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Ever-Smarter Ways To Save The Planet

Essential Guide: Eating Less Meat

A no nonsense guide to fitting a new way of eating into your busy lives

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Home Club

Easy changes to start eating less meat

Real advice to help reduce your carbon footprint

Growing up, a meal wasn't a meal unless it included a piece of meat and as an adult, one of my favourite things to do is to go out for a nice meal, whether that is brunch with friends, a family pub lunch, or to a fancy restaurant for a special occasion.

I consider myself a bit of a foodie, researching the best places to eat when visiting a new town, checking out new food places in my local area - and most of those meals would contain meat.

Yet over the last couple of years, my diet has drastically evolved, I've cut way down on my rib-eye steaks and chicken curry after researching how much the meat industry contributes to environmental issues and the welfare of animals.

I only eat meat when eating out, at home most meals are vegetarian with maybe one fish meal a week and swapping cows' milk for oat milk - it didn't take too long to get used to the taste of oat milk in my tea!

Whether you are looking to eat less meat or give it up altogether because you are worried about contributing to climate change, the antibiotics routinely feed to farmed fish and meat, or you care about the welfare of animals, here are some answers to questions you might have.

How does eating less meat help reduce my carbon footprint?

Meat and dairy account for around 14.5% of global greenhouse gas emissions, and the production of red meat accounts for 41% of those emissions, according to the UN's Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO).

It's not just the vast number of emissions being pumped out that is so devastating, it's also the ripping up of rainforests to grow industrial animal feed for cows, pigs, and chickens.

> "Red meats - in particular beef and lamb - rank at the top of the list when it comes to the highest carbon footprint."

Did you know it takes 1800 gallons of water to produce a pound of beef? The same amount of corn requires only 108 gallons.

If the world wants to meet its bold target of keeping global warming to 1.5C there needs to be a shift in people's diets – so yes, eating less meat will undoubtedly help the environment.

With a growing population, the demand for fish, meat, and dairy will continue to put a strain on the environment.

Greenpeace has declared that, in the UK, "we need to be eating 70% less meat and dairy by 2030 to prevent climate breakdown".

The government's Chief Scientific Advisor has said that to tackle climate change people need to eat less meat and take fewer flights.

For many meat lovers, this will take a personal behaviour change which some will find easy, and some will find more difficult but it's not impossible.

Are there certain meats that are worse for the environment?

Unsurprisingly, red meats - in particular beef and lamb - rank at the top of the list when it comes to the highest carbon footprint.

> "Meat and dairy account for around 14.5% of global greenhouse gas emissions."

According to an Oxford study, led by researcher Joseph Poore, 1kg of beef is responsible for 60kg of CO2 equivalent emissions and the second worst is lamb, which is responsible for 25kg.

Compare that to bananas and peas that only produce 0.8kg of CO2 emissions and onions a minuscule 0.3kg.

The numbers are pretty bleak.

Why are they so high? Cows and sheep are "ruminants", meaning that their stomachs contain bacteria capable of digesting tough and fibrous material such as grass.

The digestive process causes the animals to belch out methane.

Not only are their gassy burps the problem, but cows also take longer to grow and reproduce than other animals such as pigs, chickens, and turkeys.

They require much more land and food, a leading cause of deforestation.

This also explains why cheese, milk, and other dairy foods have such a high climate cost.

How many days should I go meat-free?

Some people choose to go cold turkey (excuse the pun) and

1. **If going cold turkey (excuse the pun) isn't for you, then why not try a meat-free Monday?**
2. **Why not replace chicken with cauliflower, mushrooms, carrots, and other cheap vegetables in your curry?**
3. **Lentils make for a delicious filling for cottage pie, Bolognese, or soup.**

> "To be honest, we think it's hard to tell the difference between McDonald's beef burger and their McPlant!"

1. **Choosing a diet** that limits red meat and emphasises fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, and healthy fats has been shown to reduce your risk of heart disease.

2. **The versatile chickpea** can be used to make burgers, nuggets, and even a delicious healthy snack.

3. **You can** even get pig-free pulled pork made from mushrooms!

avoid all meat and dairy products altogether from the get-go and become vegan, eating plant-based meals instead.

This may be difficult for many so you might want to try swapping one meal a day meat free or one meatless day a week.

Why not try meat-free Monday? There are thousands of easy and delicious recipes available, and supermarkets and restaurants now have much more choice when choosing meat-free meals.

Choosing a diet that limits red meat and emphasises fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, and healthy fats has been shown to reduce your risk of heart disease and other chronic conditions.

Why not work on your flexibility and start reaping some healthy benefits and do something great for the planet.

What can I substitute meat for?

Over the past few years, vegetarian and vegan alternatives for meat have exploded as businesses have realised people still want to enjoy a burger without the moo! It's hard to tell the difference between McDonald's beef burger and their McPlant.

A Chicken Royale and the vegan alternative are so similar, that I can't taste the difference.

Walking down the aisles of your favourite supermarket you're spoilt for choice; you can even get pig-free pulled pork made from mushrooms!

It's worth mentioning that while these alternatives are great for convenience, processed food should be limited.

Swapping meat for health reasons you should opt for beans, lentils, and vegetables.

Lentils make for a delicious filling for cottage pie, Bolognese, or soup.

The versatile chickpea can be used to make burgers, nuggets, and even a delicious healthy snack.

Why not replace chicken with cauliflower, mushrooms, carrots, and other cheap vegetables in your curry.

If I cut out meat, where will I get my protein from?

This is probably the most common question as getting enough protein in your diet is essential for your health, you can get protein from both plant and animal sources.

The great news is that whole eggs are among the most nutritious foods available, packed with Vitamins B12 and A, one medium egg has around 6g of protein while, 226 grams of cottage cheese provides 28g of protein.

Other protein-rich foods include

oily fish, milk, tofu, nuts, beans, and pulses.

What about fish – how does eating less fish reduce my carbon footprint?

If you've watched Seaspiracy on Netflix - the documentary on the harm humans is doing by fishing, there is a good chance you have removed fish and seafood from your diet already.

Whether fish is wild-caught or from an aqua-farm they cause devastating effects on the environment.

Toxic aquafarms lead to more industrial fishing as they require billions of fish to feed the captive fish, to commercial "bottom trawling" when fishing boats drag giant nets across the ocean floor that scrape up fish but also anything else in their path.

And longline fishing - a technique where boats drag long fishing lines through the water with several hooks on them that unintentionally hook and kill other species such as different fish, sea birds, turtles, and whales.

These animals are then thrown overboard as "bycatch."

Longlines also can get lost in the ocean and are never retrieved, killing animals long after the boats have left.

What about dairy - how does eating less dairy help the environment?

This can be very complicated as to what is better for the environment - the production of cow's milk and alternatives both have their drawbacks.

For example, compared with cow's milk, producing soya milk is significantly less damaging in terms of greenhouse gas emissions, land use, and water supply.

However, producing almond milk uses roughly 17 times more water than cow's milk per litre, but cow's milk emits nearly 10 times more greenhouse gases per litre.

With supermarket shelves full of plant milk – soya, oat, almond,

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coconut, hemp, rice, and hazelnut–plus more and more non-dairy alternatives to cheese, yoghurt, cream, and ice-cream coming onto the market, it's easy to reduce your dairy intake.

What is dairy-free cheese made from?

Vegan cheese is a plant-based alternative to dairy that is 100% animal-free.

Typically, vegan cheese is made using some kind of nuts like cashews and coconuts.

It then goes through a fermentation process to create a cheese-like product.

It might take a bit of trial and error to find one that is right for your taste, thankfully there is more choice than ever from vegan cream cheese to vegan halloumi, and even vegan brie, your favourite cheese will have been veganised!

What is tofu and what do I do with it?

Tofu is a soy-based food that's made from curdling soy milk and forming it into a solid block, in a similar process to making cheese.

It's low in calories and a good source of plant-based protein that can be used in all sorts of ways.

It's a great addition as a meat and dairy substitute such as tofu halloumi, sticky tofu with rice, and can be even made into a scrambled egg alternative.

There are hundreds of recipes out there for you to try.

What will the cost implications be of substituting meat?

It can be challenging to serve healthy meals when you're trying to save money.

Consider serving budget-friendly meatless meals once or twice a week.

Meatless meals are built around beans, lentils, vegetables, and whole grains.

These plant-based proteins tend to be less expensive and offer more health benefits than meat.

If choosing between lentils, legumes or soy is still driving you nuts.

Why not WhatsApp your Carbon Mentor?!