



Plant-Based: What Does It Mean?

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

Plant-based eating is a lifestyle where you choose to eat mostly whole foods that come from plants.

The plan involves replacing highly processed foods with lots of vegetables, fruit, grains, beans, soy, lentils, nuts and seeds. Plant-based diets are good for human health and also for our planet.

Unfortunately, the popularity of the term plant-based has led some food companies to misuse the term **made from plants** in their advertising campaigns. This term has taken on an undeserved health halo and is being used to sell cookies, soda, chips and candy made with ingredients that were once plants, such as white flour, sugar and processed oils.

Those are not whole, nutritious foods, and this marketing ploy makes plant-based eating confusing. For example, an orange is a whole plant-based food; an orange-flavored soda is highly processed. Both are made from plants (sugar was once a plant) but not equally nutritious.

The bottom line? The term **plant-based** does not necessarily mean *healthy*, so buyer beware. Yes, cola, potato chips and veggie dogs may contain ingredients that came from plants, but they have been highly processed and are no longer as nutritious. To truly reap the benefits of a plant-based diet, choose more whole plant-based foods, including: roasted chickpeas, tofu, edamame, whole-grain noodles, canned beans, mixed nuts, nut butter, quinoa, oats and all vegetables and fruits.

And, choose fewer of these processed plant-based foods: fake meat, chips, ice cream, cookies, cake, fruit-flavored candy, juice, white bread, white rice and soft drinks.

Immunity Support on Your Plate

By Cara Rosenbloom, RD

If you've read a headline that mentions *immune boosting*, don't believe the hype. The idea of boosting the immune system with supplements or specific ingredients is misleading and scientifically inaccurate.



There are many things we can do to keep our immune system running smoothly, such as getting enough sleep, being physically active, minimizing stress and eating a balanced diet. But boosting immunity implies heightened action, which should be avoided — an overactive immune system is linked with autoimmune diseases, such as lupus or multiple sclerosis, and is equally harmful to your health as an underactive immune system. Immune boosting is a marketing term, not a medical term.

Let's focus on supporting your immune system instead. Certain nutrients, including zinc, selenium, iron, protein and omega-3 fats, as well as vitamins C, D and E, are critical for the growth and function of immune cells. Build meals with a variety of foods to get the nutrients your body needs.

- 1. Get extra vegetables and fruit.** They should fill half of your plate at every meal. Frozen options are great.
- 2. Add protein from fish, chicken, dairy, tofu or beans.** The building blocks of protein (amino acids) are essential for T-cell function, which protect the body against bacteria and viruses.
- 3. Choose nuts and seeds.** Include Brazil nuts for selenium; walnuts and flax for omega-3 fats; pumpkin seeds for zinc; and almonds or sunflower seeds for vitamin E.
- 4. Enjoy fermented foods.** Yogurt, kefir and fermented vegetables — such as sauerkraut or kimchi — contain probiotics, which may be linked to a strong immune system.
- 5. Look for vitamin D.** It's found in fish, milk, fortified plant-based beverages and eggs. If you don't eat any of these foods or get much sun, consider asking your health care provider to check your blood levels. You may need a vitamin D supplement.

It's also important to minimize highly processed foods, such as soft drinks, candy, fast food and salty snacks. These foods lack nutrients and can impair the production of immune cells and antibodies.

Avoid Gloom and Doom Scrolling

Repeatedly checking out bad news can be **unhealthy**. Of course, the internet and alerts are important ways to stay informed about things which can potentially impact your safety or that of your region: a pandemic, hurricanes or earthquakes.

But **doom scrolling** (also known as **doom surfing**) — searching for and reading article after article filled with bad news — isn't healthy.



Constantly scrolling through bad news can trigger sadness, anxiety or anger and contribute to headaches and lost sleep. What's more, finding differing information about medical crises or worrisome topics can be confusing and result in even more doom scrolling.

“Information overload is incredibly anxiety-provoking — which is true even when the information is accurate,” says Yale New Haven infectious diseases specialist Jaimie Meyer, MD.

Try these tips to avoid, or reduce, doom scrolling:

- ✓ **Go on a doom scrolling diet;** check the news just once or twice daily.
- ✓ **Avoid surfing for varying opinions on medical news.** Dr. Meyer advises sticking to reputable sources, such as the CDC and the National Institutes of Health.
- ✓ **Take a 24-hour respite from technology from sundown to sundown March 5 to 6 for the National Day of Unplugging.** It's a good way to see how much calmer you can feel when you take a vacation from doom scrolling.



Q: Drug interactions?

A: Drug interactions happen when a drug alters how your body processes medication.

If you take two or more drugs, you may be at risk for unintended side effects, such as not absorbing a drug, metabolizing a medication too quickly or too slowly or even an overdose.



Drug interactions are common. For example, the antibiotic metronidazole may interact with the blood thinner warfarin to increase the risk of bleeding. Or the anti-seizure drug phenytoin can interact with oral contraceptive pills to reduce their effectiveness.

Take steps to avoid interactions: Keep your health care provider informed about all your prescription and over-the-counter medications and any dietary supplements. Maintain your own medication list and fill all your prescriptions at the same pharmacy. If you have medication questions, be sure to ask your provider or pharmacist. — Elizabeth Smoots, MD

Sleep on This



National Sleep Awareness Week is March 14-20. Wake up to these sleep-friendly measures that can help you feel rested and renewed every day:

- Stick to a routine sleep schedule.
- Cut back on caffeine and skip the alcohol.
- Exercise daily but not close to bedtime.
- Quiet your mind and leave worries for wake time.
- Practice mind-body relaxation or other stress-relieving techniques.
- Keep a cool sleep environment.
- Avoid extra screen time before bed.



Still can't sleep? Speak with your health care provider to explore more strategies for ensuring proper, healthy sleep.

Making sleep a priority can help you achieve your other wellness goals, such as exercising regularly, eating properly and managing stress. And when your body and mind are rested, you'll be able to meet daily demands in a positive light.



American Diabetes Alert Day, on March 22, is a wake-up call.

More than 34 million Americans have diabetes: 90% to 95% have type 2 and about 5% have type 1. Another eight million aged 18 and older have prediabetes (elevated blood sugar not yet high enough for a type 2 diagnosis). More than seven million Americans don't know they have diabetes. The good news? Type 2 diabetes can be prevented, controlled if you already have it, and sometimes reversed with diet, weight control and exercise. Learn more at diabetes.org.

Note: Due to production lead time, this issue may not reflect the current COVID-19 situation in some or all regions of the U.S. For the most up-to-date information visit coronavirus.gov.

The **Smart Moves Toolkit**, including this issue's printable download, **Medications and Food**, is at personalbest.com/extras/21V3tools.



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