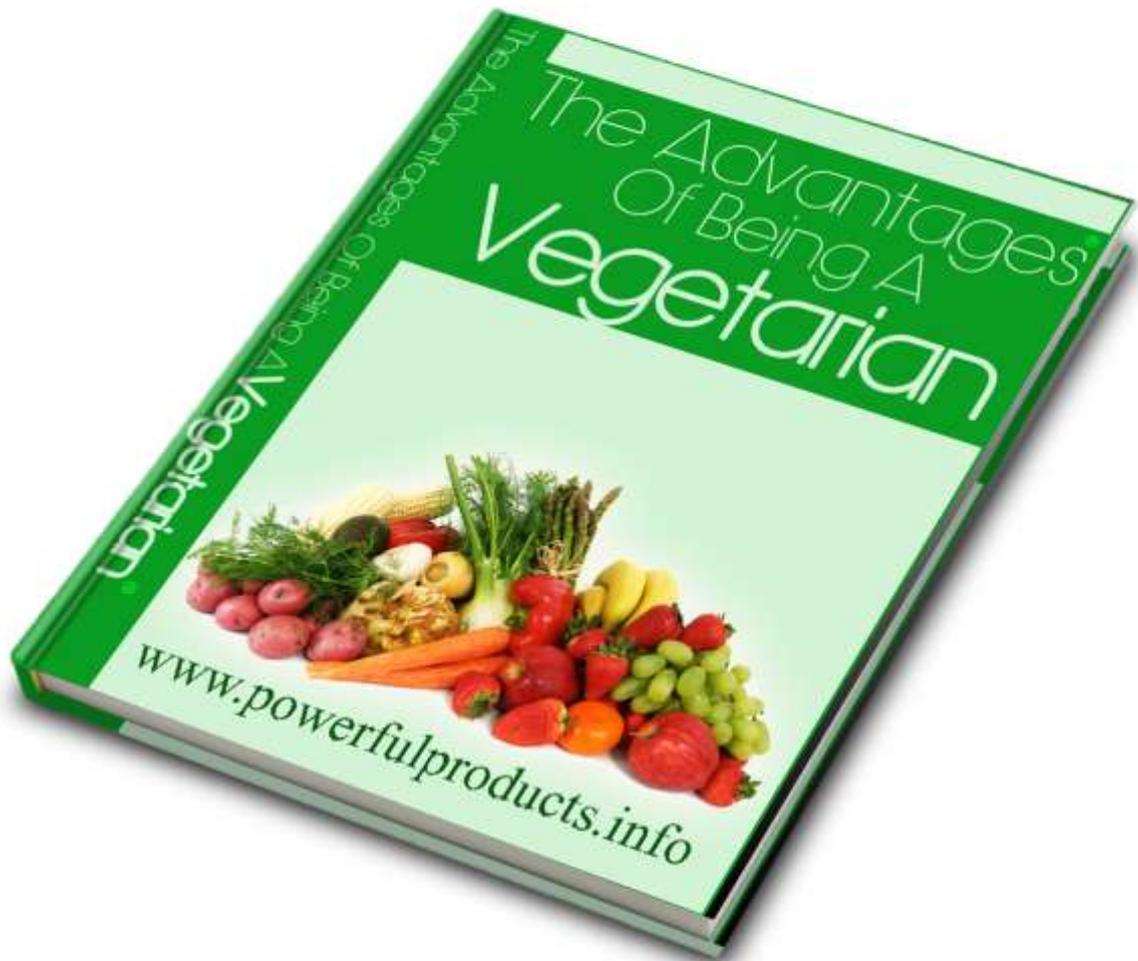


The Advantages Of Being A Vegetarian



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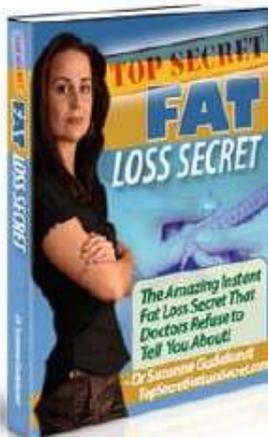
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### What Does A Vegan Use Instead Of Gelatin

So many dishes are made with gelatin. They include many summer favorites. Both sweet and savory dishes have been based on gelatin.

Children love fruit flavored gelatin based dishes such as jello. A more adult dinner table can be graced with a salad in a gelatin mould. Mousses and cheesecakes can both call for gelatin.

So what can a vegan or a strict vegetarian use who wants to avoid animal products. Even meat eaters may wish to use an alternative to gelatin for health reasons.

Gelatin is derived from beef or pork. Cooks sometimes make their own by boiling bones or pigs' trotters but most often it is bought in powder form ready made in packets. It can then simply be added to water that is just below boiling point. This provides the basis for a whole range of jellied dishes.

A vegan or vegetarian can use rice starch, arrowroot or potato starch for some of these dishes. A fruit or vegetable flan can be covered in a jelly like glaze by blending a little of one of these products with water and then adding it to boiling water. It is important to stir the mixture vigorously to prevent lumps forming. If lumps do form use a food processor to remove them.

But for a molded jelly shape you will need something different. A seaweed based product called agar-agar is the thing to use here. This can be bought in powder form and added to hot water just like gelatin. It is even available to buy it in flavored forms that will make the traditional jello that children and many adults love.

Be careful not to keep an agar-agar jelly too long. They should be eaten on the same day as they are made because they provide an ideal environment for bacteria to grow.

But they are quick to make and quicker than gelatin to set. So it is not really a problem to make one quickly just before you need it.

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In powder form agar- agar will keep for months. That makes it a good stand by to keep in your store cupboard.

Many non-vegetarians will find it useful to keep some handy for visiting vegetarians. In many ways it is easier to use than gelatin which can easily go "stringy" if the water used is too hot. Agar-agar is almost fool proof.

## Vegetarianism And Cancer: The Evidence

Vegetarianism has the reputation of being a healthy diet because it is low in fat and high in vegetable products and fibre. An increasing number of scientific studies are showing that a vegetarian diet can help to prevent cancer and can assist the body to recover from cancer when combined with chemo-therapy or radiation therapy.

A vegetarian diet is not an alternative to conventional forms of treatment. It would be unwise to reject medical treatments that have been shown to work. Only the irresponsible would recommend a cancer patient to reject conventional medical treatment.

What a vegetarian diet can do for a patient who is undergoing cancer treatment is to help their body cope with the side effects. A diet high in natural fruit and vegetable juices will provide the body with important nutrients that help the natural healing process.

Patients who adopt a vegetarian diet often report an improvement in their general outlook and their attitude to the disease. In part this may be because they are eating a nutrient rich diet.

But the psychological effect of switching to a vegetarian diet can be as important as the nutritional value. Cancer patients suffer from a feeling of loss of control because their whole life becomes dominated by a complex regime of treatment that is in the hands of specialists. When they change to a vegetarian diet they regain their sense of control over their own lives.

The effect of psychology on disease should never be underestimated. It is well documented in the medical literature as the placebo effect. Feeling better should not be dismissed in cancer treatment. Vegetarianism will do not harm and it may do some good.

But it is in cancer prevention that the benefits of vegetarianism are most thoroughly documented. A diet which contains many soya based products has been shown to be associated with a low risk of cancer. Breast cancer in particular is very rare among women who eat a soy based diet. Vegetarianism is the soy based diet par excellence.

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Diets which are high in meat, especially red meat like beef, has been shown to be associated with a higher incidence of colon cancer. Animal fat may also be associated with a higher level of breast cancer in younger women. Dairy products may be associated with an elevated risk of ovarian cancer.

A vegetarian diet alone can never eliminate the risk of cancer because there are so many environmental and genetic factors involved. But it can reduce the risk because it is high in fruit and vegetables that contain substances called flavonoids and other antioxidants that destroy the free radicals which can cause cancer.

Free radicals are molecules that damage the DNA of cells. We are exposed to free radicals through pollution as well as diet so they are almost impossible to avoid. But by eating a vegetarian diet that is rich in fruit in vegetables we can help our bodies to resist their effects.

## Vegetarians and Non-Vegetarians can Enjoy Tofu

Tofu is often a object of fun. Those who have never eaten it often laugh at it. Even some vegetarians hesitate to try it because they fear that they may be ridiculed or simply do not know how to cook it.

But tofu is a highly nutritious food that can be cooked in variety of delicious ways. Vegetarians and non-vegetarians can enjoy it. What is more it has proven health benefits.

Tofu comes in two forms. There is silken tofu which you will find on the supermarket shelf with oriental foods. Silken tofu can be kept for a long time without refrigeration if the packet is unopened. Once opened it must be stored in the fridge.

You will find regular tofu in the chiller department of you supermarket. It usually comes in a plastic vacuum pack.

Both kinds of tofu come in a white block. It looks something like cheese. Silken tofu is widely used in Japanese cooking but both kinds of tofu can be used in most dishes that call for tofu.

When you taste tofu you will discover that there is no comparison with cheese. it tastes of nothing. That is the secret of cooking tofu. You are adding the flavor. The advantage is that tofu is endlessly adaptable. It takes on the flavor of the herbs, spices and vegetables with which it is cooked.

You can use it in stir fries by cutting it into little cubes. Flavor it with garlic, ginger, sesame oil, chilies or whatever you like to add to your favorite stir fry. If you keep a block of silken tofu in the store cupboard you will always have something make a stir fry in a hurry.

Tofu can also be used for salad dressings and creamy sauces for savory or sweet dishes. Throw either kind in the food processor with the flavorings you want to use. For a salad dressing choose garlic, lemon juice, honey or herbs. if you make the same dressing thicker it can be used as a spread or dip.

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You might like to try it as a filling in baked potato. Roasted vegetables with a tofu dip make a delicious first course or snack meal.

A thick paste of tofu can even be made into a burger and served in a bun. It is an ideal vegetarian option for the barbecue.

For a sweet sauce add some honey, cinnamon perhaps, nutmeg, even chocolate or pureed fruit. You can use the same mixture for a cheesecake recipe if you make it a little stiffer than you would for a sauce. A few chopped nuts sprinkled on top add a variety of texture.

Tofu is a very healthy food. It is low in fat and contains no animal fat at all. It will not raise your cholesterol levels and is reputed to play a part in raising the level of "good" cholesterol.

The isoflavones found in soya based products such as tofu are thought to play a part in reducing the risk of cancer because they combat free radicals in the body.

Whether you use tofu as part of a vegetarian diet or a non-vegetarian diet it is a food worthy trying.

## Why Should You Become A Vegetarian?

There are three basic reasons why you should become a vegetarian. Firstly, a vegetarian diet is good for your health. Secondly, it is a contribution to the welfare of animals. Thirdly, becoming a vegetarian is good for the environment.

Let's start with your health. By eating a vegetarian diet you will consume considerably less saturated fat than by eating a conventional meat based diet. This will be good for the health of your heart.

Studies have shown that people who eat nuts on a regular basis are less likely to suffer heart attacks. Vegetarians depend on nuts as one of their sources of protein. Heart disease has become a major killer in all modern industrialized societies.

That alone would be a major reason to consider becoming a vegetarian. But the health benefits are even greater than that. Vegetarians are seldom obese. Obesity and the health problems associated with it have become a major public health issue.

Most vegetarians consume a lot of complex carbohydrates. These are the "good carbs" you will have heard of that do not cause rapid fluctuations in blood sugar levels. When we experience a rush of blood sugar we must produce more insulin. If this process is repeated our bodies can become insensitive to our own insulin and type 2 diabetes may result in extreme cases. Type 2 diabetes is becoming increasingly common even in comparatively young people because of the modern diet.

Cancer is another killer disease that is on the increase. A vegetarian diet can play a part in reducing the risk of some cancers because it is high in fibre and high anti-oxidants that combat free radicals.

By eliminating meat from your diet as a vegetarian you are reducing your exposure to antibiotics that are used in animal husbandry and to the hormones that are used as growth promoters and to increase milk production. Antibiotics in food can result in antibiotic resistance. Hormones fed to animals can disrupt the activity of the hormones that our own bodies produce.

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The intensive production of animals in factory farming systems raises major issues of animal welfare. There are also environmental concerns because factory farming is so resource hungry. Vast amounts of land are used to produce animal feed that could be used more efficiently to produce food for people. If more of us were vegetarians fewer children would go to bed hungry.

By becoming a vegetarian you are contributing to your own health, to the welfare of other people, to the welfare of animals and to the health of the planet. As an individual your contribution may be small, but your decision to become a vegetarian will influence others.

## Can You Really Switch To Vegetarianism During Your Pregnancy?

Pregnancy brings a new responsibility. You have charge of the health and well being of another human being. For many of us it is the time when we give up high risk activities like drinking and smoking. A major change in diet sounds risky too, but changing to a vegetarian diet in pregnancy really should not be seen in that light. Taken slowly and sensibly changing to vegetarianism during pregnancy is quite safe.

You should, of course, discuss your diet and any changes you plan to make to it with your health care professional. If they see that you are taking the process seriously they will probably be supportive of your decision to change to vegetarianism during pregnancy.

If you approach becoming a vegetarian seriously it will benefit both you and your baby. A typical vegetarian eats far less junk food than most people. They are more likely to prepare meals from basic ingredients and to consume a wide variety of vegetables, fruit, nuts, pulses and grains than people who eat processed food. If you are not totally vegan then you will also be eating dairy produce such as milk and cheese and eggs. That should ensure you a balanced diet.

In pregnancy a woman has special dietary needs. A pregnant woman only needs about 300 extra calories a day and between 10 and 16 grams of extra protein. But it is important to ensure that you get enough folic acid, iron, zinc and vitamin B-12. Leafy green vegetables are useful here. As a vegetarian you will probably get more of these than on a typical modern diet. Your health professional will be on the look out for deficiencies. It will help them to know that you are vegetarian. Discuss whether you need dietary supplements.

Going vegetarian presents your body with many challenges. So it is important to take it slowly. This is true at any time, but it is especially true when you plan to go vegetarian during pregnancy. The best advice is to take it slowly. Make the transition gradually by eating vegetarian one or two days a week at first. This allows your body to detoxify itself slowly.

Taking things step by step also allows you to introduce new sources of protein into your diet gradually. It will give you chance to learn how to use plant based proteins like soya. There's an

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art to making a good tofu burger or a tasty lentil soup. Changing your shopping habits takes time too.

Something else to consider when changing to a vegetarian diet during pregnancy is the need for exercise and sunlight. Sunlight is necessary for your body to manufacture its own vitamin D. A dietary supplement may be necessary depending where you live and the time of year.

At any time the transition to vegetarianism should be about achieving a healthy life style. This is especially true when the change to vegetarianism is made during pregnancy. Going vegetarian during pregnancy is perfectly possible provided that you do so carefully and in consultation with your health professional. Above all listen to your own body. The transition to vegetarianism during your pregnancy can be beneficial to both you and your baby.

### When Milk Is Not A Healthy Food

Milk is often praised as a perfect food which contains all the protein, fats and minerals that are needed for a healthy life. It is often recommended that we drink a pint of milk a day.

Milk is, after all, the only food for the young of mammals. It seems natural that we should rely on it and other dairy produce manufactured from milk as a source of nutrition.

But matters are not so straightforward. Cows' milk is not a natural food for human beings. For human infants it can be harmful unless modified as it is infant formula.

Older children can often tolerate milk, but many adults lose the stomach enzyme that allows them to digest milk. In northern latitudes many adults retain that enzyme and they can digest milk. But in other parts of the world adults seldom have the ability to do so.

As societies become more diverse it is not uncommon to encounter individuals who cannot tolerate milk in their diet.

Even those of us who can drink milk need to be aware of health concerns that are linked to a high consumption of milk and dairy produce. Full cream milk can help to raise the body's level of cholesterol because it contains animal fat. This is even more true of cheese, butter and cream, which contain a higher proportion of fat.

Skimmed milk may be answer to this problem but a high consumption of dairy foods has been associated with various forms of cancer. Breast cancer, ovarian cancer and prostate cancer have all been linked to dairy foods. A Harvard study showed that if too much dairy produce is consumed the body's enzymes may not be able to break down the lactose that milk contains. This can build up in the blood stream and contribute to cancer formation in the body's organs.

Milk produced under modern factory farming conditions is a long way from the milk that used to be available. Cows do not necessarily graze on grass. They may be kept indoors and fed on concentrates. This has several consequences for their milk. Milk from grass fed cattle is typically high in vitamin D. But milk from cattle reared indoors is not.

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Vitamin D is essential if we are to utilize calcium in bone growth and repair. We may be drinking milk in the belief that it helps us avoid osteoporosis when in fact it does not. Milk is not a reliable source of either vitamin D or calcium.

Milk can also contain high levels of hormones such as IGF-I. This substance has been linked to a number of cancers.

It is possible to avoid milk and still obtain sufficient nutrients from a variety of other sources. Leafy green vegetables and whole grains are a good source of calcium. Vegetables such as carrots are a good source of vitamin D. Soya products contain no animal fat and are often fortified with both vitamin D and calcium.

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