



**PLANT-BASED
HEALTH ONLINE**

For a Healthier Future

Your Plant-based Starter Guide

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Introduction



At Plant-Based Health Online we are passionate about highlighting the connection between a **sustainable whole food plant-based diet (WFPBD)** and *lifestyle, your health and the health of the planet.*

Our mission is to spread the message of a WFPB diet and healthy lifestyle and the many benefits it brings as far and wide as possible - starting with ***you!***



We are so pleased your journey has brought you this far and hope this starter guide will help you continue on your way towards a ***healthier future.***



The problem



Unhealthy diets are now the top cause of chronic illness around the world ^{1,2}.

Eating patterns high in meat, dairy and processed foods have fueled our current global health crisis with rising rates of obesity, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, certain cancers and dementia.

These trends have also contributed to the current climate crisis due to animal agriculture playing a significant role in deforestation, species loss, rising greenhouse gas emissions and water pollution. If we are to work on our physical and emotional health, we must also consider the health of our planet and everyone we share it with.

The solution

The good news is that it's really never too late to make changes and using the right foods in your diet, along with healthy lifestyle habits, can be a very powerful way to **regain your health**.

Adopting a WFPB diet is one of the very best ways to do this.

By choosing a diet based on fruit, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts and seeds, you can work towards optimal health and do your best to prevent disease.



What is a whole food plant-based diet?

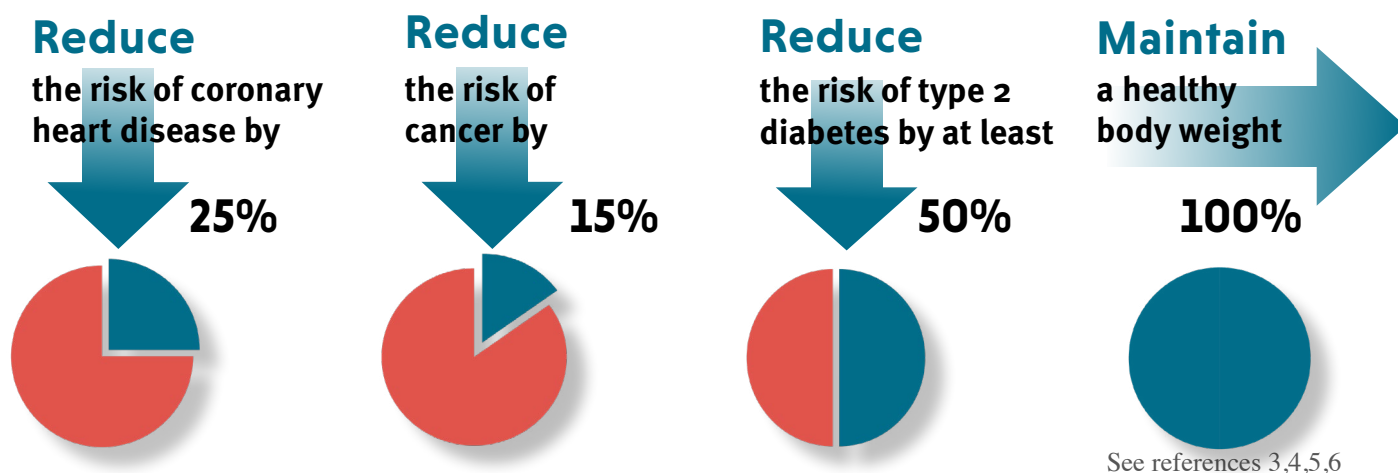
A whole food plant-based diet (WFPBD) focuses on eating foods as they are grown and is centred on vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, legumes, nuts and seeds.

Foods such as meat, chicken, fish, dairy and eggs as well as processed foods (including highly refined flour or sugar products) are reduced or eliminated from the diet.

Why do we recommend a WFPBD?

There is an abundance of medical research supporting a WFPBD as one of the healthiest choices you can make. Eating a plant-based diet has been shown to significantly reduce the risk of our most common chronic diseases whilst helping you live a longer and healthier life.

A healthy plant-based diet can help to:



Plant-based diets are not only optimal for *disease prevention* but can also be used to treat established illness in conjunction with conventional medical treatments.



The impact of a plant-based diet is so significant that national and international guidelines now recommend plant-based diets for prevention of cardiovascular disease ⁷, cancer ⁸ and the treatment of type 2 diabetes ⁹. Major dietetic organisations around the world, including the BDA in the UK have confirmed that a 100% plant-based diet can meet nutritional requirements for all stages of life from birth through to old age ¹⁰.

Foods groups to *increase*

Fruits



Vegetables



Whole grains



Beans, peas, lentils



Nuts and seeds



Water



Foods groups to *decrease*

Meat, poultry, fish



Dairy products



Eggs



Processed foods



Processed oils



Sweetened beverages



The impact of our food choices

Our health is linked with the health of our planet

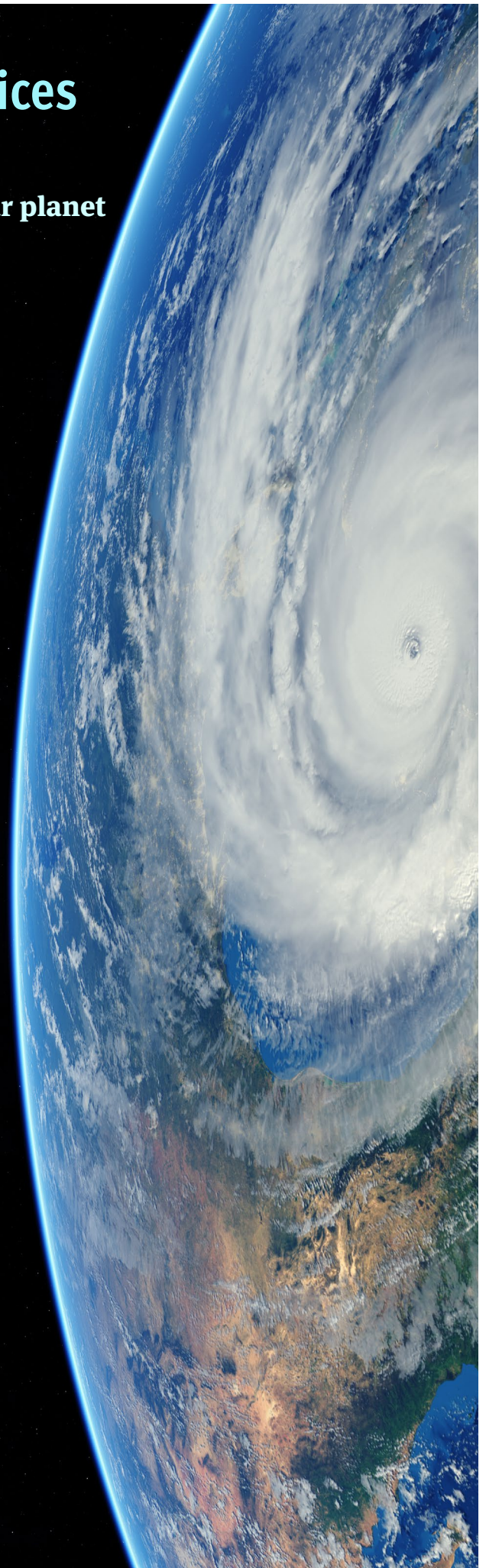
We can no longer only focus on our personal health.

The health of our planet is in crisis with climate change threatening our very existence.

The global food system is a major contributor to this current crisis with animal agriculture contributing significantly through its impact on greenhouse gas emissions, land degradation, loss of biodiversity, species loss and water pollution ¹¹.

Animal agriculture is also constantly generating new infectious threats and these infections can result in human epidemics and pandemics at any given time ¹².

The use of antibiotics in animal agriculture is a major driver in generating antibiotic-resistant infections, which again poses a real threat to human health ¹³. There is now global consensus that to sustain both human and planetary health, we must all shift to a plant-based food system.



Plant-based myths

A WFPBD is commonly misunderstood as a deficient or restrictive diet. However, the very opposite has been found to be true - a well-planned diverse WFPBD is in fact, more nutritionally sound than typical Western dietary patterns ^{14,15}.

Myth: You can't get enough protein on a plant-based diet

1. Protein

Protein is an essential nutrient and our bodies do need it to build and repair various tissues. However, the general population is eating far too much protein and we need far less than we think we do (daily requirements 0.8g/kg body weight/day).

Importantly, excess protein has to be excreted by our kidneys (making them work harder) or stored as fat.

Some athletes who are training frequently may have increased requirements (1.2 - 1.7g/kg/day for strength and - 1.2g-1.4/kg/day for endurance athletes) but are also able to meet their needs on a WFPBD.

Other groups which have different protein requirements include infants, children, pregnant and lactating women as well the elderly.

There is an abundance of plant foods which offer very healthy sources of protein. It is a common misconception that these plant proteins are lacking



in some amino acids - this simply isn't true. More importantly, plant proteins also come packaged with healthy nutrients that animal foods simply don't have (fibre being the best example!).

When you meet your energy (caloric) requirements with a diverse plant-based diet, you can also easily meet your protein requirements.

✓ **Try:** plant protein sources such as tofu, tempeh, beans, lentils, nut & seed butters, quinoa

Myth: soya is not good for you

2. Soya



There remains a lot of confusion around soya but there is an abundance of research which shows that not only is it safe, when consumed in its minimally processed form, it can be a very healthful addition to your diet.

Much of the research which gave soya a bad name was conducted in animal studies and was not reproducible in humans. Other studies which reported negative effects were associated with very large quantities of soya. We know however, that up to 3 portions a day is safe, has important health benefits and does not have feminizing effects on men ¹⁶.

Soya is high in isoflavones which have been shown to be protective against some cancers, such as breast, ovarian and prostate as well as lowering LDL ('bad') cholesterol and reducing heart disease risk ¹⁷.

✓ **Try:** minimally processed soya foods such as tempeh, unsweetened soya milk, tofu, edamame



Myth: you need cow's milk for strong bones

3. Calcium

Calcium is an important mineral in our diet, and it can easily be found in various plant sources

✓ **Try:** plant sources of calcium such as fortified plant milks and yoghurts, kale, almonds, tahini, beans and lentils.

🌿 **Tip:** Soaking, sprouting and fermenting can increase the absorption of calcium.



Remember there are other important factors for optimal bone health:

- regular weight bearing exercise
- avoiding smoking
- avoiding excess caffeine, salt and protein
- minimal alcohol consumption
- meeting vitamin D requirements

A note on dairy

Many of us have been led to believe that dairy is necessary for strong bones but there are some very important reasons to eliminate dairy from your diet

Your health

Dairy contains a protein - casein- as well as growth hormones such as bovine growth hormone, oestrogen and IGF-1. These explain in part, the established connection between cow's milk and prostate cancer especially but also the potential link with hormone-driven female cancers such as breast, endometrial and ovarian cancer ¹⁸.

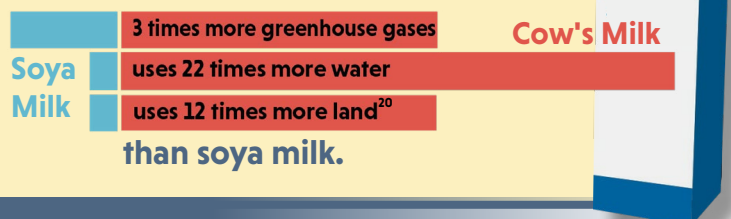
It is a myth that dairy is needed for strong bones. In fact, countries with the highest dairy consumption also have the highest numbers of hip fractures ¹⁹. Whilst dairy might not be the only cause, it does highlight that it does not reduce risk.

Cow's milk consumption may also predispose to acne, eczema and asthma ¹⁸.

Your planet

Dairy production has a significant impact on greenhouse gas emissions, climate change, water use and pollution as well as increasing concerns with antibiotic resistance.

One litre of cow's milk emits



✓ **Try:** plant-based milks, at PBHO our favourites are unsweetened soya and oat

Myth: you need red meat for iron

4. Iron

Although it is true that red meat is a source of iron it is a source of haem iron which, although absorbed by the body more easily, has been found to be detrimental to health. Indeed, in 2015 red meat was classified as a group 2 'probable' carcinogen by the World Health Organisation.

Plant foods are a source of non-haem iron and come in a healthful package also containing fibre and antioxidants for example.

Plant-based eaters do not have higher rates of iron deficiency compared to their meat-eating counterparts ²¹.



Try: leafy green vegetables, cooked spinach, broccoli, lentils, chickpeas



Tip: to enhance your iron absorption combine these foods with a source of vitamin C such as citrus fruits or bell peppers

Myth: You need fish for omega-3

3. Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Omega-3 is an essential fatty acid meaning we need to get it from our diet. They are anti-inflammatory and are important for our immune system, brain health and other bodily processes.

Many people believe that fish is the only source of omega-3 but fish themselves obtain their omega-3 from algae - and so can we. Whilst some studies document that fish might be considered healthy, it's important to realise that fish (farmed and wild) contain pesticides, industrial pollutants ²², antibiotics and heavy metals ²³. Importantly, our current recommended intake is not sustainable for healthy oceans and a healthy planet.

There are other plant sources which are rich in omega 3. They may be considered superior given that they do not include the harmful chemicals mentioned above. Including these foods daily will allow you to reach your requirements.



- 1 tbsp ground flaxseed
- 1 tbsp ground chia seed
- six walnut halves
- 2 tbsp hempseed

During pregnancy and breastfeeding and in later stages of life, a DHA/EPA supplement from algae is likely to be required for those following 100% plant-based diet.

www.pbho.co.uk

Myth: Plant-based eating is expensive

6. Affordability

Healthier diets are thought to cost more but this is not necessarily true. Whilst some plant-based products can be expensive, beans, legumes and whole grains are some of the cheaper foods found in the supermarket. Numerous studies support this including a recent report which analysed the cost of the Eatwell guide . It concluded that it does not differ significantly from the current diet pattern in the UK – £5.99 per day compared to £6.02 per day for the current diet ²⁴.



7. Oil

Whilst not a myth, the inclusion of (extracted plant) oil in a healthy plant-based diet continues to be a hot topic of discussion.

Some of the medical pioneers of a WFPBD concluded that a diet without added oils halted the progression of atherosclerosis (build up of fatty substances in the artery wall). It may seem sensible then, that if you have known atherosclerosis or other inflammatory conditions (such as lupus, arthritis, multiple sclerosis) to avoid added oil in your diet.

However, there is another school of thought that suggests extra virgin olive oil (EVOO) is beneficial for a healthy heart. It is certainly more favourable than saturated fat and has been associated with some improved health outcomes and reduced mortality^{25, 26}. This is probably, in part, because it contains monounsaturated fatty acids (MUFA), polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFA), tocopherols, and polyphenols. If you are healthy, fit and active then small amounts of EVOO and some other oils (walnut, flax, avocado) are

Some tips to help keep your shopping bills to a minimum and reduce food waste include:

- meal planning
- batch cooking
- avoiding unnecessary exotic ingredients
- buying in bulk
- using frozen fruit and vegetables which can make shopping cheaper



unlikely to do harm. They can be expensive however and are extremely high in calories. In this situation, it comes down to personal choice but it's worth remembering you could get the same beneficial nutrients from whole plant sources - olives, nuts, seeds, avocado and berries.



Tip: try to avoid refined, ultra-processed and commercial oils as well as tropical (coconut and palm) oils which are high in saturated fat

Before you begin

Now that you know more about a plant-based diet and the benefits it can bring, it's important to think about how you will transition away from your current way of eating

Preparation is key

Reading this guide is a great first step. Planning ahead and learning the nutrition basics will make sure that you set yourself up for success

1. Think about your 'why'

Whether you are making small changes or overhauling your diet, thinking about 'your why' and why it matters to you is a great way to start. Consider the reason that matters to you the most - perhaps it's your physical health or reducing your risk of disease? Or perhaps it is for planetary health or for animal welfare reasons? Finding something that's meaningful for you will make your changes sustainable. It's also good to remember that your reasons for starting often change as you progress on your health journey - revisit your 'why' as times goes on.

2. Educate yourself

Equip yourself with the facts - there are plenty and with strong scientific research to support them. It's likely family/friends/colleagues will ask questions about your new diet so knowing about some of the research behind the benefits of a plant-based diet is really helpful. Like any diet, plant-based diets should be well considered. By reading up on the right information you can enjoy learning nutrition basics as well as trying new recipes.

3. Find some support

It's also extremely helpful to find support for your journey. Sticking to new habits and lifestyle changes are challenging but are certainly easier if friends and family join or at least support you. Eating differently to those around you has the potential to feel isolating so if you do not have anyone close to you who is also plant-based, try to find a local or online community who can support your efforts.

✓ **Try:** Plant-based health professionals UK website (<https://plantbasedhealthprofessionals.com>) and membership offers a great community of like-minded people who can answer questions and direct you to great resources.

4. Remember to enjoy yourself

Apart from the important factors mentioned already such as physical and planetary health, there are many other important reasons we eat. It's helpful to be mindful of the cultural traditions and many different emotions that can be linked with eating. Whatever they may be, your plant-based journey should be bring joy and good health.



Getting started

For most people, a gradual change is best, but others may wish to change very quickly - this really comes down to personal choice but either way preparation is key.

1. Set yourself up for success and plan ahead

Think about what you will do with what's in your cupboards, fridge and freezer - will you use it up and phase in your new diet? Will you donate the food you don't want anymore? There is no right way of doing this - just do what's best for you.



2. Stock your pantry

It can be easier to follow a healthy plant-based diet if your pantry is well stocked. This will also help save time, money and effort. Having all the ingredients you need will help you prepare quick and delicious meals.

Try to think of your kitchen having two types of foods:

1. Dry or frozen items which can be bought less often and in bulk
2. Fresh produce which will need to be bought more regularly in a weekly shop for example

✓ **Try:** some examples of plant-based pantry foods include brown rice, canned beans and vegetables, lentils, chickpeas, wholewheat or lentil/chickpea pasta, soba noodles, herbs & spices, nuts, seeds, nut butters, dried fruits and frozen fruit/veg for the freezer.



3. Plan for eating out

It can sometimes be a challenge to eat outside your home and stick to a plant-based diet - it's not always easy at restaurants, friend's homes or when travelling.

Dining Out

There are some amazing plant-based restaurants, but for those that aren't plan ahead and look at the menu. Call beforehand to see if they can accommodate you or enjoy lots of side dishes together to form a main meal - there are lots of things you can try so that you can stick to your new way of eating.

Social events

Eating out with or at other people's homes can be hard and can sometimes lend itself to uncomfortable situations if they do not understand or support your choices. You could for example, offer to bring your own dishes. Make a sharing dish - maybe they will try it and love it!

Travelling

Travelling can introduce challenges too but it is possible to stick to your diet when you are away from home. Again, planning ahead is key - find out what options there are in the airport, hotel or close by to where you will be staying. Pack your own meals for your journey, stay hydrated and choose the healthiest option available.

**Community cooking classes with
Lifeafterhummus Community Benefit Society, London**



4. Healthy swaps for your favourite meals

A great way to approach your meals is to think of dishes you really enjoy. Substitute animal products (such as meat or dairy) for healthier ingredients such as beans, lentils or tofu. Try adding these into favourite dishes to make vegetable curries, stir fries or lasagna.



Healthy plant-based pancakes, photo credit:

[Lifeafterhummus](https://www.lifeafterhummus.org/) Community Benefit Society

Breakfast tends to be an easy meal to start off with - try porridge and berries, overnight oats or dairy free yoghurts with nuts, seeds and fruit.

Or another way to move towards a plant-based diet is to start by reducing your portion sizes of animal products or try meat-free weekdays.

5. Learn to enjoy cooking

There are a variety of great cooking courses online but you could have a look for cooking classes in the community. They are often free and a great way to have fun and connect with other people who are learning the same way you are.

photo credit: Lifeafterhummus



5. Think about supplements

A well planned and diverse plant-based diet is packed full of nutrients, vitamins and minerals. For those who follow an exclusive WFPBD there are some important supplements you need for optimal health.

Vitamin B12 Required for: healthy nerve and blood cells

Vitamin B12 (Cobalamin) is the only nutrient not directly available from plants. It is made by bacteria, fungi and algae - not by plants and not by animals. Animals do however, eat and accumulate these microorganisms along with their food which is why it can be found in their meat, organs, and byproducts (milk, cheese, eggs). However, livestock themselves often receive B12 supplements in their feed. It is also not unusual for vegetarians or meat eaters to fall short of their B12 requirements.

Nevertheless, if you are exclusively plant-based, it is very important to supplement in order to avoid deficiency.

Your body can absorb very small amounts of vitamin B12 at a time so it is a good idea to include fortified foods regularly in your diet. Certain products such as marmite, fortified nutritional yeast and some fortified

plant milks contain B12. However, these sources are not a dependable way of meeting your requirements. In order to make sure you consistently meet your daily needs, a supplement is always recommended.

**>25 - 100 micrograms daily for those aged 16-64
>2000 micrograms weekly**

(most people find it easier to remember something if they do it daily!)

Most supplements contain at least 25 micrograms but many contain much more. This is because your body can only absorb small amounts at a time, so it is suggested to supplement with a dose greater than the Recommended Dietary Allowance. This is considered safe - any excess is removed from the body and toxicity is very rare.

[Government Dietary Recommendations](#)

Vitamin D3 Required for: bone, teeth and muscle health as well as supporting your immune system

The importance of vitamin D has in the past been understated and deficiency is very common. We now know that inadequate levels have been linked with autoimmune disorders, heart disease, cancer, insulin resistance, inflammation as well as unfavourable outcomes in pregnancy ²⁷.

Vitamin D is not widely available from foods - this is why it is called the 'sunshine' vitamin as it is acquired from time spent outside in the sun. Whilst some animal sources contain small amounts of vitamin D (oily fish, liver, meat and eggs) they also contain high levels of saturated fat, cholesterol and other components which are not considered healthful.

Fortified plant milks and sunbathed mushrooms may also provide a small quantity but in most cases, a vitamin D supplement should be taken.

How much do you need?

Daily requirement: Recommendations for vitamin D are variable.

By supplement:

The NHS currently recommends 10 micrograms/ daily (400 IU/daily) for maintenance of normal levels but this dose is under review.

A higher dose of 1500-2000 IU/daily has more recently been recommended for those aged 18-70 at a healthy weight. This should be increased to 3000 IU/daily for those who are overweight or obese ²⁷. The upper safety limit is 4000 IU.

By sunlight:

From March to the end of September, it is suggested that 20 minutes in outdoor sunlight, 30-45 minutes is needed for those with darker skin types, may provide enough exposure for vitamin D production. There are some 'at risk' groups who may need to supplement all year round (such as pregnant and breastfeeding women, young children and older people as well as those with darker skin, wear whole body coverings or live in institutions).

However, between October and early March in the UK we do not get enough vitamin D from sunlight and foods do not reliably provide adequate amounts so there is a need for everyone to supplement during these months.

Blood tests are available and provide the best way to establish your vitamin D levels. This allows for individualised and optimal dosing recommendations and can be used to monitor your response to supplementation.

Iodine Required for: thyroid function

There are a number of plant sources of iodine (some fortified plant milks, sea vegetables - nori, dulse, wakame) but their amounts can be highly variable and some are best avoided (kelp can have dangerously

high amounts and Hijiki has high levels of arsenic). A supplement providing 150 micrograms daily is an easier way to make sure you are safely getting the right amount.

EPA/DHA

Required for: brain health, immunity, anti-inflammatory and blood clotting processes

It is possible to meet your requirements with plant-based foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids (walnuts, flax/chia/hemp seeds), but if these foods do not appear in your diet then it may be beneficial to supplement with an algae derived EPA/DHA supplement.

The need for EPA/DHA is higher for expectant mothers and so a supplement providing 350-550mg EPA/DHA is required in pregnancy and breastfeeding and may also be beneficial for those aged over 65.

6. No need to be perfect

Remember to enjoy your journey - it really is a process. Whilst it can be challenging to make changes in your diet and lifestyle, try to have fun discovering new foods and new friends - and of course, feeling healthier than you ever have before.



7. Connect with a plant-based health professional

At PBHO we are here to help you start and continue on your plant-based journey towards a healthier future.

Visit us at [PLANTBASEDHEALTHONLINE.COM](https://www.plantbasedhealthonline.com) to read about our team and book an appointment to personalise your plant-based health plan.



Resources

Websites

<https://plantbasedhealthprofessionals.com>
<https://www.vegannigerian.com>
<https://byanygreensnecessary.com>
<https://plantbasedjuniors.com>
<https://nutritionfacts.org>
<https://plantricianproject.org>
<https://nutritionstudies.org>
<https://veganhealth.org>
<https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/plant-based-diet.html>
<https://www.vivahealth.org.uk>
<https://www.vegansociety.com>
<https://www.pcrm.org>
<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-vegan-diet/>
<https://www.wcrf.org/dietandcancer>



For 21 days of email support, plant-based tips and recipes, sign up for our Plant Based Health Professionals 21-day challenge.

Community

Sign up to be a member for news updates, webinars, cooking demonstrations, supportive community and more

<https://plantbasedhealthprofessionals.com>

Books

Becoming Vegan - Brenda Davis MD
The Truth About Food - David Katz MD
Sustainable Diets - Pamela Mason
How Not to Die - Dr Michael Greger
The China Study - T Colin Campbell
Whole - T Colin Campbell
Proteinaholic - Garth Davis MD
Ageless Vegan - Tracye McQuirter with Mary McQuirter
By Any Greens Necessary - Tracye McQuirter
Eat to Live - Joel Fuhrman MD
Bit of the Good Stuff - Sharon Collins
A Parent's Guide to Intuitive Eating - Dr Yami Carzorla-Lancaster
Vegan for Life - Virginia Messina RD and Jack Norris RD

Cookbooks

Eat Well to Live Well - Karen Lee
Vegan Richa's Indian Kitchen - Richa Hingle
Sweet Potato Soul - Jenne Claiborne
Health on the Hob - Hayley Tait
A Kitchen Fairytale: Healing with Food - Iida van der Byl Knoefel
Vegan Soul Kitchen - Bryant Terry
Jackfruit & Blue Ginger - Sasha Gill

Online and Community Cooking Classes

<https://madeinhackney.org>

[Lifeafterhummus community Benefit Society](#)

References



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For a Healthier Future

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