

Introduction

I trust, prior to the purchase of this book, that you've become convinced to some extent of the value of consuming a more healthful, plant-based diet. Oftentimes it's not the "whys" of dietary change, but the "hows" that trip us up. The purpose of this book is to deal with the practical "hows"- to take you by the hand, meeting you each day to encourage you step-by-step in this lifestyle change. A daily "letter" provides practical information, tips and encouragements. I will share some of what you might expect to experience in this transition, some tips on meal planning and preparation, some encouragements to keep you motivated and discussion of many topics that reach beyond what we put in our mouths. I have tried to keep the readings brief (short enough to squeeze in before heading out for the day) and the featured recipes simple and appealing. I've focused on recipes that will easily become staples in your new wholesome diet, so it becomes easier to see how this could be a lifestyle, not just a three week experiment.

Maybe you've read some about a plant-based diet and even about supplementing with fresh vegetable juices, but this sounded a little too radical for you. Or maybe you've even given it a try, but felt it too overwhelming with so many changes. Let's be realistic- this kind of diet is radically different from the Standard American Diet. Let's take a take a moment to peek into the lives of an average SAD couple. This couple, in their mid-twenties, is busy working two jobs and doesn't have enough energy past the end of the work day (actually it petered out an hour or so after lunch) to do much more than heat up an easy-prep dinner. The husband is "Mr. Meat and Potatoes", has never eaten a salad, nor fruit if it weren't part of a sugary dessert. His favorite lunchtime "quick and cheap" meal is two hot dogs, chips and soda from a local quick mart. And the wife isn't much better- she hates cooking and tries to get by with the simplest meals possible- a meat entrée, a starchy side from a box mix, and a token vegetable (microwaved and left untouched by the husband). Both plop down in front of the TV following the meal (or sometimes during) and don't have the energy for much else that evening. In the morning they drag themselves out of bed (after ignoring the alarm once or twice), grab a bagel with cream cheese on their way out the door and begin this process all over again.

OOOPS- I've actually just shared a pretty accurate summary of the diet and lifestyle my husband and I were living not so long ago! By our early thirties, John weighed at least 270 lbs. and had a growing number of health conditions. But, now, in our late thirties, we are feeling younger and doing more than we ever dreamed we would. Recently we've taken up running which was one of those things that just seemed like something *other* people do. I can still do handstands and run along the beach with our son, just for the fun of it! (Things you want to be able to envision yourself doing beyond elementary school-age, right?!). It really is possible to be able to feel and behave younger than you ever have- even if you've always been a couch potato, as we had been. Youth is wellness and all the freedom it allows. Our body innately knows wellness and will return to it when we supply it the raw materials and treatment it was originally designed to receive. Praise God for His gracious design of our incredible bodies!

Now let me say, right up front, that the dietary approach I'll be discussing is way beyond a "vegetarian diet". A "vegetarian" can still live on soda, snack cakes, French fries, "fluffernutters" (peanut butter and fluff sandwiches on white bread- for the uninitiated) and all the chocolate they can hold. In contrast, this is a diet that intentionally includes the most nutrient-dense foods available to build health and develop the inner strength to deal with the elimination of the toxins and excesses we have exposed ourselves to in consuming the SAD diet and living the SAD lifestyle the majority of our lives. This way of eating, quite simply, focuses on those things that God originally created for our optimal health.

My Starting Place

Symptoms checklist

Check off those aches, discomforts and annoyances below from which you currently suffer and are looking forward to seeing disappear as you change your diet and lifestyle.

Remember- this is your starting place.

Initially place your check (or today's date) in the left column. The line to the right is for adding the date on which you noticed this problem disappear.

_____	_____	headaches	_____	_____	dry skin
_____	_____	migraines	_____	_____	oily skin
_____	_____	back or neck pain	_____	_____	itchy skin
_____	_____	frequent colds	_____	_____	dry, flaky patches
_____	_____	sinus congestion	_____	_____	eczema
_____	_____	head congestion	_____	_____	psoriasis
_____	_____	excess mucous	_____	_____	pale, pasty complexion
_____	_____	chest congestion	_____	_____	puffy face
_____	_____	tight chest	_____	_____	drawn look in the face
_____	_____	heart palpitations	_____	_____	looking older than age
_____	_____	chest pain	_____	_____	sudden appearance of wrinkles
_____	_____	"racing" heart	_____	_____	"age spots"
_____	_____	sneezing	_____	_____	acne
_____	_____	sinus infections	_____	_____	rashes, skin outbreaks
_____	_____	sore throat	_____	_____	boils, warts
_____	_____	persistent cough	_____	_____	brittle, cracked nails
_____	_____	ear congestion/infection	_____	_____	hangnails, ingrown nails
_____	_____	allergies (dust, pet, etc.)	_____	_____	bloodshot eyes
_____	_____	seasonal allergies	_____	_____	itchy eyes
_____	_____	food allergies	_____	_____	burning/watering eyes
_____	_____	asthma	_____	_____	dry eyes
_____	_____	bad breath	_____	_____	dark circles under eyes
_____	_____	body odor	_____	_____	dull eyes
_____	_____	spider veins	_____	_____	blurred vision
_____	_____	varicose veins	_____	_____	seeing spots
_____	_____	"restless" legs	_____	_____	poor vision
_____	_____	overweight	_____	_____	tongue coating
_____	_____	underweight	_____	_____	bleeding gums
_____	_____	fatigue	_____	_____	sores in mouth, cold sores
_____	_____	low energy	_____	_____	anemia
_____	_____	listlessness	_____	_____	hair lacking shine or body
_____	_____	lack of interest	_____	_____	hair breaking/falling out
_____	_____	chronic boredom	_____	_____	hair too dry or too oily
_____	_____	"foggy" thinking	_____	_____	unwanted hair growth
_____	_____	poor memory	_____	_____	dandruff

_____	_____	poor concentration	_____	_____	hot flashes
_____	_____	depression	_____	_____	poor circulation
_____	_____	low libido	_____	_____	cold hands or feet
_____	_____	poor sexual response	_____	_____	constantly feeling cold
_____	_____	feeling “crummy”	_____	_____	poor coordination
_____	_____	headed for a breakdown	_____	_____	unsteadiness, weak muscles
_____	_____	nervousness, anxiety	_____	_____	muscle cramps
_____	_____	irritability	_____	_____	achy legs, leg cramps
_____	_____	short temper	_____	_____	achy/stiff/painful joints
_____	_____	frequent mood swings	_____	_____	general aches and pains
_____	_____	seasonal affective disorder	_____	_____	arthritis
_____	_____	nervous stomach	_____	_____	frequent strains/pulls
_____	_____	indigestion	_____	_____	bruise easily
_____	_____	heartburn	_____	_____	slow healing
_____	_____	gas	_____	_____	swelling, pressure
_____	_____	belching	_____	_____	nighttime urination
_____	_____	bloating	_____	_____	incontinence
_____	_____	water retention	_____	_____	painful urination
_____	_____	stomach upset/pain	_____	_____	urinary tract infections
_____	_____	nausea/vomiting	_____	_____	fungal infections
_____	_____	frequent diarrhea	_____	_____	athlete’s foot, ringworm
_____	_____	constipation	_____	_____	“jock itch”
_____	_____	hemorrhoids	_____	_____	yeast infections
_____	_____	tender/rigid stomach	_____	_____	menstrual irregularity
_____	_____	protruding stomach	_____	_____	“PMS” irritability
_____	_____	strong food cravings	_____	_____	painful menstrual cramps
_____	_____	sugar cravings	_____	_____	infertility
_____	_____	caffeine dependency	_____	_____	cysts in breasts, tenderness
_____	_____	alcohol addiction	_____	_____	poor posture
_____	_____	overeate regularly	_____	_____	painful, problematic feet
_____	_____	poor appetite	_____	_____	difficulty falling asleep
_____	_____	high cholesterol	_____	_____	insomnia
_____	_____	high blood pressure	_____	_____	broken sleep, nightmares
_____	_____	low blood pressure	_____	_____	sleeping more than necessary
_____	_____	sensitive teeth/receding gums	_____	_____	snoring
_____	_____	clenching teeth, sore jaw	_____	_____	_____

Isn’t this a SAD list?

These things are not NORMAL. They may be common, but they are not NORMAL.

They are indicators of something wrong in your body.

They are a warning sign to you that something needs to change.

Reference to this “**Starting Place**” checklist as you journey along in your health quest. Be sure to note the passing of these discomforts and praise God for the healing!

Nutritional Powerhouses: Beans, Greens, Berries and Other Great Choices

Other than raw foods and fresh vegetable juices, there are certain foods that are nutritional all-stars. If I had to list off the top three additional foods we should ensure are a regular part of our diet I would quickly say “beans, greens and berries”. We’ve been joking as a family that we’re on the “bean, berry, green” diet. You say that five times fast it does start to sound pretty funny! Ideally, you’ll want to eat your greens and berries raw (which isn’t that hard to do), but you’ll find it easiest to cook your beans.

Greens, of course, should be a regular part of your salads (leaf lettuces, baby greens, spinach, etc.- but not iceberg lettuce- it’s too nutritionally inferior). But what about those hearty greens (kale, collards, Swiss chard, etc.) that seem a little more intimidating and unappealing? These can be consumed raw in a variety of ways- added to fresh vegetable juices, broken up into small pieces and added to salads or marinated to tenderize and mellow their flavor. Most people will find they enjoy them best cooked, though. Allow yourself a bit of time to develop a taste for them (our taste buds regenerate every two weeks and the more alkaline your diet, the more quickly these foods will become appealing!) so give yourself time to incorporate them more into your diet. Greens are a highly beneficial part of your diet because they have the highest nutrient-to-calorie ratio of all foods and are packed with minerals (as well as many other nutrients) that help alkalinize the body and aid the cleansing and healing process.

One resource cites the top ten antioxidant foods in the following order (different sources give you different lists in different orders, but this will at least give you an impression of how beneficial berries and beans are): small red **beans**, wild blue**berries**, red kidney **beans**, pinto **beans**, blue**berries** (cultivated), cran**berries**, artichokes, black**berries**, prunes and rasp**berries**. Did you see that? Five varieties of berries and three varieties of beans topping the antioxidant all-star list.

Berries taste wonderful and are an easy addition to our diet. We can add them to fruit smoothies, fruit salads or just enjoy them fresh and whole as a snack.

Beans are incredibly versatile and inexpensive. Beans are highest in fiber of all foods (higher even than whole grains) and are second highest in antioxidants (only following berries). I have a cooking class I’ve entitled “The Humble Bean” because there are so many wonderful things about this unpretentious food (my sister inquired if I might have meant “The Rumble Bean” instead!). Beans should become a regular part of your diet (ideally eaten daily) - but be encouraged if you’re concerned about that rumbling part, there are ways to improve your digestion of beans. (See the listing for my “Everyday Wholesome Eating” cookbook on the “**Suggested Cookbooks**” page. It includes a section on this as well as quite a number of bean recipes). Beans are great as a salad topping (straight out of the can), processed into a veggie dip (like hummus), added to soups or used in entrées.

And while we’re on the topic of some of the **cooked foods** in our diet, I’ll touch on some of the better choices. When eating grains, always choose whole grains. Many people are allergic to two of the most common grains (corn and wheat), so you may want to experiment with some alternative grains like millet, quinoa and buckwheat. Also, any sprouted grain products (breads, tortillas, etc.) are going to be a better choice over those made with regular whole grain flours. Sweet potatoes are also preferential over white potatoes. They are more nutritious and have a lower glycemic index (less impact on your blood sugar). One last note: Anytime you can soak or sprout a bean or grain before cooking, you’ve increased its nutritional content, digestibility and alkalinity. Simply soak overnight in plenty of water, or longer to increase the benefits!

Your First Day on the Path of Diet and Lifestyle Change

Wow- this is exciting! I'm so glad you were able to spend a little over a week preparing for this day, the start of your three weeks of diet and lifestyle change. The time, study and work you have already invested will greatly aid in making this a successful transition. This is not a small endeavor- committing a month of your life to healthful change. Establishing new healthful diet and lifestyle habits in your life is going to have a greater impact on your health than you may have anticipated- certainly more than just physically. I'm excited for you to personally witness the positive changes that you'll experience as a result of transitioning to a wholesome, plant-based diet.

Because today is your "official" first day eating in this new way, I wanted to take some time to share some beginner tips.

Don't go hungry. This diet is not about portion-controlling or deprivation. Eat enough to be contentedly full. Even if one of your goals is to lose weight, I think that you'll be pleasantly surprised that without changing the quantity of foods you eat (just the foods themselves) weight loss will come as a natural side-effect of consuming the foods that God originally designed for our best.

Eat a variety of foods. Don't get stuck in a rut, eating the same foods over and over. This will only serve to convince you that this diet is boring and nothing anyone could stick with for any length of time. If you consider how long it will take you to just try all the different fruits available at your local market, you get a better idea of the diversity of plant-based foods available to you. Move on to the freezer section and sample some of the range of frozen veggies that are conveniently at hand. Also give some ethnic foods a try. These are often plant-based and offer incredible variety to your diet. In time you may even become enlightened to how redundant your old SAD diet was!

Enjoy your foods. Don't force yourself to eat certain foods just because they are good for you (developing a taste for kale and limas may take a while!). Instead, focus on eating those foods you thoroughly enjoy, regularly trying some new fruits, vegetables, beans, grains, nuts or seeds. As your tastes naturally change, your enjoyment of these foods will grow to include more and more variety. Don't force the change. Enjoy the foods you eat. You get more nutritional benefit from foods you enjoy eating than from those that you "choke down" just because you know they are good for you. My husband declares that he enjoys the foods we eat now more than he ever did those we left behind.

Prepare double batches of recipes you like. For many, the task of preparing home-cooked meals may seem a bit daunting. Once you find some dressings, soups or entrees you enjoy, make them in quantity and freeze the extra. This will reduce some of the work of preparing wholesome meals.

You'll also find I end up talking a lot about our mindsets and attitudes as we make these changes, for these, on their own, have an incredible impact on our health progress (remember their foundational placement on the health pyramid?). So I want to share, right out at the outset here, on Day 1, my first encouragement along those lines.

We live in a time where we have an incredible variety of foods available to us- an availability and convenience probably never before seen in history. All this variety, right at our fingertips. Since we have such a diversity of fruits and vegetables from all over the world available year round, you'd think it would naturally follow that we avail ourselves of this bounty and profit from their nutritional offerings. But, we've got other foods even more conveniently located that work to undermine our health. We choose meal after meal, day after day, which of these foods we are going to select. The Bible clearly says, *"Everything is permissible"—but not everything is beneficial.* *"Everything is permissible"—but not everything is constructive"* (I Corinthians 10:23). We're grown ups. We make our own choices. But those choices aren't without consequence. You've probably very likely experienced in your own body some of the results of making some convenient, SAD choices. You've

decided now to make a conscious effort to choose GOOD foods. If we can keep this in mind- “I have the freedom to choose any food I’d like, but I consciously desire to choose those that are most beneficial to my body”- it can help us avoid the usual “diet mindset”. It’s not so much that “I can’t have chocolate cake” (truth is, I can eat the whole thing if I want to!), but because I desire good health I am going to intentionally choose those foods that were designed for my best.

We can’t deny the fact that there is a definite trade-off in our health when we choose poor foods. For a temporary, fleeting taste pleasure we are sacrificing feeling great tomorrow (or the next day or five years from now- many of these consequences are cumulative and not seen in the short term). But I know for myself the effects can be pretty immediate, and I don’t like feeling lethargic and draggy more than I like the flavor of whatever. This makes it easier for me to make a conscious decision to make a good choice with my eating selections. I have learned (by experience) that the enjoyment of these foods is not as enticing to me as living without the symptoms caused by them.

Freedom vs. Deprivation

Choosing good foods because they are the best for us, and turning down harmful foods because they aren’t, is exercising our freedom of choice. It is not deprivation.

Instead, it frees us to experience energy, good feelings, a bright outlook, physical well-being, a clear mind and the full enjoyment of today and tomorrow.

And to introduce our recipe of the day, I want to share how fruit smoothies are such a simple, wholesome addition to your diet. Not only do they taste great and are easy to prepare, but they are so nutritious they shouldn’t be overlooked as a potential staple in your diet. Each of the ingredients are great health-promoters. Oranges are a great source of Vitamin C and other nutrients. Nuts and flax oil provides essential fatty acids and “staying power” (fats give you a feeling of satiety that “stays with you” longer than fruit alone). Studies have shown that half of the 12 most antioxidant-rich foods are berries. Try a variety- blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, cherries, cranberries, etc. Include a variety of fresh fruits as well (peaches, mangos, pineapple, etc.). By regularly changing your “recipe” you keep the smoothies interesting and vary the nutritional content. Top your smoothie with ground flax and you get that much more benefit- essential fatty acids and an excellent source of fiber.

Smoothies are a healthful alternative to ice cream and make a great mid-day snack or “dessert”. We often enjoy them as a meal- either for breakfast or lunch, or for dinner if we’ve eaten lunch out. They don’t require any fancy ingredients and a limitless variety can be made with the creative use of ingredients on hand. They’re a great fast food (take ‘em to go!) and appeal to young and old alike.

All you really need to make smoothies is:

1. A good blender. Borrow one or get one reasonably second-hand- but, in time, save up for a “Vitamix”- the Cadillac of blenders! (see “**Suggested Appliances**” page at back of book)
2. Frozen bananas. These provide a sweet creamy base for most smoothies. When your bananas look like they’ve pretty much gone by, they are in the perfect state for peeling and freezing. Oftentimes you can get a really great buy on these “overripe” bananas at the grocery store. Keep a stash of them on hand in resealable plastic freezer bags. If using fresh bananas, add some ice in place of the water to get a good smoothie consistency.
3. Other frozen fruits/berries- freeze them away as they come in season (strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, peaches, pineapple, mango, grapes, etc.)
4. Fresh fruit- oranges, apples, pears, peaches, pineapple, grapes, etc. (anything but melons)

*In his heart a man plans his course,
but the LORD determines his steps.*

Proverbs 16:9

Dear God,

Lord, I've felt like it's time to start taking better care of myself, and I'm setting out to make some changes. I know that I can plan my course, but it is you, Lord, who ultimately determines my steps. I pray that you would direct my steps and give me wisdom in the changes I'm planning to undertake. Thank you, Lord, that you reassure me through your word that when my ways are committed to you, you will make my paths straight and my plans will succeed. Praise you, Lord, in advance for the positive changes you are working in my life as I give all my plans over to you.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Fruit Smoothies

2 oranges

*2 handfuls of blueberries, strawberries,
pineapple, mango, grapes or whatever
other fruit you may have on hand*

1/3 cup nuts (almonds, walnuts, pecans, etc.)

1/2 cup water or ice

2 frozen bananas

opt: 1 apple (cored)

1- 2 Tbsp. flax oil

Peel, cut and add fruits to the blender. Add rest of ingredients and puree till smooth. (I like to puree the orange sections, nuts, water and any 'seedy' berries before adding the other ingredients, to make sure they are thoroughly processed.)

Variation: In place of 2 whole oranges, you can use a cup of orange juice (ideally, fresh squeezed).

These are great served topped with chopped nuts (almonds, walnuts, pecans), shredded coconut, chopped fruit and/or ground flax.

Applesauce

2-4 organic apples

1-2 tsp. lemon juice

opt: 1/2 tsp. cinnamon

Wash and core apples (peel conventional ones). Cut into large chunks. Puree in blender with lemon juice and cinnamon. Try adding some berries for variety. Nuts can also be pureed with the apples to lend creaminess (more like a smoothie).

Applesauce can be enjoyed raw on its own or you can use it as a topping for cooked cereal, pancakes, or waffles if you simmer it a bit before serving. (Eating raw fruits with cooked grains would be poor food combining. Raw fruits should always be eaten on their own because they digest so quickly. The only exception could be fruit and nuts, which most people find digest fine together.)

For those avoiding bananas and other sweet fruits because of Candida or sugar-handling issues, applesauce provides a great option. You can also substitute fresh apples for the frozen bananas in the fruit smoothie recipe and still get a very tasty result.

