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FEATURES

VEGAN PARENTING

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THE VARIOUS FACETS OF RAISING CHILDREN WITH A PLANT-BASED LIFESTYLE



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Veganism's popularity is growing at an unprecedented pace. According to a [report](#), the number of Americans following a vegan diet increased by a whopping 600% from 2014–2018. While it is projected that by 2040, only 40% of the world's population will eat meat, the vegan food market which was about USD 14.2 billion in 2018 is projected to hit USD 31.4 billion by 2026.

What are the factors fueling this movement? A confluence of health, environmental and ethical concerns has led to the growth of veganism. "From an ethical perspective, people—women in particular—are becoming more aware of the innate empathy and compassion that comes with leading a cruelty-free lifestyle," says Dr. Malini Saba, health coach, environmentalist, and food book author. "There is a rising understanding of the destructive effects of animal husbandry on ecosystems, deforestation, and climate change. Furthermore, studies demonstrating the health advantages of plant-based diets and an increased emphasis on individual health and wellbeing are the other major factors driving the rise of veganism."

A Unique Plant-Based Journey

With [various studies](#) showing that a plant-based diet is healthy for both [humans](#) (and possibly our planet too), there is a big jump in the number of parents wanting to raise their children and families as vegan. While education, structure, and routine are the key, there is no universal handbook for vegan parenting. After all, every individual is unique.

Nonetheless, it is important to consider a few important things before committing to a vegan lifestyle. Making the change towards a vegan diet involves many factors that go beyond just what's on your plate. Thorough reflection is required to guarantee a smooth and long-lasting transition.

Nutritional competence is paramount, requiring deep understanding of plant-based sources of vital nutrients. "Friends and family reacted with a mixture of curiosity and skepticism when I decided to raise our children as vegan. To make sure our children were getting the nutrients they needed for growth, we devoted many hours to reading food labels at the grocery stores and experimenting with plant-based recipes," says Gaurav Kaushik, who works in insurance, and is a dedicated advocate for sustainable living and veganism. "We faced well-meaning but harsh remarks from acquaintances who questioned the suitability of a vegan diet for children. Some voiced worries about their intake of protein, while others were concerned about the absence of vital vitamins that are often present in animal products."

Kaushik educated himself and others about the diversity and abundance of plant-based foods. "I reassured people that our children's dietary requirements were being satisfied by a carefully planned vegan diet. With time, the initial skepticism vanished as our children flourished on a vegan diet."

Vegan parents say that thoughtfully planned meals which balance palatability and nutrition are critical. The secret to a nutritionally fulfilling vegan diet is meticulous planning, examining a wide variety of foods, and a thorough knowledge of how nutrients interact with one another. Examining myths in the light of scientific data and nutritional knowledge can reveal the robust and healthful character of a well-practiced vegan diet.

While beans, lentils, tofu, and quinoa are key sources of plant-based protein, iron-rich vegan foods include spinach, lentils, fortified cereals, and pumpkin seeds. Legumes are again extremely versatile and most vegan parents add black beans, chickpeas, and lentils to a variety of recipes. "Quinoa is unique as a complete protein source, while tempeh and tofu provide versatile textures and are high in protein. For those who prefer convenience, plant-based protein powders made from brown rice, hemp, or peas offer other possibilities," explains Dr. Saba.

Seeds and nuts like flaxseeds, chia seeds, and walnuts are rich in Omega-3 fatty acids. "Broccoli, pok choy, kale, fortified plant milk and almonds have really worked for us as good calcium sources," says Raina Kumar, whose family has been following a vegan diet since the last five years.

Dr. Saba points out that parents need to be aware of potential nutrient gaps and approaches for supplementing or relying on fortified foods. "Consult with a healthcare professional can help with a personalized and knowledgeable strategy," she says. She further adds that it is crucial to customize diets to meet individualistic demands of developing children in a holistic and healthful way and pediatricians and certified dietitians play an important role in such situations.

Challenges In Raising A Vegan

Open communication and social support are important aspects of vegan parenting. Kaushik suggests to first speak to your child about the importance of veganism and protecting the planet. "It is also necessary to have open communication with teachers and families, especially for social settings, to make sure your child's dietary requirements are met," he says. "To make sure that our children felt included, we had to prepare ahead of time and offer alternatives often for school events and birthday celebrations," adds Kaushik. He emphasizes that finding like-minded friends or family members, getting involved in the vegan community, exchanging social situational advice, and sharing experiences are all beneficial for vegan parenting. Vegan parenting is an ongoing journey and an ever-evolving landscape. The transition to veganism is often a gradual one, and each person is bound to find a path that best suits their circumstances and values. So, prioritize progress over perfection and enjoy the ride!

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