

Plant-based diet: A fad diet or a forever diet?

With all these diets out there – Atkins, Apple Cider vinegar, Paleo, Whole30 – how do you know which are fads and which can deliver lasting health? While many of these diets provide short-term results, they do not provide sustained long-term health. This begs the question, can a plant-based diet be a long term solution for healthy living?

About one year ago, I went to a lecture on the importance of a plant-based diet for cardiovascular health. The keynote speaker was a bariatric surgeon by the name of Dr. Garth Davis. Dr. Davis shocked those in attendance that day with an overwhelming amount of evidence for the correlation between animal based products and heart disease. I was curious about his proposal for mankind and felt inspired to research the topic of heart disease prevention myself. Over the past year I have come to the realization that many will not agree with, but I feel must still be heard.

To assess whether or not a plant-based diet is a fad diet, we must first dissect what a fad diet actually is. According to the University of Pittsburgh Medical College, a fad diet is “A weight-reduction diet that either eliminates at least one essential nutrient from the diet, or recommends consumption of one type of food in excess at the expense of other foods.”¹.

The Atkins diet is a fad diet according to the above definition as it recommends consumption of protein and fat in excess at the expense of carbohydrates like whole grains, fruit, and vegetables². The Paleo diet, is also a fad diet as it encourages cutting wheat, whole grains, and legumes out of your diet which have all been proven by extensive research to be beneficial for the body^{3, 4}. Furthermore, neither of these diets have been proven by accredited research to be beneficial to the body when being implemented long term.

A strict plant-based diet is a diet rich in whole foods including vegetables, fruit, legumes, nuts/seeds, and whole grains. This diet excludes all forms of animal proteins, yes that means glorious cheese as well, and has been proven by multiple peer reviewed sources to drastically reduce the risk for heart disease^{5, 6}.

A common misconception is that those on a plant based diet will not be able to obtain sufficient protein, iron, Vitamin B12 and Vitamin D, fish oils, and Calcium. According to Dr. Davis's book, Proteinaholic, which has over 700 peer reviewed references, you can get more than enough protein, calcium, and iron from a plant based diet^{2, 7}. Furthermore, for those who live in temperate climates, orange juice or soy milk has just as much fortified Vitamin D that dairy products have. So, Vitamin B12 and DHA (an omega 3 fatty acid that is crucial for the brain) are the only essential nutrients that should be supplemented with a strict plant-based diet.

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If you don't think you can completely cut animal products from your diet, you can still have your favorite animal protein on occasion. This way, you will not necessarily need to take Vitamin B12 and DHA supplements depending on how frequently you eat fish or meat and will still get most of the same benefits that you would from a strict plant-based diet.

Based on the definition and the evidence stated above, a plant-based diet is not a fad diet. I truly believe that this diet has the potential to impact the human race in a positive and preventative way. Please consult a registered dietician or physician before considering any diet, especially if you have dietary restrictions.

Sources

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Nick Falkiewicz grew up in Brighton, Michigan, and now resides in Ann Arbor. Nick has a bachelor's of science degree in Nutritional Sciences from Michigan State University and is currently in his second year of his master's program in the School of Public Health at the University of Michigan where he is also perusing a Dietetics certification. He attended Ave Maria University, located in Naples, FL, where he was a student athlete football player for two years before transferring to Michigan State University. Most of Nick's experience has been with research on cardiovascular disease in the United States and actively teaching heart health to 5th grade children in Lansing through the (S)partners for Heart Health program. (S)partners for Heart Health teaches the importance of physical activity and nutrition along with a focus on helping them set goals in order to meet their physical activity and nutritional recommendations each day. Nick spent most of this past summer in Grand Rapids where he was a wellness specialist for a corporate wellness consulting agency. He also has experience with one of the biggest health clubs in Michigan, the Michigan Athletic Club, as a floor manager and as fitness personal. Nick has been part of numerous volunteer organizations including Camp Kesem, Burchum Hills Retirement Community, Cooking Matters, and cooking meals at homeless shelters. Nick's leisure activities include golf, paddle boarding, working out, bowling, cooking, and enjoying the sweet outdoors any way possible.

