

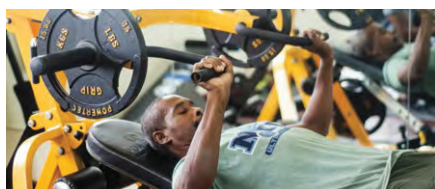
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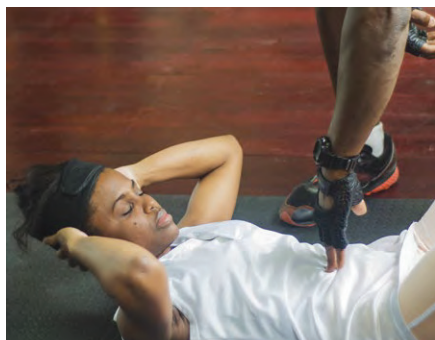
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Choosing to follow a Vegan diet



I had intended to become a vegetarian from the time I was in my teens. When I was about 16, I decided that I would become a vegetarian, so I stopped eating meat except for fish. I would eat the regular food that was prepared at home minus the meat. I did not do much cooking at all back then so this meant that I was at the mercy of whoever cooked at home.

I ate a lot of meals at my vegetarian aunt's house during this time. When I couldn't eat there and the main course at home contained meat, I would have to make something to eat, and by something I mean that it was just devoid of meat. Most times it was ill thought of and so a lot of my meals contained little or no protein. This went on for about 9 months until I finally gave in and began eating chicken again. My first attempt at becoming vegetarian was a decision that I had not prepared for so I failed.

My journey back to becoming vegetarian took me 5 more years. During this time, I did a lot more cooking. I learned more about preparing vegetarian meals and not just meatless meals. I spent a lot of time looking at recipes online and in cook books in stores. I began to realize that vegetarian cooking was doable and did not have to be as expensive or time consuming as I had previously thought.

During my return journey back to vegetarianism, I began to experience severe headaches that sometimes lasted weeks. My doctor at the time put me on a very restrictive diet- no cheese, no nuts, no canned foods, no chocolate, no caffeine, no soda and some other things thrown in there. It was a BIG change for me to cut out those foods, but I knew I had to do it since my headaches were really out of control.

At 22 years I felt that I could really make the change to a healthier diet without going back. I didn't eat cheese, I didn't really like fish even though I ate it (I actually really like chicken), chocolate was out, I never really drank milk so a vegetarian diet was pretty much out for me. So I decided to go vegan (*no animal products*).

I was still living at home so this meant that I had to cook for myself in order to maintain this diet. But my mind was made up and I was prepared this time. I got encouragement too from my wonderful boyfriend, now husband, who also made the switch around the same time. We were cautioned to make a slow transition and not rush into the decision. My decision was not rushed and was actually a transition; my husband's however, was a far cry from a transition. On looking back, he says that if he had not done it that way, he might not have done it at all.

After making the switch, we cooked together a lot and tried out our first attempts at recipes on each other and my mother who unquestioningly ate them. At first a lot of the recipes I tried were failures, but with time and practice, they got a lot better. I made a lot of patties, ate a lot of fake meats like soy chunks, but with time and practice I was able to cook a wider range of dishes.

I won't lie and say that all the vegan meals that I made were what I had previously thought were delicious. Macaroni pie loaded with cheese and pizza and chicken and chocolate and....all tasted great! But I made the choice to eat healthy and this meant that I had to learn to love different



things. At first I craved certain foods that I had enjoyed before. I remember deeply and almost mesmerizingly inhaling the scent of a chocolate that someone teasingly placed in front of me to smell. I remember looking at a succulent piece of chicken that was baked to perfection. I remember that it was a journey with temptation to return to the diet that I knew before. But I made the choice, as hard as it was at first.

It's been 10 years now and I can tell you that I have found delicious things that are healthy. I don't have a longing for chocolate or cheese or chicken anymore. I love my vegan diet and am satisfied by this diet.

When I want pizza, I make vegan pizza. When I want dessert, I make brownies or some other delicious vegan recipe. I chose to be vegan and my tastes and health have all benefited tremendously!