Is a Flexitarian Diet Right for You?



Article

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Published September 9, 2022

Find out how adopting a flexitarian diet can be a practical and long-term way to embrace healthy eating for real life.

You know you should eat healthy — and you *want* to. But with so many diets touting the benefits of eliminating this or only eating that, it's hard to know what healthy is anymore.

The truth is rigid, rule-based diets are hard for most people to stick to, making you feel anxious and defeated before you have even begun. You'll be more successful with a plan that's realistic for you and focuses on healthy eating for real life — one that includes foods you enjoy, enough calories and nutrients to keep you well and doesn't deprive you of foods in an unsustainable way.

You might find that in a flexitarian diet.

WHAT IS A FLEXITARIAN DIET?

Simply put, a flexitarian diet is that of a flexible vegetarian. Also called semi-vegetarianism, it's the diet for those who aspire to the health benefits and/or ethical practices of vegetarianism, but who want the freedom to step outside its boundaries without feeling guilty.

At its heart, flexitarianism is a move toward a plant-based diet and away from meat, highly processed foods and sugar. It’s how flexitarians make this move that defines their success.

PROGRESS, NOT PERFECTION

Food is such a huge part of our daily routines that the thought of giving up a favorite can feel daunting; after all, family bonds and entire cultures are forged around traditional dishes. On top of that, the food you want to stop eating tastes *really good*.

A flexitarian diet plan doesn’t disregard your humanity or punish you for it. Instead, it emphasizes healthy choices while helping you feel in control. This long-haul approach sets up attainable, self-paced goals rather than promising quick returns or requiring utter devotion to restrictive rules.

WHAT ARE THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF FLEXITARIANISM?

First and foremost, flexitarianism is about getting the right nutrients into your body. It’s not a “lose weight fast” scheme or the latest cleansing craze, but a thoughtful, practical and long-term way to make incremental changes toward eating healthier foods.

According to the Cleveland Clinic, the health benefits of flexitarianism include:

- Decreased risk of heart disease
- Long-term weight loss
- Lower BMI
- Decreased risk of Type 2 diabetes
- Decreased risk of some types of cancer, including colon cancer

An evidence-based study available from the National Center for Biotechnology Information found “weight loss and metabolic health benefits, including reduced diabetes risk and blood pressure” were among the most supported potential flexitarian diet benefits, and that emerging evidence suggested that a flexitarian diet “may be effective for patients with inflammatory bowel diseases such as Crohn’s disease and for gut inflammation,” due to its higher levels of dietary fiber.

WHAT WILL FLEXITARIANISM LOOK LIKE FOR ME?

Learning about health benefits is great, but what does adopting a flexitarian diet meal plan mean for everyday life? It will be different for everybody, but common practices include:

- Limiting meat by going meatless two days a week (check out our Meatless Monday recipes on Instagram(open in new tab)), avoiding meats at breakfast or cutting out red meats altogether
- Substituting plant-based proteins in a favorite dish or exploring one new vegetarian recipe a week (we’ve got plenty(open in new tab))
- Using natural alternatives to refined sugar, carbs and artificial sweeteners

STOP WORRYING AND START FLEXING

The flexitarian diet isn’t designed to totally remake your identity, but to lead you toward healthy eating habits for real life. If you feel like flexitarianism may be right for you, make a plan that will require significant, specific changes that don't feel too demanding. Where you go from there is up to you!

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