



# How to Eat Healthy in College Dining Halls

By  
February 08 2016

There are many reasons [why college is the best time to go vegan](#), but finding healthy, plant-based fare in a typical dining hall is its own matter. I transitioned to a whole food, plant-based diet during my third year of college and, after a few semesters of practice, I found ways to get the most out of the dining hall. Fortunately, with a little planning and communication, keeping up a plant-based lifestyle can be easy and rewarding, even on a college meal plan:

## 1. Make friends with the people in dining services

Discussing your commitment to eating whole plant foods with the director of your college's dining services is one of the most effective ways to get started. Remember that the easier you make it for others, the more willing they will be to provide for you. So be positive and helpful (flattery goes a long way here).

Emphasize inexpensive, easy-to-prepare vegan staples, such as oatmeal for mornings and plain brown rice at night. Then you can add in whatever else is being served—fresh fruit and nuts for the oatmeal, and leafy greens, steamed vegetables, soups, salsa, and salad bar items for the rice. Not only will this improve your eating experience, it will support healthy options for your peers as well.

## 2. Make special requests for healthier food options (don't be shy)

The more creative you are, the less likely you will become bored with your food options. Some schools post dining hall menus online. Check these ahead of time, and don't hesitate to order your meal without specific ingredients, or request your own off-menu dish. For example, if you see a meat dish on the menu accompanied by grilled vegetables or a tasty grain, ask if you can have only these items. More often than not, the individual items are prepared separately, which makes your request convenient for everyone.

## 3. Find the alternative milks

Many dining halls have a section for students with food allergies. This is where you'll find your soy milk, almond milk, and other plant-based goodies. More use of this section will show dining services how important these options are to students. I often ate oats with plant milks and chopped up fruit in the morning and for emergency dinners when nothing else was available.

## 4. Load up on healthy snacks

If you are lucky enough to have a dining hall that lets you take pieces of fruit to go, take advantage of this! Other items great for snacking include nuts, seeds, and dried fruit. Staying full between meals with a couple bananas or a handful of raisins will help you stay focused in class and keep you from resorting to vending machine junk food. If you can't take items out of your dining hall, request that fruit be put out when it is ripe so that everyone can enjoy it and there is less waste of unripe, starchy fruit.

## 5. Savor your company and practice mindful eating

One of the best aspects of the college dining hall is spending time with friends. Whether eating with an individual or in a large group, try to fully appreciate the moments of being together. Being present in the dining hall will help you better enjoy the human connections that we all crave, while allowing you to eat more [mindfully](#).

As you get the hang of navigating the college dining hall, you'll start to see more and more options. Take generous portions of

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salad bar items, and fill up on whole, healthy plant-based foods first, so you don't fall into the pleasure trap of cookies, pastries, and other tempting dessert items. Most important, be kind and respectful to dining service workers, fellow students, and yourself; it will make your experience much more enjoyable.