

How to Eat Like a Vegan King

Written by Joanna Brathwaite

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Veganism is the new trending cuisine. Whether you have chosen to go au natural for health reasons or animal rights, you don't have to skimp on the "good stuff." Eating vegan foods can be just as tasty, satisfying, and delectable. With help from Executive Chef Michael Stebner of True Food Kitchen, Certified Holistic Nutritionist Kirstin Carey of Nourish, and Certified Personal Trainer Anthony DiNobile of All In Fitness & Wellness, you and your family can eat like vegan royalty.



AFM: What are two of your favorite vegan dishes?

MS: I love the Kale Crunch salad from True Food Kitchen. It's a combination of kale, cabbage and watercress tossed with grapefruit, avocado and radishes in a chili garlic dressing. I also love the Tofu Scramble Wrap from the brunch menu. We add nutritional yeast flakes to very firm tofu, which really gives it a nice egg flavor. Then we season a mixture of soy chorizo, peppers, onions with chili and cumin to give it a little kick and some great flavor. This is a dish that mimics a traditional breakfast burrito, but without the meat or cheese. I feel great after eating it – unlike the way I feel after eating a traditional breakfast burrito.

KC: Sweet Potato and Avocado Salad – roasted sweet potatoes, avocados, tossed in an Asian dressing. Raw Veggie Pasta with Pesto – spiralized butternut squash, beets, sweet potato, zucchini, and carrots tossed in pesto.

AD: Tofu Salsa – organic/sprouted tofu, organic tempeh, organic crushed tomatoes, organic red bell pepper, organic sweet onion, chili powder. I love how the tofu and tempeh absorb the flavors of these ingredients. Being a bodybuilder, the high, complete protein content is appealing to me. Smoothie – raw protein powder, chia, sprulina, cinnamon, organic spinach, organic banana, vanilla, stevia. This is so refreshing and sprulina not only has the highest protein content by weight on the planet, it's very high in chlorophyll which filters the blood.

AFM: Why is eating vegan better for you?

MS: Vegan food is generally lower in saturated fat and if you do it right, you can easily get your recommended daily intake of fruits and vegetables.

KC: Simply eating foods without animal proteins isn't necessarily better for you. French fries and tomato pie are vegan – but they're not clean foods. Eating clean vegan can be an incredibly healthy way to eat, as it relies so heavily on plant-based, whole foods – which support the immune system, increases alkalinity, and decreases the opportunity for illness.

AD: In my opinion, and most people agree, when you eat animal products, the body has to work harder to process and digest them than when eating plants. So now the body can take that extra energy and focus it on repair, recovery and replenishment.

AFM: How can people slowly transition from a meat-eating or vegetarian lifestyle to a vegan one?

MS: Try starting off with "meatless Mondays," or eat at vegan-friendly restaurants. You can also eat seasonally inspired produce from your local farm or farmers' market – when you start with great ingredients you may find that you don't need to add meat or cheese.

KC: Adding in one meal a day that is clean vegan is an easy way to transition. Smoothies are a great way to start, then adding in more plant-based meals over time.

AC: Experiment and find out what 'meat' alternatives you might like. Tofu, tempeh, seitan (if gluten is not an issue), chicken-free strips are good starters and begin working them in and animal proteins out.

AFM: Where are some of the best produce markets in the Valley?

MS: Town & Country Farmers Market in Phoenix on Wednesdays, Scottsdale Old Town Farmer's Market on Saturdays, and Singh Farms in Scottsdale on Saturdays.

KC: Farm Box by Sunizona Farms is a fabulous resource as all of their produce is veganically grown (totally organic and no animal products used in the growing process).

AC: Sprouts and Whole Foods.

AFM: What about vegan foods/products do you like the most?

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MS: What I love the most is how good I feel when I leave out the meat and cheese for a few meals. You have to remember that just because its vegan, it doesn't mean it's good for you. Try to eat whole soy foods with a lot of fruits and vegetables and stay away from highly processed vegan foods with soy isolate and other vegan fillers.

KC: I'm not a fan of "vegan products" as they usually contain a lot of "nonsense" like preservatives or processed foods. So I generally lean into raw vegan products such as Go Raw or Hail Merry products.

AC: How little I have to cook now. Before, I used to cook literally 10 pounds of chicken, three dozen eggs, two pound of fish and several sweet potatoes for the week. Now I cook a batch of tofu salsa.

AFM: How can home cooks transform typical foods like pasta, burgers, and seafood into a vegan delight?

MS: I like to look at it like I look at eating in general; start with high-quality ingredients, prepare them simply, leave out the meat and cheese and let the other ingredients stand out. Great quality dry pasta tossed with fresh peas, asparagus, green garlic, lemon zest and organic EVOO is a great dish. I also love falafel burgers and quinoa tacos.

KC: Since pasta is a processed food, I don't recommend it to anyone even if it's vegan. I would recommend shifting to veggie pasta – literally made from the whole vegetable such as zucchini and spiralized into pastalike string. We also make a vegan protein burger at Nourish that isn't processed and includes no soy. It is made up of nuts, beans, quinoa, spaghetti squash, seeds, and spices. It's amazing!

AC: Substitute some of those foods for things like quinoa, portabella mushroom, and vegan seafood.

AFM: What are some of your favorite restaurants that cater to vegans?

MS: True Food Kitchen, of course. I also love Chef Sara's Raw Vegan Cafe in Carefree and Fox Restaurant Concepts' latest fast-casual restaurant, Flower Child, on 44th and Camelback in Phoenix.

KC: Nourish, Desert Roots in Tempe, and 24 Carrots in Tempe

AC: Desert Roots Kitchen, Herb N' Flavors, Pomegranate Café and Nourish.

For more information on healthy eating, visit www.nourish123.com, www.allinfitnessandwellness.com, and www.truefoodkitchen.com