

Essential Vegan Weight Loss Guide

I approach the topic of healthy eating from the **viewpoint that we don't need to count calories or worry too much about portion size, as long as we are eating the right foods and listening to our bodies, and not attempting fad diets.** This is certainly not something I made up on my own or that only I follow. In fact, for many of you, this will likely be old news.

For others though, this philosophy might sound crazy for a few reasons:

1. For years we've all been taught that you have to be very **mindful of how many calories** we are putting in and burning off of our bodies or we will never lose weight.
2. We've been taught that the best way to lose weight is to **control our portions according to specific dietary requirements.** We've heard about thousands of people losing huge amounts of weight by following diets like this. Even though we've also heard about people gaining all that weight back, we listen more to the inspirational side.
3. **"Eating the right foods"** is simpler than it sounds. Any whole foods from the plant world qualify, and the more variety, the better. The best way to accomplish eating good variety is to try to [eat every color of the rainbow](#), every day. Focus on vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and beans, and add in some nuts and seeds. Use processed foods only as last resorts and only occasionally.
4. **"Listening to our bodies"** can sound a little wacky too. Everyone who's ever lost weight and kept it off for life will tell you that they now know how to tell when they are hungry (truly hungry, not emotionally hungry), and are able to tell when they are done eating. In [Food for Life](#), Dr. Neal Barnard talks about this concept openly. You can tell a difference in your body when you are truly hungry. Your blood sugar level plummets, you get a headache, you might feel dizzy, and you *know* you are hungry.

Maybe what we've been taught for the past 20 years isn't actually what's best for our bodies. Let's dive into those concepts and evaluate them in this vegan weight loss guide.

On counting calories...

While it is true that the body needs to burn more calories than it takes, it's generally a waste of time to count calories, and it tends to be counter-productive. If you focus on the other rules, you will lose weight and won't have to worry about calories.

A calorie counter might look at an incredibly healthy tablespoon of flax seeds, see 50 calories and 5 grams of fat, and decide not to eat it because they are trying to be to afford to eat a great piece of vegan pie later that night. That's the wrong philosophy. The flax seeds are also incredibly high in essential nutrients for a vegan diet.

Counting calories causes your brain to wage a battle that keeps you focused more on "losing weight" than on eating healthy foods. It's more of a "diet mentality" than a "life change mentality." It makes eating so emotional and allows guilt to enter the food plane, where I don't believe it should belong. Eating is about satisfying basic human needs, and we've allowed fad diet philosophy to control our

brains rather than enjoying food for what it is, good-tasting fuel.

Additionally, in many Asian cultures for thousands of years, people have been eating far more calories than Westerners. Why are Asians typically so skinny? [The China Study](#) concludes that their diet, based on plant products like rice and grains, soy protein, vegetables, and very few animal products, has helped them maintain low body weights and low risks for critical illnesses.

On portion control...

Portion control is important to the extent that if you are eating massive amounts of food, you are not going to lose weight. However, it goes hand in hand with the rules of eating the right foods and listening to your body. Your body will tell you the correct portions to eat, so you don't need someone to measure it out for you.

For guidance on how much you should be eating, check out the [vegan food pyramid](#). At first glance, it can seem intimidating. For instance, how can one person eat 6-11 servings of whole grains each day? But, it's much easier than you think to get all of that food in your body. You can even keep track of the food you eat to ensure that it lines up with the amounts suggested in the food guide pyramid. Once you have a fundamental understanding of what you need to be eating, you won't need to use it all the time to ensure you get the correct amount of nutrients.

On eating the right foods...

Even vegan food has a world of junk that simply isn't going to help you lose weight. Yes, it's cholesterol-free (cholesterol only comes from animals), and yes, it might not actually make you fatter (although it might), but no, it's not health food.

Just like with animal-filled foods, you should stay away from [vegan junk food](#) if you are trying to lose weight. By all means, once you have hit the weight you want, you can add it in as you like. Along the journey, if you feel like having a vegan cookie, you should have a vegan cookie. Just don't expect to lose weight if you are going to replace all your normal junk food with vegan junk and processed food.

Some people get confused by the term "processed." Just think of it this way-- your grocery trip should be focused on the produce section, not the frozen food aisles, the canned food aisles, or the boxed food aisles. Almost everything you need can be found there.

For your [beans](#), the healthiest way to get them is by rehydrating and cooking dried beans. You can find a plethora of beans in the bulk aisles of Whole Foods and other health food stores. If you really don't have time to cook beans, canned beans will work fine. Be sure to rinse the liquid off them before using as it's generally full of sodium and liquid that our bodies don't enjoy digesting (you will get gas!)

[Whole grains](#) can also be found in bulk and are usually much cheaper than the boxed version. When you are just starting out, it might make sense to buy boxed grains like quinoa, millet, bulgar, etc. so you can see how it's cooked. The most economical way to get them is through bulk bins.

[Seeds and nuts](#) are also available in bulk or in boxes. Keep in mind that many nuts and seeds are filled with oil that spoils easily, so it's a smart idea to keep them in the refrigerator or freezer until you need them.

On listening to your body...

Your stomach sends sensors to your brain to let you know when it is hungry and when it is full. One thing to keep in mind is that there is a lag time in between, usually about 15 minutes. So, if you stuff yourself really quickly, you will be in for a world of hurt. Take your time eating and enjoy it.

Listen for cues that you are finished, and hear them. When you're done, you're done.

Your body will also learn to tell you when it has a need for some kind of food. Ever crave a grapefruit? Do you sometimes, seemingly inexplicably, really want to eat tomato sauce? This is your body telling you it's lacking in some nutrient and asking you to eat the food filled with that nutrient.

Another thing to listen for is how you feel when you eat certain foods. Recently, after I eat potato chips, I can feel them sliding around in my stomach. I feel heavy and greasy. This is a bittersweet revelation for me because I really enjoy the flavor of many potato chips, but my body does not.

Additional tips for losing weight on a vegan diet

1. Learn to cook

Not long ago, cooking was taboo and left to the domestic goddesses of the world. Luckily, there has been a resurgence of the coolness of cooking. I attribute that to worldwide man-crushes on Bobby Flay, parents trying to make 30-minute meals, and to women wanting to look as hot as Giada de Laurentiis while making a killer lasagna.

Cooking frees you in ways that are hard to imagine when you are just a take-out or restaurant king or queen. A common question in our house is, "What do you want to eat tonight?" With the number of excellent [recipe websites](#) out there, you can literally make anything you want in the world on any given night. Most vegan cooks I know are far more inventive and open-minded about food than most standard cooks.

Even if you are intensely busy as many are nowadays, you can select one day and cook for the week. Make huge pots of great soups, grain dishes, beans, and vegetables, and divvy them into individual serving containers for later in the week. Cut up fruits or buy just enough to take a few each day.

2. Drink plenty of water

[Water: For Health, for Healing, for Life: You're Not Sick, You're Thirsty!](#) is an amazing book about how many illnesses can be controlled, cured, and even prevented simply by drinking more water. That goes for allergies, headaches, rashes, morning sickness, menopausal symptoms, premenstrual symptoms, and much more. By the time we feel thirsty, we are dehydrated, so we need to drink water even when we don't feel we need it. Additionally, as we age, we have less "thirst" and more dehydration.

Almost everyone has heard that they need to drink eight 8-ounce glasses of water daily to maintain optimum health. And most people will also say that they drink "a lot of water." I am willing to bet that

most who think they do are still not drinking enough. The best way to tell for sure is to measure it out in a measuring cup and then count how many cups you drink in a given day. It might fall short.

Water is essential for helping fiber to make its way through your body, and the more of it you eat, the more water you will need to help things move along smoothly. Make sure you drink enough.

3. Trust yourself

Your body will drop the weight it needs to drop, if you are eating the right foods, getting enough exercise, drinking plenty of water, and listening to yourself.

You have to trust that eating is not about having enough will power, or about tricking yourself into eating well. While at first you might not enjoy eating healthier foods, you will adapt to them and start to enjoy them. Soon enough, you will crave healthier foods and stop wanting to eat junk. But, you have to trust in that process and in yourself.

Food is just food, and you need to find a way to separate food from emotions. Not that you should stop enjoying food, but you can't eat to fill a void. It will never fill, and you will feel terrible. If you truly have a void, you need to seek outside help from a therapist.

4. Get enough exercise

Diet alone may make some huge changes in your body and can even make you thin, but to be truly in shape, you will need to exercise. The amount and type of exercise depends on your preferences, but make sure you get your heart pumping every day. Even walking makes a huge difference in your health, and if you can get in three 15-minute walks every day, you will be well on track to helping your body lose extra weight. As you gain strength and endurance, you can increase it by adding other cardiovascular workouts and strength training.

5. Teach yourself how to plan meals

There are many books out there dedicated to giving great examples of meal plans that you might consider reading. Once you have a general idea of what makes for a well-balanced meal, it's much easier to design your own.

Here are some great books for meal plans:

- [Food for Life: How the New Four Food Groups Can Save Your Life](#)
- [Vegan Handbook: Over 200 Delicious Recipes, Meal Plans, and Vegetarian Resources for All Ages](#)
- [Low-cost vegan meal plans.: An article from: Vegetarian Journal](#)

To summarize...

Remember that fad diets are unlikely to work in the long run, whereas a life-style change will work. You will lose the extra weight you have if you follow the concept of eating as much as you want of the right foods, while listening to your body, getting enough exercise, and controlling stress.

Even the concept of “vegan weight loss” has now developed a following and has garnered the status of the latest and greatest diets. Most vegans I know are not vegans simply for their own health. They are looking at the greater good of the population, and understanding also that they can improve their health. If you are thinking of becoming a vegan, it will help you to [understand veganism](#) in greater depth than simply for health benefits. Otherwise it's just another diet and I can guarantee it's not going to work forever. Tie yourself into a greater cause.

People who only have a few extra pounds hanging around their bodies and who hardly try to lose weight might find great results simply from cutting out animal products. Others might have a harder road to follow with more concerted efforts to eat the right foods. Either way, becoming a vegan is a great way to lose weight, improve your health, and do your part for the environment, the economy, and for the animals who can't speak for themselves.

To read more in shorter examples of a vegan weight loss guide, check out these pages on the Vegan Nutritionista site:

<http://www.vegan-nutritionista.com/vegan-weight-loss.html> and <http://www.vegan-nutritionista.com/vegan-weight-loss-diet.html>.

If you have an inspiring vegan weight loss story, please think about [sharing it with our readers](#), as you never know who you can touch with your personal story. There are so many people in the world struggling with their weight, and sometimes all they need is to know others were in their shoes and made it out of them.