



Vegetarian Nutrition

a dietetic practice group of the
Academy of Nutrition
and Dietetics



Experts in Plant-Based Nutrition

RDN Resources for Consumers:

Plant-Based Diets to Combat Climate Change and Protect Planetary Health

Overview

Food comes from the Earth and should contribute to a healthy body while giving back to the natural processes of the Earth. However, modern food systems and food choices have contributed to the degradation of the Earth's natural processes while negatively impacting human health by contributing to chronic diseases such as obesity and diabetes. Because the health of the natural environment is critically important for human health, scientists use the term **planetary health** to recognize that we must create the healthiest outcomes for *both* human health and planet Earth, as they cannot be separated. Planetary health is human health *plus* the health of planet Earth.

The global mass production and consumption of livestock (including meats such as beef, lamb, goats, etc.) have contributed to greenhouse gas emissions and environmental degradation that are associated with changes in the climate and warmer mean global temperatures.³⁻⁹ This in part has fueled extreme weather events such as uncontrollable wildfires, flooding, and cyclones.¹⁰⁻¹¹ The rate and impact of climate change and global warming has outpaced the scientific projections while the past decade was the warmest on record.^{9,12} Climate change also impacts food security and the nutrients available in our foods.⁴ In order to keep global warming and climate change in check, we need to swiftly reduce greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2030 and ensure that greenhouse gas emissions are completely balanced by 2050.¹² Thus, we need to work together to help reduce pressures on the planet so to help create stability for all us. The good news is that

the foods we eat can help combat climate change and environmental destruction. Choosing to eat variety of unprocessed whole plant foods such as grains, beans, fruits, vegetables, nuts, and seeds is a key strategy.

Plant-Based Diets: A Tasty Way to Combat Climate Change and Improve Health

An important and timely scientific report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) strongly encourages consumers to demand and eat a well-balanced, plant-based diet that would not only offer impressive benefits to human health but would also protect the Earth while ensuring that more people have healthy foods to eat. Additionally, The EAT-Lancet Commission encouraged the public to decrease eating meat by at least 50% while increasing the consumption of healthy, whole plant foods by 100% to protect the Earth *and* combat chronic diseases. More specifically, our plate/our daily food intake should include a wide array of fruits and vegetables, plant proteins (soymilk, tempeh, edamame, tofu, broad beans/fava beans, kidney beans, chickpeas, black-eyed peas, yellow split peas, all types of lentils—green, red, orange, brown, etc.), whole grains (wild rice, steel-cut oats, quinoa, amaranth, wheat berries, millet, sorghum, teff, etc.), and small amounts of healthy oils (olive oil, canola oil, etc.).¹³ While any and all efforts to shift towards a plant-based diet are important for personal and planetary health, a comprehensive analysis of studies has shown that overall, completely plant-based diets have the greatest impact on conserving water and land as well as combatting greenhouse gas emissions.¹⁴

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In summary, shifting our taste buds to include delicious, whole plant foods as the mainstay of our diets is necessary to meet climate stabilization goals—all while improving planetary health.

Create Delicious, Plant-Based Meals Where the Possibilities are Endless:

Breakfast:

Savory grits with sautéed greens (hot) | Apple cardamom overnight oats (cold) | Southwest tofu burrito bowl | Persimmon & spinach chia seed smoothie

Holidays:

Roasted squash with pomegranate and pistachios | Colorful cabbage salad | Mashed parsnips with shitake mushroom sauce and greens | Black-eyed pea fritters | Nutty lentil loaf | Sweet potato crisp | Rainbow carrot salad | Pecan soup | Three sisters (beans, corn, squash) casserole

International Dishes:

Tempeh Italiano | Jackfruit enchiladas | West African peanut stew | Lebanese fowl moudammas (fava beans) | Palak tofu (India) | Peach gazpacho | Heart of palm ceviche | Thai green papaya salad | Ginger fusion raw zoodle bowl | Creamy French lentils

Game Day:

Black bean sliders | Roasted cauliflower bites | Cowboy “caviar” | Hazelnut hummus

Celebrate Plant-Based Diets Throughout the Year:

- Ethical Eating Day (January 11)
- Earth Day (April 22)
- International Day for Biological Diversity (May 22)

Lead by Example:

1. Get in the kitchen and cook from scratch and show off your homemade plant-based lunches at work; bring a plant-based dish to the potluck—and share the recipe!
2. Create or join a “green team” and promote plant-based diets as a solution

3. Prevent food waste | minimize or eliminate food packaging | engage in “zero waste” principles.
4. Compost plant-based food scraps for healthy soils | use veggie scraps to make vegetable stock.
5. Grow organic, regional produce—from small scale projects such as container gardening to larger projects such as food forests. Save your seeds. Take a food preservation classes in your community—or a basic veggie garden class.
6. When dining out, select the plant-powered dish:

NEW FOR WINTER! **TRY SPICED RED LENTILS!**

- Packed with protein, fiber, iron, and health-enhancing phytochemicals
- Super Low Carbon Footprint 🌍
- Choose instead of beef, pork, or chicken

Greenhouse Gas Emissions per 4 oz. Serving

Food Item	Greenhouse Gas Emissions (grams CO ₂)
LENTILS	88
BEEF	2000

Data source: Heller & Frickson (2014)

For more information, please refer to the UCLA Dining site.

Graphic courtesy of University of California Los Angeles Dining Services

Additional Resources:

Global Footprint Network Ecological Footprint Calculator:
<https://www.footprintcalculator.org>

Growing Food and Saving Seeds, Native Seed/SEARCH:
<http://www.nativeseeds.org>

For more ideas and resources, visit www.vndpg.org and www.vegetariannutrition.net.