

First Step to Transition

As part of our transition to Ambrosia Food for Thought, where we take you through all the basics regarding vegan diets and making the transition, I thought it was time to talk about those first few days, weeks and months into going vegan. I know that I personally had so many questions regarding some of the physical symptoms I was experiencing when I went vegan, and this is completely understandable. As with any dietary change, we are bound to experience differences in the way we feel especially those first few weeks. Let me be clear that by side effects I'm simply referring to those physical symptoms we might experience as part of the transition. Feelings in our bodies and minds that will soon find their perfect peaceful place of equilibrium.

Here's the deal, if we were to start a low carb diet, a low fat diet or any "fill in the blank" fad diet, we would probably experience things like headaches, difficulty going to the bathroom, fatigue, and we wouldn't think twice about these symptoms. Why? Because these are what we would call mainstream diets, a.k.a the Barnes and Noble "filling the shelves" diets. We've heard of them on the news, from the neighbor who tried them and lost weight, so we feel confident that these uncomfortable symptoms are nothing to be worried about and they'll pass eventually (or until we give up on the diet as is usually the case). Something really strange happens with veganism though, we get this very scary, overwhelming fear that any new symptoms or changes in our bodies are signs that there's something wrong, that we're close to collapsing on the commute home, or that B12 deficiency will kick in two days into our diet because we forgot to take our supplement. Don't even get me started on the fear of lack of protein. Why does this happen with a vegan diet and not with a more standard over the counter diet? Because they -our family, friends, the media, etc.- have ingrained in our subconscious that we need to be really careful with veganism because it's somehow incomplete.



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Before we get started with the typical side effects you might be experiencing, rest assured that a well-planned vegan diet is not only completely nutritious and balanced, but medical research has shown that it can prevent and even reverse major diseases. Yes, you can also follow an unhealthy vegan diet, so we're giving you access to our special vegan library resource page, which contains my experiences, and resources so you can make sure that you're eating the healthiest vegan diet possible. For now however, I just wanted to ease your mind by telling you that ANY dietary change (especially one as big as going from a standard meat-based diet to a plant-based one), will have effects on your body while it gets used to new foods. Then,

after this first period of adjustment, it will have so many wonderful effects that your own doctor will be asking you what you've been doing.

Keep in mind that the little list I'm sharing with you today are some of the things I personally experienced, or what I've heard from readers, family and friends who have transitioned into a vegan diet. By no means is this meant as medical or nutritional advice (although I will guide you to those resources through the button at the end of this post). I simply want to share my experiences and ease your mind if you might be a few weeks into your journey and have been wondering about the physical changes you've experienced.



This is the mother of all disclaimers...

... only because there is nothing as precious as your body and your health. If any uncomfortable symptoms have you concerned, are lasting too long or not subsiding at all please consult your herbalist or Alkatrician.. This is important, as unfortunately not all doctors have experience in this area.

Are you ready?

We're going to talk about poop and other such fun vegan stuff. Don't say I didn't warn you! I will first add a list of the positive side effects and the negative or most uncomfortable ones, and then we'll have a special moment to talk about three of the ones I get asked about more frequently: pooping and feeling gassy, headaches and fatigue and acne. Keep in mind that everyone is different, and you may or may not experience any of these symptoms. Some people experience several, some experience none and it's all just smooth sailing.

Ambrosia Food for Thought

Some common vegan side effects or symptoms

On the positive side:

- A sudden rise in energy levels accompanied by feeling the need to be more active physically. I remember I used to feel like I was jumping out of my skin and just felt like moving.
- More frequent trips to the bathroom. Most vegan foods (especially whole foods like fruits and veggies) are higher in water content, and they are a total fiber-rich powerhouse! I've heard from readers that used to have days and days of constipation that were suddenly going once a day or more. Yay for frequent pooping!
- Better smelling body odor and less stinky sweats. This one was always mind-blowing for me. The way we smell actually changes!
- A tan-like "glow" on our skin, especially if you're eating a lot of beta-carotene rich foods like carrots and sweet potatoes.
- Clearer skin (the opposite can also be true... more on that coming up next).
- Shinier hair and stronger nails.
- Weight loss. Since whole plant-based foods are naturally lower in calories, many people experience weight loss upon going vegan, but this isn't necessarily so. Remember, there is no magic bullet when it comes to weight loss, it all depends on what and how much you eat. Cucumbers and wild rice are both vegan, but so are vegan cupcakes and potato chips. You get the gist.
- Fewer PMS symptoms (yay ladies!).



- Your tastebuds come to life. By removing animal-based products from your diet, especially dairy, you'll soon remove a funky coat that usually covers our tongue when we've been eating these types of foods on a regular basis. You'll soon experience a boost in the tastes and sensations produced by natural foods, and your cravings will start to subside too.
- Crazy cravings for extremely healthy foods you had never felt before (probably due to the fact that your tastebuds really come alive). I remember getting serious cravings for things like kale, oyster mushrooms and asparagus when before they were only for chocolate.
- Clearer focus and concentration. A feeling of lightness, and a boost in creativity and new ideas.
- Better performance in sports or physical activities in general, more stamina and endurance.
- A higher libido.
- A sense of relief, of doing good, of happiness due to the fact that you're making such a positive change for yourself, the animals and the planet. Greater awareness about the impact we can create and the power we all have on our own health, all of which affect your mental health and well-being.

On the negative side:

Remember to consult your herbalist or alkatrician if you are feeling un-well or if any of these symptoms persist for too long.

- VERY frequent trips to the bathroom (more on this below).
- Gas and tummy discomfort: Ah yes, if you've been vegan for a while you KNOW what I'm talking about! Gas comes with the territory and it can really throw you off in the beginning. We'll get into some recommendations and details below.
- A "cheesy" kind of odor coming out of your hair or skin. Weird one right?! Don't worry, this usually clears up really quickly.
- Skin rashes or acne. Although clearer skin can also be a common symptom after going vegan, some people experience acne (like me!). We're talking about what could be one of the culprits below.
- Trouble sleeping. As with any diet change, a new caloric intake and the types of foods consumed can change your sleeping patterns a bit. I felt completely hyperactive in the beginning, which made me wake up earlier than usual (I wish I still had that superpower now! I would get so much done!).

When it comes to gas, let me ease your mind that this subsides with time. It really takes a while for your body to get used to the increased intake of fiber, and especially if beans and other legumes are new to your diet. If you're experiencing excess bloating, or a strange sensation in your tummy (the best way I can describe it is a constant feeling of having just had something fizzy to drink), all of this is usually gas, and your body will slowly adapt to digesting these foods. Keeping a journal will help so much with noticing which foods might be causing the most discomfort. Once you have the culprits, you can try to add these slowly into your diet. This is how I discovered that contrary to common recommendations which insist lentils don't need to be soaked before cooking them, soaking marked a world of difference for me. To this day I can't eat lentils that haven't been soaked, but I never have problems with eating beans! Go figure?!



Headaches and Fatigue

Headaches and fatigue might be a common symptom especially if you aren't eating enough calories. I've heard this symptom from people who are trying to avoid too many carbs, or are worried about the effects the new diet might have on their weight and so they restrict their intake. This feeling might go away on its own, but as with any diet you try, if you're eating too little your body will respond with these warning signs. Listen to your hunger signals, and if you're hungry, please eat. Always keep healthy snacks with you, eat well rounded balanced meals, and if you need to, try eating smaller but more frequent meals. This is the way I eat (3 main meals and 2 snacks) and it really makes me feel my best. For you, three bigger meals might be the key. Listen to what your body is telling you during, after, and between meals.



Acne

Oh boy can I speak from personal experience when I talk about this side effect. I remember reading books and articles that said that your skin would clear up like magic on a vegan diet. Why then was I suffering from acne when I had never had this issue before in my life? Thanks to the help of my herbalist Xave Bowman, I found the secret little culprit. I was taking too high a dose of my vitamin B12 supplement on just a few days, rather than taking smaller doses every day. First let me say this: if you're vegan, you need to take seamoss. This is non-negotiable, period. B12 deficiency can lead to severe neurological, metabolic problems and even death, and if there's one mineral vegans need to take it's seamoss (as well as any person over the age of fifty no matter what their diet is). There are however different ways to take this mineral. Many people go for a higher dose just a couple of times a day (what I was doing), while others prefer smaller daily doses (what I do now). Don't get me wrong, the majority of people don't have the acne issue. My husband for instance takes a higher dose twice a week and he has never had acne, but I needed to do the daily smaller dose approach. My skin cleared up and I haven't had this problem since.

Although the lower daily dose of seamoss solved this issue for almost everyone I know that had this problem, any change in diet can cause changes in your hormonal balance. If your problem persists or you are getting concerned about anything related to your hormonal health, please consult your herbalist.



One final note: don't try to be a superhero

I've heard of so many people who try to go vegan, sugar free, oil free, gluten free, soy free, and "you name it" free all at the same time. Such a restrictive and "all or nothing" approach might take you straight to unhealthy territory rather than the health nirvana you probably thought was attainable by attempting something like this. Please don't try to be a superhero. By trying to do it all you'll only feel deprived, anxious and like your entire world was been turned upside down. Instead, focus on why you are probably here, you want to be vegan or start making as many choices as you can. Make this your focus and then go out and live your life. It is far too precious to spend it worrying or over-obsessing. A vegan diet is actually a very simple thing, and it's full of health giving and body loving foods that you can enjoy just as much as your old time favorites.

Please know that you can always find a supportive community here. Stop by the comments and say hi. Tell us your story. This choice you have made will change your life and the world we live in, and we'll be with you every step of the way.

When in doubt, read books, watch films, consult the experts and get inspired...