

Nurses adopt plant-based vegan diet for 21 days and lose weight

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Joanne Evans, M.Ed., R.N., P.M.H.C.N.S.-B.C., provided a presentation to colleagues at George Mason University in Fairfax, Va., about the health benefits of adopting a plant-based vegan diet and soon had 19 nurses eager to test out the science firsthand.

After 21 days, 74 percent of the nurses, 14 out of 19, in this self-reported plant-based dietary review lowered their cholesterol, with a mean average of 18 mg/dL, while six lowered their cholesterol by 45 to 60 mg/dL; more than half, 10, lost weight, with an average weight loss of 4.4 pounds, with a range of 1.5 to 9 pounds; 30 percent, six, reported gains in energy; and 41 percent, eight, reported feeling highly satisfied with their health, compared to one nurse who reported this before the dietary modification. After the program concluded, the nurses reported an uptick in fruit and vegetable consumption, while meat and dairy consumption fell. The findings appear in the March 2017 issue of the [American Journal of Nursing](#).

"Large bodies of research show a plant-based vegan diet boosts weight loss, lowers blood pressure, improves cholesterol, and stabilizes blood sugar," says Neal Barnard, M.D., F.A.C.C., creator of the 21-Day Vegan Kickstart, president of the nonprofit Physicians Committee, and an adjunct associate professor of medicine at the George Washington University School of Medicine and Health Sciences. "We now have preliminary evidence that this way of eating boosts energy, too. The secret is to stick with the prescription since the [health benefits](#) last as long as you're putting the dietary principles into practice. A plant-based

vegan diet is not a fad diet, but a new approach to eating, a new approach to health, and a new approach to life."

A review about vegetarian and vegan diets in the Dec. 2016 issue of the [Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics](#) finds a plant-based vegan diet reduces the risk of type 2 diabetes by 62 percent, the risk of death or a hospitalization from a heart attack by one-third, or 32 percent, and the risk of developing all forms of cancer by 18 percent.

Plant-based eating patterns continue to gain traction among cultural influencers, from former president Bill Clinton's adoption of a vegan diet to improve his heart health in 2010 to Beyoncé's debut of her newfound approach to weight loss in 2013 and New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady releasing his plant-based secrets, shortly after a Super Bowl victory, in a New York Times magazine feature in 2015. Serena and Venus Williams applaud this dietary approach for its anti-inflammatory benefits. They competed together at the U.S. Open earlier this year.

Similar to today's top athletes and cultural influencers, the nurses in this study have the ability to influence a larger audience—their patients and nursing students.

"A plant-based diet provides a healthful template for all patients, but what I find works best is personalizing the approach," says Evans, the lead review author and a clinical research specialist. "We miss the point when we give generic advice and suggestions. I recommend clinicians do a nutritional assessment, learn what the patient eats on a daily basis, find out their food preferences, discover their challenges, and create personalized solutions."

The nurses in the program achieved metabolic benefits without counting calories, measuring portion sizes, or adhering to strict rules. They

received support through weekly webinars with Evans, who answered questions about day-to-day challenges, provided advice about nutrient intake and cooking procedures, and offered feedback about how to integrate options for family and friends into every meal.

Participants also received daily support from the 21-Day Vegan Kickstart program, a free online meal-planning program that goes live the first day of each month and provides participants with dietitian-created meal plans, grocery shopping lists, inspirational tips, videos of cooking demos and grocery store tours, and interactive tools, including a free iPhone app.

To sign up for the April 1 program, visit 21DayKickstart.org. The program is available in English and Spanish, with international recipes designed to appeal to a variety of palates. Sample entrées include steel-cut oatmeal breakfast bowls with berries for breakfast, Mediterranean-inspired chickpea salad rolls for lunch, edamame, pears, and bell peppers as heart-healthy snacks, and leafy greens with Costa Rican Beans for dinner.

More information: Joanne Evans et al, A Plant-Based Nutrition Program, *AJN, American Journal of Nursing* (2017). [DOI: 10.1097/01.NAJ.0000513289.14377.0f](https://doi.org/10.1097/01.NAJ.0000513289.14377.0f)

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