



WESTERN NEUROPATHY ASSOCIATION

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LESS NEUROPATHY PAIN WITH PLANTS Lynn Carpenter, Edmonds, WA

I was skeptical, but I figured I had nothing to lose when I switched over to a totally new way of eating earlier this year. My friend showed me her book, *How Not To Die*, by Michael Greger, M.D., in which there were just two pages where he talked about curing diabetic neuropathy with a plant-based diet. I don't have diabetes; however, my mother had it, so I'm probably pre-diabetic.

I haven't ever had much pain during the day, even as the neuropathy symptoms of numbness increased from my toes up my legs, since I was diagnosed in 1990. It was at night that I suffered really sharp, electric shock-type pains along with spasms in my feet and legs over the last couple of years. Sometimes I had these pains in my hands and wrists, as well. It made getting to sleep very difficult and I found myself relying on more Tylenol PM and Magnesium than I wanted to.

After reading Dr. Greger's book, in which he shows that one can cure neuropathy with this new way of eating, I switched my diet away from meats and dairy—going for the hoped-for results as fast as I could. I started shopping at stores that offered more vegan options—although even my grocery store carries a few of them. I got some cookbooks from the library and made lots of new stir-fry meals and soups.

And, EUREKA, it has worked! I can honestly report that on most nights I have no pain at all as I try to fall asleep. The amazing part is that this reversal happened within 5 days of my changing to an all plant-based meal plan. I started doing this in June and on July 4th I went to a family dinner where I ate several things that I knew I shouldn't have - eggs in the potato salad, a custard dessert and even some cheese. And, wow, did I pay for it with recurring pain for the next 2 nights!

Now, I still have occasional "restless legs," but just as an annoyance as I am trying to fall asleep, not as an excruciatingly painful event. And once in a while, when I do experience some pain, I realize that it might be from a meal that had something in it that I didn't catch. I highly recommend trying a vegan diet to cure your own painful symptoms of neuropathy.

WHAT IS A PLANT-BASED DIET? Harvard Health Blog¹

Plant-based or plant-forward eating patterns focus on foods primarily from plants. This includes not only fruits and vegetables, but also nuts, seeds, oils, whole grains, legumes, and beans. It doesn't mean that you are vegetarian or vegan and never eat meat or dairy. Rather, you are proportionately choosing more of your foods from plant sources.

Mediterranean and vegetarian diets

What is the evidence that plant-based eating patterns are healthy? Much nutrition research has examined plant-based eating patterns such as the Mediterranean diet and a vegetarian diet. The Mediterranean diet has a foundation of plant-based foods; it also includes fish, poultry, eggs, cheese, and yogurt a few times a week, with meats and sweets less often.

The Mediterranean diet has been shown in both large population studies and randomized clinical trials to reduce risk of heart disease, metabolic syndrome, diabetes, certain cancers (specifically colon, breast, and

prostate cancer), depression, and in older adults, a decreased risk of frailty, along with better mental and physical function.

Vegetarian diets have also been shown to support health, including a lower risk of developing coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and increased longevity.

Plant-based diets offer all the necessary protein, fats, carbohydrates, vitamins, and minerals for optimal health, and are often higher in fiber and phytonutrients. However, some vegans may need to add a supplement (specifically vitamin B₁₂) to ensure they receive all the nutrients required.

8 ways to get started with a plant-based diet

1. Eat lots of vegetables. Fill half your plate with vegetables at lunch and dinner. Make sure you include plenty of colors in choosing your vegetables. Enjoy vegetables as a snack with hummus, salsa, or guacamole.
2. Change the way you think about meat. Have smaller amounts. Use it as a garnish instead of a centerpiece.
3. Choose good fats. Fats in olive oil, olives, nuts and nut butters, seeds, and avocados are particularly healthy choices.
4. Cook a vegetarian meal at least one night a week. Build these meals around beans, whole grains, and vegetables.
5. Include whole grains for breakfast. Start with oatmeal, quinoa, buckwheat, or barley. Then add some nuts or seeds along with fresh fruit.
6. Go for greens. Try a variety of green leafy vegetables such as kale, collards, Swiss chard, spinach, and other greens each day. Steam, grill, braise, or stir-fry to preserve their flavor and nutrients.
7. Build a meal around a salad. Fill a bowl with salad greens such as romaine, spinach, Bibb, or red leafy greens. Add an assortment of other vegetables along with fresh herbs, beans, peas, or tofu.
8. Eat fruit for dessert. A ripe, juicy peach, a refreshing slice of watermelon, or a crisp apple will satisfy your craving for a sweet bite after a meal.

Reference

K.D McManus, MS, RD, LDN; What is a plant-based diet and why should you try it, Harvard Health Blog, August 31, 2020, retrieved September 17, 2021 from <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/what-is-a-plant-based-diet-and-why-should-you-try-it-2018092614760>