

# CHANGES THAT MAKE US #NOWINLIFESTYLE



## MY VEGAN VICTORY!

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So what is veganism anyway? According to the Webster's dictionary...

Ok! I promise not to make this article academic (Read: boring). Instead, I will tell you all about my journey from being a regular hamburger/steak/sausage eating human to a bonafide vegan foodie! I 'hope' you are a little intrigued by now!

I became a vegetarian at the age of eight, following one Qurbani Eid. I went to my mother and made a big fat declaration about turning vegetarian. I had prepared an 'Oscar speech' at the face of possible protest from her, but to my surprise (and disappointment), all she said was 'payesh khao' (have some rice pudding!). In retrospect, I cannot help but wonder if it was her generation's version of today's 'murikhaos', but that is another story.

My journey as a vegetarian started off on a festive note, with frequent trips to Dhaba, and Sajna, and ordering multiple dosas. My ego was getting a daily boost for 'doing the right thing' and the



tummy was happy too. Soon the novelty wore off and I started experiencing hunger pangs for a 'specific' brand of dishes — the kind I swore off not even a month ago. I slapped myself a few times (only symbolically) and stuck to my guns. After all, I never went back on my word and my reputation was at stake...I mean stake!

Having my home so close to Star Kabab did not help either. I started humming the song "donna donna," every time the aroma of what was on that grill tried to sway me like a conniving lover who knew exactly what to say after a fight.

Before I knew it, I turned into a vegetarian who still ate meat at least once a week and promised every time that it would be the last. I no longer cooked or brought meat at home, but when I did eat it, I made a point to eat it in public. I dragged my best friend along with me on these forbidden trips.

Somehow, having a witness to the 'crime' made it feel a little less offensive and I felt a little less like a hypocrite. Besides, she was the type of a friend who would help you hide the body if you have committed a murder (oh the pun!), so I knew that I would not be judged. It was the perfect arrangement. Only that it was not...

I felt a deep sense of shame and failure. I was also confused and did not understand why this was happening to me. After all, I knew all there was to know about the cruelty animals had to endure to satisfy our taste buds; I knew how unhealthy it was for me to eat meat

(I felt nauseated every time I ate it); I knew that it was completely unnecessary to kill animals to meet our protein or any other nutritional needs. I thought knowledge was power and that my conviction to the cause and my love for animals were enough to convert me. Why was it not working?

It was simply because — Meat is addictive and I was addicted to it! And just like any other meat lover, my cravings got the better of me, and my head and my heart were handcuffed.

I was still eating other animal products — dairy and eggs, which contain the same hormones, antibiotics, and preservatives as meat, and were equally addictive. It was like quitting cigarettes, but still chewing on tobacco. My body never got a chance to cleanse its withdrawal!

I was not sincere. The decision was taken on an impulse, without proper planning, and probably only to prove a point.

I truly wanted to give up meat, but I was not willing to suffer through the process. I started reading up on addiction in general and started listening to all podcasts and TED talks I could find on the topic. I also watched half a dozen food documentaries including Meat the Truth, Earthlings, Cowspiracy, and Forks Over Knives. I was armed with all the right information and ready to give this another try. By then, I had all my questions on why, how, and what answered.

Eating meat causes suffering, fear, social deprivation, loss of natural environment, loss of liberty, mutilation and illness to more than 70 billion land animals, and an even higher number of sea animals every year. Many animals spend thousands of miles on the road to hell!



Becoming a vegan is the most effective step you can take to end this cruel practice. Each one can save more animals with their diet choice than almost any other way.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared processed meat a 'carcinogen' which increases one's risk of colon or rectal cancer by 18 percent. And it is not just processed meat that puts you at risk. A vast array of studies from leading universities and independent researchers has found that eating chickens, cows, and other animals promotes cancer in many forms. Meat, dairy products, and eggs all contain cholesterol and saturated fat and con-

tribute to the top killers: heart attacks, strokes, diabetes.

In order to make cows grow at an unnaturally fast rate, the cattle industry feeds them pellets full of hormones, and the artificial hormones injected into cows cause health problems in people who eat them. And while organic or hormone-free meat might be a better option, you are also not eliminating your chances of ingesting the naturally-occurring sex hormones present in the animals when they were killed — so when you eat those animals, you are also eating hormones.

Factory farms are breeding grounds for antibiotic-resistant bacteria, also known as 'supergerms'. The antibiotics that we depend on to treat human illnesses are now used to promote growth in animals and to keep them alive in horrific living conditions that would otherwise kill them. Countless new strains of antibiotic-resistant bacteria have developed as a result. Roughly 70 percent of the antibiotics used each year are given to animals that are used for food, meaning if you eat meat, you run a greater risk of making yourself antibiotic-resistant.

Now the question is, can a vegan diet save the world? According to a new report from the United Nations, the answer is 'Yes!' Animal products can cause more damage than [producing] construction minerals such as sand or cement, plastics or metals. Plus, livestock raised for meat consumes a large portion of the world's crops and a lot of freshwater. Currently, agriculture, particularly meat and dairy products account for 70 percent of the world's freshwater consumption. It also accounts for 39 percent of the globe's total land use and 19 percent of its greenhouse gas emissions.



A global shift towards a vegan diet is vital to save the world from hunger, fuel, poverty and the worst impacts of climate change.

Getting rid of a lifelong addiction is not an easy feat. When you choose to go vegan, you must commit to it all the way, plan your meals ahead of time, and stick to it come what may. Please do not succumb to eating only boiled vegetables or salads for your meals. Your body and mind will revolt so badly, that after a few days, you will end up eating a whole cow, washing it down with a few gallons of milkshake, and getting rid of all the plants in your house. Including the plastic ones!

Do not be afraid to go out to eat. No one likes a party pooper. Besides, life's three best outside food are vegan anyway — chotpoti-phuchka-shingara...mic drop!

Plan a weekly menu. Do the groceries accordingly. Subscribe to vegan YouTube channels for recipes and inspiration. Make those meals exciting!

Please be aware, every meal counts. Even if you choose one vegan day every week, your body, the animals, and the planet will thank you for it. However, to really appreciate vegan food, you need to reset your taste buds that have been bombarded with high fat, high salt, and high sugar for decades. To appreciate a salad in all its glory, you cannot eat a hamburger first. Aim to give up all animal products for a certain period of time.

The significance of '40 days' is almost biblical when it comes to adapting any good habit or kicking a bad one to the curb. Try that. If 40 days is too formidable, then try 21 days. Please do not turn this into a 'weight loss' diet. Meat eaters usually lose weight once they become vegan, but if that is your intention, then you will shift your focus and fail. Plant based food have lower calories anyway, but you do need to eat enough to feel satisfied. Once you get the hang of it and are not in the danger of falling off the wagon, then go ahead and plate up a pretentious amount of jeera aloo for dinner by all means. How people do that, I will never know. But hey, your pet, your potato.

Cook/prepare your own food as much as you can. The possibility of vegan cuisine is endless! My favourite hashtag for veganism is #WhatYouEatCanEat! Meaning, you can pretty much veganise any meat dish/dairy/egg dish with little to no change in taste and texture. Black bean burgers, mushroom biriyani, spaghetti with soybean balls, carrot cake with cashew cream cheese, banana chocolate smoothie! You see where I am going with this? #NoDeprivation. I created that hashtag and you are welcome!

Do not talk about it if you do not want to face the fire. If you do, be prepared to be ridiculed and harassed with zero provocation from your end. Believe it or not, meat eaters get obnoxious with vegetarians/vegans a lot more often than vegans do with meat eaters. When attending dawats/weddings, eat at home and then go. If the host asks if you have eaten, then let out a confident, yes! No one notices what others are eating anyway. If it is a small gathering and lying is not an option, then you can always take some food on your plate and move it around like a super model. Those who actually care about you, will slowly

learn and keep vegan options when they invite you to eat with them.

Load up on complex carbohydrates (please do not badmouth carbs — it hurts my feelings!) such as whole grains and vegetables (yes, potatoes too!). Snack on fruits. Eat beans, legumes, mushrooms, nuts and seeds to meet your protein needs. Drink plenty of water! A typical vegan breakfast may consist of a bowl of parched rice or oatmeal with chopped up bananas, coconut milk, and any kind of nuts on top. Paratha is a 'must-have' for me on Fridays. With that, I like aloo dam, begun bhaja, and semolina halua. For a healthier choice, you can opt for chickpea flour omelette, or scrambled tofu with your favourite vegetables mixed in.

I like eating big lunches and my favourite is vegan sushi with our local binni rice and marinated shitake mushrooms! For dinner, I usually choose chapati or rice with a creamy, spicy, protein rich curry. No self-respecting human being should end the day without some type of a dessert!

Have you ever tried a vegan chocolate mousse? No? Scratch the curry. Eat the mousse for dinner.

When eating out, carefully inspect the menu. You are most likely to find multiple things that are vegan on the menu even if they are not labelled as such. Most restaurants are also super cool about veganising any dish. At Indian restaurants, I request the cook to not put 'makhhan' in my 'daalmakhni' or 'gheh' on my vegetable biriyani. Bella Italia now knows not to put any cheese on my pizza ortolona (and you will not even taste any difference!), and pretty much all the Chinese joints will whip up a meat, fish, and egg free chowmein, rice, and stir-fried vegetables if you just ask them nicely.

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One may ask, is vegan food always healthy? Certainly not. But for food to be healthy, it must be vegan first. I have been an 'unhealthy' vegan for three years. I love my daalpuri, my french fries and my cashew butter. But even then, my annual bronchial asthma attacks have completely stopped, my skin problems have vanished, my weight has gone down (still a long way to go, but ahem...), and I almost never fall ill. I know I can do better, and I aspire to be a healthy vegan. If I am given a keema-paratha, a plain paratha that's been fried in refined oil, and a baked paratha with no oil, then the first one is the one I have sworn off for life, the second one is what I will eat on the weekends, and then the third one is what I would eat the rest of the time. If you are a super woman/man, and you want to do right by your own health, your animal friends, and the planet — all at the same time, then become a healthy vegan!

But for now, I will do the chicken dance for you if you become any kind of vegan. I have a feeling that the chickens will want to join in!

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Photo: Sazzad Ibne Sayed, Shahrear Kabir Heemel  
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