

ORGANIC LIVING

Vegetarian for a Week



By Jan Ross,
Staff Writer

I scanned the menu and realized, to my dismay, that they did not offer a vegetarian entrée. The two choices at the restaurant I had selected for lunch with my girlfriends included chicken salad or salmon.

Neither of those would do. I was a vegetarian now. At least, I was a vegetarian for a week – one week, just as an experiment to see if it could help with weight loss and a healthier lifestyle. But what was I going to eat for lunch? That was not a problem, I realized as soon as I inquired. They could prepare spinach ravioli for vegetarians – an option that actually sounded more appealing than the other two choices. They were easily accommodating and I began to discover that, with a little work and planning, vegetarians could eat easily, healthily and have just as delicious choices as we omnivores.

When I informed a friend that I was becoming a vegetarian for a week, she asked whether I meant vegetarian or vegan. My response was that I wasn't exactly sure how they were different. After a little research, I learned that vegetarianism is a way of eating that follows a plant-based diet which includes fruits, vegetables, cereal grains, nuts and seeds. A vegetarian diet may also include dairy products and eggs, depending on personal choice. Vegetarians do not eat meat, although a semi-vegetarian might include fish, poultry or some meat on occasion. There's even a pescetarian diet, which includes fish but no other meat. A vegan diet excludes animal products of all kinds, even dairy products, eggs, and honey. Vegans might also avoid using other products derived from animals,

such as leather products or cosmetics derived from animal products. My good friend who is a vegetarian defines her diet as "never eating anything with a face". I was inspired to try the vegetarian lifestyle when I learned that the carefully packaged meat in the grocery doesn't really come from family farms anymore and that most meat is obtained from factory farms. Factory farms are systems of large-scale industrialized and intensive agriculture that is focused on profit with animals kept indoors and restricted in their mobility. The cruelty to animals employed at many factory farms is well-documented and you can easily find information and videos about them on the Internet.

I was also intrigued by the claims that a vegetarian diet makes for a healthy lifestyle. Vegetarianism can provide protection against heart disease, cancer and strokes. Vegetarians are noted for having lower blood cholesterol levels; lower blood pressure; lower rates of hypertension, type 2 diabetes, prostate and colon cancer; are less likely than meat-eaters to be obese; and have lower rates of death from heart disease.

I had already discovered that there were several delicious vegetarian choices at the grocery and had been eating soy burgers and other products made with soy for years. They were delicious, easy to prepare, healthy for you, and, best of all, low in calories. I could have a soy burger on a thin bun for a whole lot less calories than a beef hamburger on a fat bun. It was an easy choice. I also liked a good variety of vegetables and fruits, so I didn't think making the switch would be very difficult. I was ready to test-drive vegetarianism.

There were only two difficult things about becoming a vegetarian – my husband and fast food. I knew my husband would not be amenable to a vegetarian diet; this is a man who relishes steak and burgers. That meant I had to

prepare two different entrees every night for dinner but it didn't end up being nearly as dif-

ficult as I envisioned. I grilled a steak for him, a soy burger for me. It just required a little planning ahead. We could both eat the fruits and vegetables I had prepared, so it was just a matter of making two separate entrees. The fast food choices were a little more difficult.

I assumed that most fast food places didn't offer a vegetarian option and that was true, to a certain extent. Everyone automatically assumes that vegetarians can just have a salad but, once you take the chicken off those fast food salads, there's not a lot of food there. Certainly not enough to keep you satisfied for long. But once I really started looking closely, there were actu-

ally a lot of choices. There are several Internet sites which provide lists of restaurants, both fast and sit down, that offer vegetarian options. One of the best is a site called Sound Vision, which I have listed below. Eating out just required a little more planning. When I ran to McDonald's one night to get dinner for us, I realized I was also going to have to run to Panera's because one of those salads from McDonald's was just not going to be enough dinner. No



problem; they were close together – it just required a little more effort.

My "vegetarian for a week" project is over but I find that I'm not quite ready to give up the lifestyle completely. I seem to feel a little healthier and it was a fun and interesting challenge finding and preparing foods that were different from what I had been used to eating for years. I don't think I'll ever become a complete vegetarian because I enjoy chicken cooked on the grill or a cheeseburger way too much, but now that I have found how easy it is to cut way back on eating meat, that's what I plan to do. October is National Vegetarian Month, so this would be a great time for you to attempt a vegetarian diet as well. I'll be eating more fruits and veggies, less things with a face – this is definitely doable!



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