



THE HUMANE SOCIETY  
OF THE UNITED STATES

# Health benefits of plant-based foods

Consumers are increasingly becoming interested in healthy, plant-based foods. Are you keeping up with the demand?



PHOTO BY: THE HSUS

[The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics](#) believe that appropriately planned vegetarian and vegan diets are healthful, nutritionally adequate, and may provide health benefits for the prevention and treatment of certain diseases. They also view plant-based diets as appropriate for all stages of the life cycle. Plant-based diets have also been shown to prevent or reduce the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, certain types of cancer, and obesity.

A low intake of saturated fat and high intake of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, soy products, nuts, and seeds are characteristics of plant-based diets that result in lower total cholesterol and low-density lipoprotein cholesterol levels and improved serum glucose control. These factors contribute to the overall reduction of chronic disease.

- In the 2015-2020 [Dietary Guidelines](#) for Americans, vegetarian diets are recommended as one of three healthful dietary patterns.
- Offering plant-based options in schools will help meet U.S. Department of Agriculture nutrient standards by providing options that are [low in fat and cholesterol-free](#).
- Schools offering a variety of plant-based options [may help children developing healthful eating habits](#) early in life and reduce the risk for chronic disease later in life.

## How more plant-based options will thrive in your serving lines

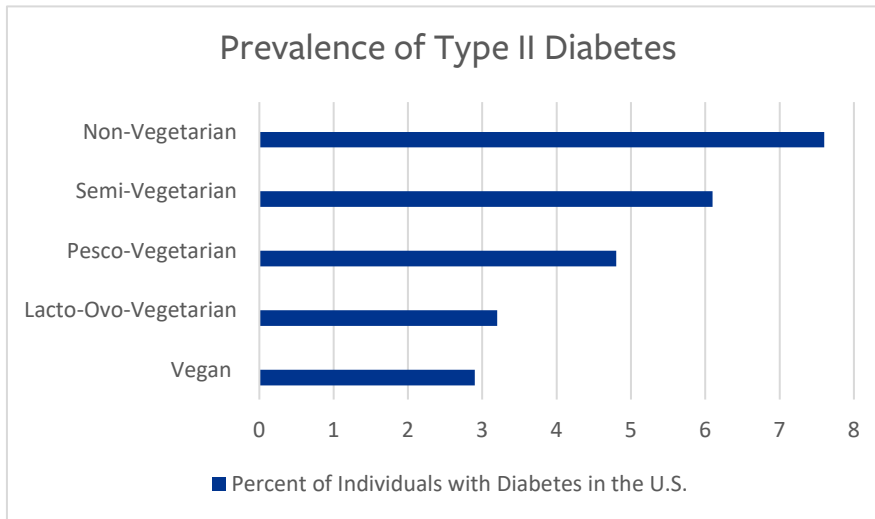
- **USDA nutritional standards:** Students will get their daily requirement of fruits and vegetables and be able to focus more clearly.
- **More variety:** Students will have the option to try new, healthy foods. One NPD survey found that [89% of people eating plant-based foods are not vegan or vegetarian, they just like variety in their diets](#).
- **Creativity:** Chefs can create new recipes and experiment with different ingredients.
- **Accommodating to all students:** Students who are lactose-intolerant, vegan, or vegetarian are sure to get a tasty, nutritious meal.
- **Save money:** Legumes, beans, and whole grains cost less per serving compared to meat. They also have a longer shelf life.

## The demand for healthy, plant-based foods

- A national survey from the Yale Program on Climate Change and the Earth Day Network shows [health as the top influencer in consumers choosing plant-based foods](#).
- In one survey conducted by the International Food Information Council, [45% of respondents believed that plant-based alternatives were healthier](#) than their animal-based counterpart.
- An NPD survey found that [20% of people use the foods and drinks they consume to help manage a health condition](#).
- Overall [health-related benefits are a primary driver](#) for choosing plant-based foods.

## Diabetes

- The [Adventist Health Studies](#) found vegetarians have half the risk of developing diabetes compared to nonvegetarians.
- Adherence to the healthful plant-based dietary index results in a [34% lower risk of developing diabetes](#).
- Substituting 5% of energy intake from animal protein with vegetable protein was associated with a [23% reduced risk of type 2 diabetes](#).
- [Prevalence of type 2 diabetes:](#)



## Heart disease

- In [an analysis](#) using 5 prospective studies, vegetarians had a 24% reduction in ischemic heart disease death rates compared to nonvegetarians.

## Cancer

- [The World Cancer Research Fund and the American Institute for Cancer Research](#) recommend eating mostly foods of plant origin and avoiding all processed meats and limiting intake of red meats for cancer prevention.

## Brain health

- Saturated and trans fats found in dairy products, meats, pastries, and fried foods can [increase the risk for cognitive decline](#).



PHOTO BY: AMANDA TRENCHARD/HSUS

## Common misconceptions about plant-based diets

- **You can't get enough protein on a plant-based diet:** Many plant foods are rich sources of protein including lentils, beans, tofu, edamame and nuts.
- **You'll lose muscle on a plant-based diet:** Increases in muscle mass and strength are associated with any protein source, not just animal-based protein sources.
- **You'll be hungry on a plant-based diet:** Plant-based foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes are rich in fiber allowing you to feel full longer.
- **A plant-based diet doesn't supply enough vitamins and minerals:** Plants are the most nutrient-dense foods we can eat. For example, leafy greens, broccoli and tofu are rich in calcium.
- **A plant-based diet is expensive:** Plant-based diets include lots of legumes, beans, and whole grains which are often cheaper per number of calories than meat and fish.

Find out more information by visiting [forwardfood.org](http://forwardfood.org).



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