



# A Doctor's Top Tips for Transitioning Smoothly to a Healthy Plant-Based Lifestyle

By Craig McDougall, MD  
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As a physician, I have learned the greatest rewards come from the relationships built with people and helping them live better lives. From my mentors, like my father John McDougall, Neal Barnard, Dean Ornish, Michael Greger, I have learned that most chronic conditions and many of the epidemics we face in our country stem from how we eat, how we live, and how we move. However, change is not all or nothing, but every step someone moves towards eating more plants, moving more, and building strong bonds in their life helps them achieve optimal health.

I tell my patients that the more they focus on food and movement as medicine, then the healthier they'll be. Here are my top tips for transitioning to a whole-food, plant-based diet.

## Eat More to Improve Your Health

Often times when people are changing their diet, they focus on doing less: eating less food, less dairy, less meat. Instead, I like to focus on adding and eating more whole plant foods. The more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes you eat, the better your health will become. For people who are not ready to dive into plant based eating 100% right away, I recommend adding around 1,000 calories of legumes, whole grains, and starchy vegetables to their everyday routine. These starchy foods keep you full and satisfied, so you'll naturally eat less of the animal products and processed foods that are making you sick.

## Focus on the Positive

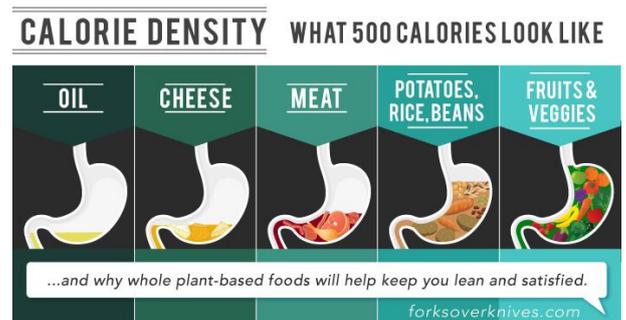
Don't focus on the fact that you are going to eat less dairy, meat, or some of your prior favorite unhealthy foods. Instead, focus on all the variety and how creative you can be with different plant foods. You can even make plant-based versions of your favorite foods including pizza, burgers, and chilies.

During our program, people see results quickly. Once you have more energy, have lost some weight, or your stomach pain has disappeared, then it's easier to continue eating healthfully. One of the best motivators for people

transitioning to plant-based eating comes from how great they feel and how much more than can do in their lives once they're feeling healthier.

## Keep Your Overall Calorie Density Low

Eating any plant-based food is usually a healthier option than an animal-based one. However, plant foods can also be highly processed and rich in calories (making them less desirable for your health). Even when not highly processed, there are also some whole plant foods such as nuts, seeds, and nut butters that are also very **calorie-dense**. These foods make it easy to passively overconsume calories and are often high in fat. For people transitioning to plant-based eating for weight loss, one of the most common issues is a diet filled with too many calorie-dense foods. Focus on keeping your plate at least half starches (whole grains, legumes, starchy vegetables) and half fruits and veggies; this will keep you full and satisfied but will also help to bring down your overall daily calorie consumption.



## Dr. McDougall's Tips for Moving More

Movement has a positive impact on metabolism, blood sugar, mental health, and sleep, so going from a sedentary lifestyle to a more active one has a big impact on your overall health. However, it doesn't have to be an hour or two at the gym everyday. We encourage our patients to move naturally and incorporate movement into their everyday life.

Just like with the food, focus on adding more. Instead of telling yourself you need to stop being lazy and laying

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around, tell yourself to move more throughout the day. Take the stairs, go for walks, ride your bike around town, or stand up while you're working at your computer. Becoming more active during your day can have a huge impact on your overall health.