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# Be a part-time vegetarian

New science suggests you don't have to swear off meat entirely to enjoy many of the same pound-paring, money-saving, health-enhancing benefits of being a full-on vegetarian. Today, three-bean soup. Tomorrow, burger night! By Marisa Cohen Photographs by Jamie Chung

If the thought of never again eating fried chicken or cheeseburgers or bacon (or fill in your favorite meaty dish here) brings a tear to your eye and an empty feeling to your stomach, you've come to the right place: This article is carnivore-friendly. But what about forgoing beef, chicken, fish and pork some days—that's a more reasonable idea, right?

It's certainly a popular one. Consider the Meatless Monday campaign, launched in 2003 as a way to get Americans to trim saturated fat from their diet. "Two years ago, we knew of just one blogger writing about meat-free days," says Chris Elam, director of the program. "Today there are more than 150, and almost 50 college cafeterias now have Meatless Mondays." Nearly 40 percent of you said you want to go without meat at least a few days a week in a recent SELF survey, and another 11 percent already have two weekly veggie-only days.

The part-timers are on to something, experts say. "Going veggie just two days a week can deliver noticeable health, environmental and financial benefits, but it's not so big a change that you'll feel overwhelmed," says Kate Geagan, R.D., author of *Go Green Get Lean*. The key is getting the nutrients you need on your two no-meat days while also satisfying your hunger and pleasing your taste buds. Our guide will help you do all three and never miss the meat.

## Why go (sorta) veggie

- 1 To stay slim** Eat less meat, gain less weight—that's the upshot of one *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* study. In it, folks who ate the most red and processed meat and poultry gained the most weight (almost 5 pounds) over five years. The cause isn't yet clear, but if cutting back on meat doesn't hurt and it helps keep us svelte, does the reason really matter?
- 2 To help the planet** Trading red meat and dairy for a plant-based diet only one day a week cuts more greenhouse gas emissions than buying all locally grown food, according to researchers at Carnegie Mellon University. Make it two days weekly and you'll erase your carbon footprint that much more!
- 3 To fend off cancer** Women who consumed the most animal fat in the form of red meat and high-fat dairy had a 24 percent higher risk of developing breast cancer, a study from Harvard University indicates. Carcinogens in cooked meat are one likely culprit, explains study author Eunyoung Cho, Sc.D.
- 4 To protect your heart** Women ages 30 to 55 who ate the most red meat also had a higher risk for coronary heart disease in a 26-year-long Harvard School of Public Health study. Whose risk was lower? Women who got the majority of their protein from vegetarian sources such as beans and nuts. Blame excess artery-clogging saturated fat for meat's heart-harming potential.
- 5 To save cash** Plant proteins are cheap: One pound of dried beans costs \$1.24 on average, much less than a pound of lean ground beef (\$3.50) or bacon (\$4.70). What's more, meat consumption costs the United States more than \$190 billion a year in health-related expenses for issues like cancer and diabetes, says Neal Barnard, M.D., president of the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine in Washington, D.C. In other words: Eat less meat; improve your health; avoid pricey treatments. Cha-ching!

## So what can I eat?

A lot! These enticing, nutritionally balanced meal ideas from SELF nutrition experts Stephanie Clarke, R.D., and Willow Jarosh, R.D., will get you psyched for your veggie days.

### Breakfast about 375 calories each

**EASY EGGS** 1 whole egg, 2 egg whites and a handful of baby spinach cooked in 1 tsp olive oil + 1 whole-wheat English muffin topped with 1 oz light Jarlsberg cheese and 1 tsp hummus

**PEANUT BUTTER DELIGHT** ½ banana or apple + one 8-inch whole-grain wrap spread with 2 tbsp peanut or almond butter

### Lunch about 425 calories each

**HEARTY SALAD** 2 cups salad greens + ½ cup cooked bulgur + ½ cup chickpeas + ¼ cup feta cheese + ½ cup chopped red bell pepper + 2 tsp each olive oil and lemon juice

**STACKED SAMMY** 2 slices whole-grain bread + 2 tsp light cream cheese + ¼ avocado, sliced + 4 cucumber slices + ¼ cup grated carrots + 2 tomato slices + ¼ cup alfalfa sprouts + 1 tsp vinaigrette. Serve with one 100-calorie bag popcorn.

### Dinner about 550 calories each

**BELLO BURGER** 1 large grilled portobello mushroom cap brushed with a mixture of 1 tbsp balsamic vinegar, 2 tsp olive oil, ¼ tsp each dried basil and oregano and garlic powder + 1 oz fresh mozzarella + 1 slice tomato + 1 tsp pesto + 1 whole-grain roll. Serve with 3 oz baked sweet potato fries.

**CHEESY BEAN BURRITO** ½ cup refried vegetarian pinto beans + ¼ cup shredded reduced-fat Mexican blend cheese + ½ cup chopped onion sautéed in 1 tsp oil + ¼ avocado, chopped + 1 whole-wheat tortilla (fold tortilla in half and stuff with first four ingredients; cook in a skillet coated with cooking spray) + ¼ cup salsa and 1 tbsp nonfat Greek yogurt for topping. Serve with ¾ oz corn chips.



click!

#### VEGETARIAN RECIPES GALORE

Find more tasty, easy-on-your-wallet dishes at [Self.com/fooddiet](http://Self.com/fooddiet).

## Why I became a flexitarian

By Elizabeth DeVita-Raeburn

Recently, a chance conversation with a friend changed how I eat. “I’m doing four weeks as a vegetarian,” she announced. “Been there, done that,” I replied. “I always fall off the wagon.” “What makes you fall off?” she asked.

“Pepperoni,” I answered immediately. “Sausage. Meatballs.”

I’ve tried to be a vegetarian five or six times, mostly because I believe animals are more sentient than we know. That makes it tough to be party to their consumption. Sounds like a die-hard reason to give up meat, doesn’t it? But my veggie stints have never lasted. My failures are invariably followed by days of self-flagellation, until I try to put the issue out of my mind, hoping it will cease to seem important to me. Alas, that has never happened.

Yet that talk with my newly vegetarian friend got me thinking: I’d sort of known that my cravings for certain meats were what did me in, but it hadn’t occurred to me that they were so specific. And when I looked back, I realized that during all the times I’d given up hope of becoming vegetarian and resumed my carnivorous ways,

I’d still avoided the “bad” foods I loved—pepperoni and steak and sausage—because I wanted my family to eat healthier. So we ate turkey chili, turkey bacon and chicken sausage, even though I’ve never enjoyed chicken or turkey and I’ve never, ever craved them. I ate them because they were healthier than the stuff I truly liked. But if I was ambivalent about eating meat in the first place, why bother eating the meat I didn’t even care for?

“What if I tried to eat vegetarian except for occasionally indulging in the meats I love?” I mused to my husband. “I bet I’d eat a lot less of it in general.” The idea intrigued him, too.

And so, without consulting scads of vegetarian cookbooks or painstakingly substituting tempeh for beef (followed by an acute sense of deprivation), we began eating nonmeat stuff we liked. That turned out to be a lot of sides, our favorite part of the meal anyway. We live near a great farmers’ market, so we gravitated to seasonal fare: corn on the cob, baked peppers stuffed with pecorino and olives, roasted beets on a bed of greens topped with goat cheese. We discovered that making homemade pizza was easy (and best with a pizza stone) and that grilling eggplant worked as well as frying, a discovery we also applied to zucchini. There was no sense of loss. In fact, we barely noticed the difference.