

## **The Transition to plant-based foods**

Deciding what we will eat means choosing between the horrors of factory farming and respect for the animals.

Going vegetarian has never been easier. The explosion of vegetarian foods means that you can pop everything from bean tacos to veggies "sausage" into the microwave and finish the meal with frozen nondairy "ice cream."

You can order a latte with soy milk in the neighborhood coffee shop, enjoy a veggie burger at the ball games, and stock your kitchen with wonderful products we only dreamed of 20 years ago: flavored rice mixes; microwave tofu entrees with exotic sauces; soy-based cheeses, "mayonnaise," "milk," and imitation meat products that can be used on their own or in your favorite recipes.

Many people become vegan overnight, while others make the change gradually. Do what works best for you.

Begin by "vegging up" meals you already eat, like spaghetti with tomato sauce, soups, salads, and by replacing the meat in favorite recipes like lasagna, stir fries, and chile, with beans or textured vegetable protein (TVP). Replace the beef in burritos with beans or grilled veggies. Bake stuffed peppers filled with rice pilaf. Top baked potatoes with margarine soy "bacon bits" or salsa. Use crumbled tofu instead of ricotta cheese in manicotti and lasagna. Use crumbled veggies burgers instead of ground beef.

Fabulous fakes will satisfy your cravings. Most large supermarkets now carry the basics, including veggie "dogs" and burgers. Health food stores stock everything from soy-based sausage and savory smoked tofu to dairy-free "cheese" and "ice cream." Don't give up if the first faux food doesn't suit your taste.

Most new vegetarians find that they really have more food choices - not fewer! For example, many add ethnic dishes like Thais and Indian curries, tofu stir-fries, and veggie casseroles to their repertoires. And thanks to mock meats, vegetarians can still enjoy all their old favorites, too.

For recipe ideas, borrow or invest in a few good veg cookbooks.

**Calcium** can be obtained from many different vegetables, nuts, and beans, as well as fortified orange juice and soy milk. The average bone loss for a vegetarian woman at age 65 is 18 percent; for non-vegetarian women, it's double that. (Vegetarian Times, April 1999)

**Iron:** garbanzo beans, kidney beans, dried apricots, raisins, figs, spinach, broccoli, kale, watermelon

**Vitamin D:** produced by sunshine on skin, 15-20 minutes, 2-3 times a week (extra amounts are stored for months, fortified foods.

**Vitamin B12:** supplements, fortified cereals and beverages. Most people have bacteria producing B12 in their throats and intestines. The body needs only

miniscule amounts of B12 and vegans rarely show clinical symptoms of B12 deficiency.