products are sold in my area at Stop and Shop, Trader Joes, and Whole Foods.

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of vegan butter. I use Earth Balance.

A few shakes of black pepper.

A bit of olive oil for coating the patties

The final ingredient is a great taste enhancer. One teaspoon of maple syrup per sandwich.

There are probably a dozen ways to cook the sandwich. Some people have Panini grills, others have George Foreman clamshell arrangements, I just use an old fashioned skillet.

I start by cutting the muffins in half and putting them in the toaster oven. Then I put my patties on the pan for about 90 seconds before turning. That's it, one turn. Don't turn them again. If you want your peppers cooked, you can put a little oil on them and place them in the pan.

After about four minutes, turn off the heat and put the cheese on top of each patty. Cover the pan to allow the cheese to melt.

When your muffins are toasted to the shade you prefer, remove them from the toaster oven (or toaster if you used one, or from a pan if you fried them in a little butter) and spread the butter on one side and drizzle the maple syrup evenly on the other side.

Put the muffin with syrup on the top of each burger while they are still in the pan and press down lightly. Then arrange the bottoms of the muffins on plates. Take your spatula and remove the burgers with the syrup tops still on, and place them on the buttered bottoms.

These Vegan breakfast sandwiches never fail to please anyone, including meat eating husbands.

(Author) Mary that sounds absolutely fabulous. My only problem is that I would have to have two! Can you give us some more of your menu items.

(Mary) I could give you a thousand but it's too boring. I read a few 'Incredible Vegan Recipes' books on Amazon and all they consisted of was one boring recipe after another, obviously copied from someplace and just slapped together for an e-book.

(Author) I get it. That's why we have you here to spice up the book with your novel approach to the Vegan menus and lifestyle.

Chapter Four: Young People and Vegetarianism

(Mary) I will give you some more of my favorite foods in a while but first Mr. Russo, I walk to talk to you about your teen aged granddaughter. You mentioned that she has become a vegetarian. How did you feel about it when she first mentioned it?

(Author) I was concerned as were her parents. It's not that we had anything against vegetarianism but we were worried that she wouldn't get the proper vitamins and such.

(Mary) I understand your concerns. Let's figure out why some young people are so interested in vegetarianism. Teenagers are often more in touch with world culture than adults. They are more in sync to the environmental movement and with issues involving organic farming. They are often against the cruelties of the meat industry. They love animals and cannot understand how people who treat dogs like valued family members can sit at a table and eat animals that should be living in harmony with their beloved canines.

So as more and more teenagers experiment with the Vegan movement, the better informed they are about what it really means to live meat free.

Even if young folks like your granddaughter decide not to remain a vegetarian, or if they bounce back and forth between meat and Veganism, their experience was informative and they will be better able to make choices if they wish to go back to a meatless style in later life.

(Author) Mary, you make perfect sense, but shouldn't parents worry about the health questions.

(Mary) There are proven health benefits to the lifestyle. The only questions come from those parents who will not even consider that their child could make an informed decision on something they themselves know nothing about.

Parents of teenagers who wish to explore the vegetarian lifestyle, should be celebrating instead of worrying. There are numerous health benefits of eating vegan and if their new passion reduces the amount of fast food and junk food they eat, that's a good thing.

You will naturally wonder if your teenager is getting enough protein if they skip eating meat. The parents need to get involved, just like they did when their children first starting bringing homework into the house.

By helping them learn about a well rounded vegan or vegetarian diet, they can derive all of their nutritional needs from natural foods. They can begin eating organic. Organic is good for many reasons, not the least of which is that organic food is grown without putting poisons on the plants. Many times a teenager will start studying Veganism and the whole house ends up buying less processed food and more natural things like organic fruits and vegetables. One stubborn teenager can often bring measurable health benefits to an entire family.

I mentioned before that I am a vegan, but many teenagers want to carry the banner of Vegetarianism without moving into the Vegan stage. That's fine. They can find happiness and better health just by giving up meat. It is possible to have a vegetarian diet that does include cheese, eggs, fish and dairy. This also makes Mom and Dad a little more comfortable. In adult life, the teenager can stay a vegetarian or can move into the next stage where I am – a full Vegan.

As always in all matters, Mom and Dad should sit down with the Vegan 'wannabe' and discuss both the pros and the cons of a Vegan move. Almost always a compromise can be worked out that will make both sides feel at ease. Parents may recommend that their teenager start out as a vegetarian by giving up meat at breakfast and lunch but still eating meat at dinner time. This situation could also allow the teenager to gradually transition her or his lifestyle to lean more towards full Veganism.

Parents and children alike need to be concerned about the vitamin needs of anyone changing their style of eating, whether it is dieting, going 'green', or fasting.

One of the biggest concerns that you should help your teen beware of is their vitamin needs in any new diet program. While a switch to a total vegetable diet will have many positive influences, you should make sure they are getting enough protein and other essential vitamins that they used to get from meat in their diet. Calcium, B12, zinc and iron are all essential vitamins especially to young people that must be found elsewhere if they decide to stop eating meat. It is a good idea for the teenager to start on a multi vitamin, if she or he isn't already taking them. You can help your granddaughter enjoy a successful exploration of the vegetarian lifestyle and not face health risks just by being aware of the vitamin needs and making sure she gets the vitamins in pill form.

It's a path of sharp rocks and potholes we have to walk, when we help guide a young person through an interest in the green life. It is possible that many of the new foods they eat won't give them the spark of a Big Mac or the zip of a Coke. They may be tempted to give up the program. That shouldn't make parents happy, because the teenager may be feeling that she or he failed miserably in their attempt to better their life, the lives of the animals, and the life of our planet.

Feeling like a failure is an especially heavy weight for a person 16 or 17 years old. Many teenagers have a blossoming desire to save the world, but being powerless and penniless, going Vegan is actually one of the few noble things that's readily within their grasp. They need encouragement, and not belittling, cajoling, or being bribed with offers of prime rib and lobster.

(Author) Lifestyle changes are not easy for anyone. When I went over the 200 pound mark on a frame of only 5'8" my doctor was furious. More exercise she said. I was already doing 15 to 20 miles per day on my bicycle plus a variety of other exercises.

"Well cut down on your food intake," she said. I explained to her that with all my bike riding and walking, I get very hungry.

"Portion control," she shot back. "Instead of two eggs in the morning and two pieces of toast, have one each."

Well I took her advice and though I have not lost much weight, I have stopped gaining. I use smaller plates now and put less on them. My point is that lifestyle changes are hard. Do you have any advice on how to ease into the Vegan way?

(Mary) Make it easy on yourself. It's a good motto for learning a new skill or going through a big life transition. I remember some movie with Bill Murray in it, I think. He was talking about 'baby steps'. It is the same when you decide to explore becoming a Vegan. It is very easy to get scared off by what appears to be a difficult and rocky road. But the truth is, there are two ways to becoming a vegetarian:

1. The easy way.
2. The hard way.

(Author) So in keeping with our motto of the day of, "make it easy on yourself", why don't we walk down the trail that's marked, 'Vegan the easy way'.

First of all along with learning a new way to eat, you are also giving up something you probably have loved to eat for years...Big Macs, Prime Rib, a Rack of Ribs, Pork Chops and bacon.

So to reduce the difficulty of hiking on this slippery trail, take it slow and easy. This road cannot be traversed in a single day. Many people have a mistaken idea that the conversion is instantaneous as though one day the person was eating all the meat he or she could find like a trencherman and in a flash they became a robe wearing, mantra singing vegetarian.

That is a complete myth. Most successful greeners found their pathway into the "V" in stages and gave up meat slowly.

Let's break the day into three parts of eight hours each. First. Give up eating meat in the eight hours you sleep. See how easy it is so far?

Taking out those sleep hours leaves us 16 hours and three meals to deal with. Since we start our day at breakfast time let's begin with it.

If you are one of those people who skip breakfast, once again you are ahead of the game, you only have about 12 hours and two meals to be concerned with.

All kidding aside, breakfast should never be skipped for a variety of reasons including the fact that it messes with your metabolism and it's just not healthy.

Now let's tackle breakfast. It's seven In the morning and you are ready to fry up three or four eggs and half a dozen slices of bacon. As delightful as it may smell to you, if you were to break down the nutritional and health contents of this meal, you might rush to what I will describe next.

Put away the eggs and the bacon and switch to grain cereals or pancakes. Do NOT GIVE UP MILK AND CHEESE. At least in the beginning you are going to need them to smooth your traipsing over the rocky path. Pick a few specific items that you will eliminate from specific meals and do this for a week or two.

After you have been successful in improving the breakfast part of your day, you can go to lunch. Much later on you can move on to dinner.

Backsliding, slipping and falling is allowed! Do not beat yourself up if you slack off and go backwards by wolfing down a few eggs and a rasher of bacon.

You will not be kicked out of the vegetarian community for this offense. Just pick yourself up, wipe of the bacon crumbs and start again.

Try to find the way to success by being sensible in your meal planning and modest in setting your achievement targets. If one of your hopes in going green is to lose weight don't substitute sugars and sweets for the meats.

(Author) Excuse me for the interruption Mary. When you said sugar and sweet, it reminded me of what I first did when I ramped up my exercise program. My formula was sugar and sweat. I felt that if I exercised long enough and worked up enough sweat, then I could have all the sugar I wanted! It took me quite a while to get a handle on that portion control deal.

(Mary) Sugar and sweat isn't the greatest, but it is better than the sugar and sweet. What good does it do if a person gives up meat only to eat monstrous portions of cereal, swathed in fruit with a layer of sugary additives. If they do this, they will not lose weight and they will think that the program failed them.

(Author) Hey Mary, one of the things that scares a lot of people away from trying to go Vegan is the idea of having to learn to eat exotic and expensive new foods such as tofu.

(Mary) They need to remember the new mantras. Baby steps and make it easy on yourself. Eat the foods you know. By doing your shopping in your own grocery store and buying more food from the produce section than the meat section, you will be working with foods like carrots, onions, garlic, broccoli, celery and cabbage. These are familiar to everyone and eating them helps to clear the rocks out of the path towards the 'V'.

Also by frequenting regular stores like Stop and Shop, Kroger or Ralph's, and eating "normal" foods, you won't feel like you have become a member of some bizarre cult.

Next, make it a fun experience. Yes it can be fun to be a vegetarian. You can start shopping at farmer's markets and select very fresh produce and vegetables for your next cooking experiment.

Not only are outdoor markets more adventurous you will find them cheaper. Some aspects of the 'V' life can be expensive but this is one area where you will save money.

By working as a family to find good recipes and working together to make them, everybody gets in on the act discovering how delicious vegetarian meals really are. If you walk the path with a song in your heart and some fruit in your belly, you may find your way to the land of the 'V' without even realizing that to get there was a long walk indeed.

Chapter Five: Going the ‘V’ Way Costs Too Much

(Author) Thanks Mary. You have given us some great insights. Nutrition is a concern that a lot of people have and I think you have discussed it well. But there's another thing that I am pretty sure frightens away some would-be vegans. It's very expensive.

(Mary) You said that being a vegetarian costs a lot of money. Have you looked at the price of meat lately? Even hamburger and eggs can break the family budget today and in many homes the biggest food expense is meat. If you were a vegetarian and all you ate was lentils, rice and beans, then it would be a very inexpensive lifestyle indeed.

Many interesting Vegan foods have been developed to fill that hole in the plate that you spoke about some time back. You can spend as much or more on vegetarian food as on a menu of meats. Many of these foods are high priced gourmet items. Even if you avoid the rare and expensive things, it can be costly to live a vegetarian lifestyle. Part of the blame is that we are a minority. Prepared vegetarian foods and vegetarian only restaurants are scarce. To be able to stay in business and avoid the fate of Salad-Mania, the restaurant you liked, restaurants and specialty stores must charge higher prices simply because they are specialty businesses, established for a niche market.

If you are going to be on a full vegetarian diet, then you will have subtracted an entire food group from your diet. You will need to replace the meat with healthy alternatives. But if your alternatives are not diverse, you may become bored and revert to the meat diet.

It can be a balancing act. The specialty shops have the advantage of having more food items that fit your lifestyle, but those items may not fit your wallet.

In season, farmers markets are a great source of fresh fruits and vegetables that are just as valid veggie options as those you find in the specialty shops.

For anyone thinking about trying the ‘V’ lifestyle, some basic gear is required.

You need a blender. You need a good food processor. Using these items you can slap, tap, drop, chop, slice and dice just about anything and make your own meals as good or better than you can find in a restaurant.

Vegans eat a lot of steamed, fresh vegetables. Those people who eat their greens from cans, cannot imagine how wonderful is the taste of steamed carrots, broccoli, corn, onions and potatoes. You asked about recipes. Here's one. Take a potato (don't peel it), an onion (do peel it), some carrots, some corn, and a few slices of

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