

# VEG OUT by Katrina Mayer

(vej owt) *intransitive verb* (vegged out, vegging out) 1. to build a healthy relationship with vegetables 2. to spend time idly or passively consuming nourishing, efficient, vegetarian foods. **vegan** (vE-gan) *noun* a vegetarian who consumes no animal products. **raw fooder** (raw food-er) *noun* a vegetarian who consumes creatively prepared, uncooked plant-based foods.

**H**ave you noticed more vegetarian selections in your supermarket lately? Or perhaps a new health food store opened up in your neighborhood. Did you throw a dinner party and someone asked if there would be a vegetarian course? The news is, vegetarianism is alive and well across the country, and especially in New York. More and more people are choosing fruits and vegetables as their main course every day.

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Interestingly, there are many different reasons why people make the choice to become vegetarians. One person may have a vegetarian friend and they want to emulate their friend's healthy lifestyle. Another person looks at cholesterol results and realizes that they have to make a change—soon. Some feel compassion for animals and decide that they don't want to contribute to more suffering. And then there are those who realize that growing organic vegetables is more environmentally prudent than raising cattle or chickens. It is often a combination of these reasons that brings people to the point of changing their diets.

But making the choice and implementing it are two different things. It is difficult to know how to start. What do you eliminate from your diet? What do you substitute? Where do you eat? And the most frequently asked question: What do you have for breakfast? The best advice for becoming a vegetarian is to *take small steps*. You didn't get to your current diet overnight, so don't expect to become a vegetarian quickly, either.

There are several different types of vegetarians, each of which require different levels of commitment. The traditional vegetarian is

someone who doesn't eat meat (beef, chicken, pork, fish) and may or may not eat eggs or dairy. Then there are vegans. They choose not to eat or use any animal products. And finally there are raw fooders who eat fruits and vegetables that have not been cooked.

Traditional vegetarianism is the easiest to follow. If you are currently eating the standard American diet, try incorporating a few vegetarian meals each week. You can choose pasta with broccoli, garlic and sun-dried tomatoes at your favorite Italian restaurant, or a falafel dinner when you are eating Mediterranean. Chinese and Indian restaurants also offer a wide variety of tasty, vegetarian dishes. Two restaurants you might want to try are Zen Palate in Westbury and Curry Cafe in Islip. Zen Palate has an entirely vegetarian menu with enough variety to satisfy even the most skeptical diner. And Curry Cafe offers a large selection of vegetarian entrees. You can't go wrong with either.

If you want to get a little more daring, try eating vegan. This would mean eliminating dairy and eggs from your diet, as well as meat. It's actually easier than you think. With rice milk and soy ice cream, you might just find these new alternatives very appealing. When dining out, head over to House of Dosas in Hicksville or Hunan Cottage in Plainview. Both offer extensive vegetarian and vegan options on their menus. You will discover how tasty vegan food can be.

On the West Coast, raw food is very popular. But New York is quickly making a name for itself too. This style of eating includes creatively prepared (but never cooked) fruits, vegetables, nuts and berries. And while raw food doesn't have a very catchy name, there is no denying the energized feeling you get from a raw food meal. It's not just baby carrots and bok choy. There are two restaurants in Manhattan that are popular for their raw food—Quintessence, which now has three locations, and Caravan of Dreams. You will

be surprised at the variety of foods on their menus. If you want to stay closer to home, stop by Dr. B. Well in Plainview. They have an excellent vegetarian deli section with about 10 raw food dishes available daily. They also offer fruit smoothies, fresh vegetable juices and wheat grass juice.

What if you decide to stay home to eat? You can do some shopping at Wild by Nature in Huntington and East Setauket, Whole Foods in Manhasset, Galloping Greens of Bayshore (Galloping Greens runs deliveries to Fire Island), or Fairway in Plainview. All of these stores have vegetarian foods you can prepare in your kitchen, or even on your barbecue. Get yourself some veggie burgers or soy hot dogs. Try the vegan cold cuts or the un-chicken nuggets. Or perhaps you would like some soy cheese and meatless chili. The possibilities are endless. And notice that tofu wasn't mentioned once!

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So, get as much information as possible. Visit your local health food store and ask lots of questions. Go online to research the health benefits of the vegetarian lifestyle. You will be amazed to see how many people are living long, healthy lives on plant-based diets. And, if you want to meet other people who are living a vegetarian/vegan lifestyle, attend an EarthSave meeting in your area ([li.earthsave.org](http://li.earthsave.org)). Three groups, one in the Melville area, one in Riverhead and one in Manhattan, each hold an informative monthly lecture series. Just remember, whatever your choice is—have fun and enjoy. And if you are still wondering what to have for breakfast, fruit smoothies are a great choice!