

# **THE PLANT-BASED SOLUTION**

**AMERICA'S HEALTHY HEART DOC'S PLAN  
TO POWER YOUR HEALTH**

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**sounds true**  
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## The Six Pillars of Support for the Plant-Based Solution

The support for plant-based health is overwhelming, fantastic, amazing, fascinating, and convincing. In this chapter, I summarize the most credible scientific information that backs the health claims of the Plant-Based Solution. If you do not have the why for making changes to upgrade your health and that of the planet, you will never get to the how. So the science, even presented in a simple way, is the foundation of choosing a plant-based diet for your health over all the other options on magazine stands, bookstores, TV shows, and social media outlets.

Science can be cool and interesting and is the basis for understanding how we are alive and healthy. Admittedly, you can adopt a plant-based diet solely from either the ethical standpoint of not harming animals or the environmental view of preserving the planet. Do it! But most of you are probably reading this book because you want to feel better, regain health, reduce medications, and avoid illness. The science is necessary to show you that this is THE path you need to start and follow for as long as I have.

Over the past few decades, many people have successfully elected to eat exclusively a plant-based diet, and a large body of scientific data proves its health benefits and safety. Nonetheless, there are always naysayers and sceptics who may present opinions or experiences to the contrary: “My brother-in-law’s friend’s sister’s boss tried to eat a vegan diet, and her cholesterol levels went to over 1,000,” or “I ate plant-based for a few months and gained forty-five pounds while developing acne and gas,” or so many other similar versions that can be found

on the Internet. What were these people eating? Not sweet potatoes, broccoli, bean stews, and tempeh burgers or the thousands of other delicious and nutritious options available in the WFPB (whole-food, plant-based) world.

In case you run into one of these postings, podcasts, or videos that expresses the dangers of a WFPB diet, it will be important to remember the powerful but simple factors that confirm the safety and acceptability of the Plant-Based Solution for you and your family. In this chapter, I will explain these six key pillars of information that support the power of a WFPB diet. These are all *wow* moments for sure. They are strong statements for why you should begin or continue your WFPB diet starting today.

## **1. The 2015–2020 Dietary Guidelines**

Politics, money, power, influence. These issues come into play every five years when the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) reexamines policy statements aiming to translate the latest science to help the public choose foods for a healthy and enjoyable diet. The stated goal of the Dietary Guidelines is to improve health and reduce chronic disease with the main focus on preventing diseases, like adult diabetes.

The Dietary Guidelines are often used or adopted by medical and nutritional professionals. They are also used to develop policy that impacts the USDA's National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program, which feed more than 30 million children each school day. The guidelines also impact the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and the Older Americans Act, totaling millions more meals daily in the United States. Finally, the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Defense rely in part on the guidelines to develop food programs for the armed services and veterans. Therefore, each edition of the guidelines is a very important document developed by a panel of experts and lobbyists and then finalized and published.

For its latest Dietary Guidelines, the federal government—after many hours of meetings, presentations, and debate—chose only three

patterns of eating to endorse.<sup>1</sup> One pattern is the Mediterranean (MED) diet, featuring large amounts of WFPB choices; the second is a US Healthy Eating Pattern, which also features many WFPB choices; and the third is a Healthy Vegetarian Eating Pattern. Of note, there is a vegan option within this third dietary pattern, the first time an all-plant-based diet received this governmental commendation.

Although vegetarian dietary patterns had been mentioned in the 2010 Dietary Guidelines, the 2015–2020 edition placed an eating pattern free of all animal products on a lofty pedestal for health promotion. This should come as some comfort when you are considering adopting the Plant-Based Solution. In the federal guidelines, soy products, legumes, nuts, seeds, and whole grains were increased while meat, poultry, and seafood were eliminated. A vegan pattern was described using plant-based dairy substitutes, like soy and other milks. The guideline indicated that this vegan option within the Vegetarian Healthy Eating Pattern was higher in calcium and fiber than other choices, although vitamin D (and vitamin B12) may be somewhat reduced and need supplementation, which is hardly a big deal.

The reaction to the vegan Dietary Guideline by plant-based medical groups was enthusiastic. Whether more plant-based options will appear in schools, federal hospitals, and childhood WIC programs is uncertain but hopeful. You can use the power of this Dietary Guideline endorsement of plant-based diets at the highest level to support your journey and fend off the trolls who will often try to knock you down (sadly, often your closest friends and family).

## **2. The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics**

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics is the world's largest organization of food and nutrition professionals and has over 100,000 practitioners. These include registered dietitians, dietetic technicians, and other professionals and students. Members are involved in health-care systems, food service, research, and private practice. They are also leaders in following and influencing dietary policy, including the federal Dietary Guidelines.

The academy presented its position paper on vegetarian diets, and it is extremely favorable.<sup>2</sup> The academy's overall position states that appropriately planned vegetarian, including vegan, diets are healthful, nutritionally adequate, and may provide health benefits in the prevention and treatment of certain diseases. These diets, according to the paper, are appropriate for all stages of the life cycle, including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, adolescence, older adulthood, and for athletes. In fact, the paper recommends starting a WFPB diet a year before getting pregnant to rid the body of mercury, PCBs, and other toxins found in animal foods.

The report explains that plant-based diets are more environmentally sustainable than diets rich in animal products because they use fewer natural resources and are associated with much less environmental damage. The paper goes on to comment that "vegetarian diets can provide protection against many chronic diseases such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, obesity, and some cancers," as I will discuss later. Wow. There is not much more that needs to be said to support your journey to follow the Plant-Based Solution. This document by the academy is a welcome summary of research and focus on the environment and of the consequences of our food choices.

### **3. The US Government: Medicare and Medicaid**

The US government and its systems pay millions of dollars annually to doctors and hospitals. This is a big deal for understanding how powerful the support is for the Plant-Based Solution. Just follow the money. All requests for reimbursement for Medicare and Medicaid services are evaluated to determine whether they are appropriate for payment by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), an office of the federal government, only after exhaustive consideration. The CMS has approved only two reimbursable programs for intensive cardiac rehabilitation (ICR).<sup>3</sup> One is called the Pritikin ICR program, and the other is the Ornish ICR program. Both are plant-based programs combined with exercise and support for cardiac patients. When you hear about a new diet fad, like the low-carb, high-fat diet (LCHF) or a grass-fed

meat diet, knowing that the CMS carefully evaluated and gave the stamp of approval to only two plant-based programs should serve as a reminder that you are on the right path. Wow for sure!

#### **4. U.S. News & World Report**

You might think the media was entirely in love with the Paleo diet, the MED diet, or perhaps some other recent diet fad. Actually, there are some responsible and respected media outlets that love the Plant-Based Solution. The next resource that will strengthen your conviction to embark on and maintain the Plant-Based Solution comes from a popular news and information website, the *U.S. News & World Report*.<sup>4</sup>

For many years, a panel of nutrition experts has ranked various diets for health. For the seventh year in a row, the best diet for heart health selected was the Ornish diet, an eating pattern based on decades of research, which you will learn more about in the next chapter. The media site also indicates that the Ornish diet can be “tailored to losing weight, preventing or reversing diabetes and heart disease, lowering blood pressure and cholesterol, and preventing and treating prostate or breast cancer.”<sup>5</sup> That is an amazing list of benefits for a dietary pattern that was also endorsed by the CMS.

Where were the Atkins and Paleo diets, which eliminate carbohydrates and emphasize calories from fats and animal products? They were at the bottom of the list. No one in the Paleo movement mentions the *U.S. News* list, of course, but you have my permission to do so.

#### **5. (Some) Hospitals Love Plant-Based Diets**

Not all hospitals love plant-based diets, but one big and powerful system does, and you should know about it. Actually, it is rare to see medical centers act as the leaders in the movement to incorporate a plant-based diet to prevent and reverse chronic medical conditions. While it might be bad for “hospital business” if the number of cases of heart disease, adult diabetes, hypertension, and similar maladies dropped from the adoption of WFPB diets, hospital systems should

see beyond the empty hospital beds to serve the public. One exception to these blinders is one of the largest not-for-profit health plans in the world, Kaiser Permanente, covering around 11 million members. In a true spirit of aligning the evidence-based health messages of plant-based nutrition with the well-being of its members, Kaiser published both a medical article describing the health benefits of a WFPB diet and also a guide for patients to get started.<sup>6</sup> These materials are available in offices staffed by over 17,000 physicians in the Kaiser system. Kaiser has asked its physicians to recommend a plant-based diet to *all* of their patients by encouraging WFPB eating patterns while discouraging dairy, meats, and eggs as well as processed foods. This represents a great example for all medical centers and a strong vote of support for your journey on the Plant-Based Solution.

## 6. Fruits and Vegetables Save Millions of Lives

If this final pillar of information that supports the power of a WFPB diet scares you, then eating a single serving of fruit or vegetables might be your goal right now. But let's dream big early. What would happen to your health if you could adopt a habit of eating ten servings of fruit and vegetables a day? This may strike you as impossible, but using a personal blender in the morning packed with produce can provide five to seven servings before you leave the house, so do not give up yet!

An international group of researchers pooled ninety-five studies involving almost 2 million study subjects who had provided dietary information on fruit and vegetable intake.<sup>7</sup> They looked at the risk of heart disease, cancer, and overall survival in the follow-up based on how many servings a day were consumed on average. The researchers found that eating 800 grams a day of fruit and vegetables—or about 1¾ pounds, which would be about ten servings—led to a 24 percent drop in heart disease, a 33 percent drop in stroke, 14 percent drop in cancer, and an impressive 31 percent drop in overall death rates during the study periods. They estimated that up to 8 million people a year would avoid death worldwide if they adopted the ten-servings-a-day habit.

## Plant Rant

You might walk into a hospital or school cafeteria and think there was controversy over the role of a plant-based diet for health. Viewing burgers, hot dogs, bacon, pepperoni pizza, and beef chili would make it appear that a diet high in animal products, including processed meats, was healthy. I could take you into the doctors' dining room of every hospital I am on staff at and show you egg sausage sandwiches, bacon strips, and cheesy eggs. However, as I have indicated, the word is out: Plants heal. Plants save lives. Plants reduce medical costs. Plants prevent disease. I promise you that I will not stop exposing and writing about the hypocrisy that exists in medical institutions and other teaching and healing centers, including schools, until healthy whole-food, plant-based options are available or exclusive choices.

## THE PLANT-BASED PLAN Find Support

If you want to walk fast, walk alone.

If you want to walk far, walk together.

### AFRICAN PROVERB

Join or create a support network by finding people online or in person who follow a plant-based diet. There are nutrition support groups like the ones we have in Michigan. There are social groups and clubs that host potlucks and gatherings at plant-friendly restaurants. Search for them online or on Meetup.com and Facebook.

If you are single, you might be interested in Veg Speed Date, a speed-dating organization that hosts events across North America.

See if there is a vegetarian or vegan festival near you. These events take place around the globe to promote veganism or vegetarianism and usually offer educational lectures and foods to taste or purchase.

## The Heart of the Matter

I had a heart murmur as a child and underwent a heart catheterization when I was a year old. I do not remember that event, but I do have a good photo of my pediatric cardiologist standing at my crib and holding me and a cigarette simultaneously. I imagine that my curiosity about those visits, coupled with the fact that my murmur resolved, led me right into the area of health and wellness. The case for plant-based diets preventing and reversing heart disease is without a doubt the strongest compared to any other diets claiming to modify chronic diseases worldwide.

Simply put, the litmus test for deciding if you should follow the latest Hollywood diet is to ask, “Is there evidence that it can reverse years of heart artery damage; reduce heart symptoms; and reduce events like hospital admissions, heart attacks, bypass surgery, and stents?” If the answer is no or more likely “It has never been studied,” then politely say, “Thank you, but I would rather stick with the only dietary plan ever shown to actually reverse the number-one killer I may face or am facing now.” Do not be confused. There is no evidence any diet other than a plant-based one can prevent and reverse heart disease, which has left people as young as those in their thirties weakened, limited, or prematurely dead. It is the dietary pattern you want to learn about and adopt as soon as possible for your health goals.

I cannot count the number of times my patients have said, “I wish I had made better decisions so as not to have suffered this heart attack and this bypass operation.” Rest assured, you will not say that if you pay attention now. Let me repeat: There is no more effective way to prevent and reverse heart disease than eating a plant-based diet naturally low in oils, sugar, and salt (along with the cessation of smoking,

of course), and there is no evidence that any other diet can achieve the same outcome for your health. None. *Nada. Nunca.* Never. I think you get it. Let's turn to a case study before biting into some history and data.

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CASE STUDY

**Bypass the Bypass with Broccoli**

I met Paul over coffee and was immediately spellbound by his story. He had developed classic angina chest pain (indicating blocked heart arteries), which first surfaced after a tennis match. Like millions of other guys and gals in their mid-fifties, he ate a typical American diet, carried extra weight, and had elevated cholesterol. A heart angiogram was performed, where a tube was passed from an artery in his wrist to his heart, and dye was injected (the same procedure I had at age one and that I have performed thousands and thousands of times on others). The results showed one heart artery totally blocked and the two others about 65 percent narrowed.

Paul's medical team surprised him by recommending a heart bypass operation, rather big news for a man playing tennis a few weeks earlier. A bypass is where a surgeon saws the breastbone open, stops the heart with a high-potassium iced solution, and sews veins taken out of the legs and arteries into the heart to literally "bypass" the blockages. I imagine it might be harder to recommend the operation to patients if it were called a detour, not a bypass. In Paul's case, he researched the problem and decided to arrange his detour operation at the world-famous Cleveland Clinic, where more detours are performed than at any other center in the world.

The night before the surgery, Paul pulled a metaphorical lucky lotto ticket. The cardiologist assigned to his case inquired if he would like to consult with a clinic physician who taught nutrition—actually a surgeon with a reborn interest in reversing heart disease—rather than undergo the heart operation. This was the first time the cardiologist had ever brought this up with a patient, but Paul was the right recipient.

Thinking of that saw about to buzz open his chest the next morning, Paul said yes to the nonsurgical alternative and checked himself out of the