

Healthy Eating & Diet

The Flexitarian Diet

By [Kathleen M. Zelman, MPH, RD, LD](#)
WebMD Expert Review

The Flexitarian Diet: What It Is

Have you ever been tempted to become a vegetarian but were daunted by the prospect of giving up steak or Mom's famous chicken Parmesan? In *The Flexitarian Diet*, author Dawn Jackson Blatner, RD, says being a "flexitarian" gives you the benefits of a [vegetarian diet](#) without having to forgo meat entirely.

A relatively new term, flexitarian comes from a combination of the words "flexible" and "vegetarian." Following a flexitarian diet simply means eating more plant-based meals and less meat.

There's plenty of scientific evidence to support the healthfulness of a diet made up mostly of plant foods. Studies show that vegetarians live 3.6 years longer and, on average, weigh 15% less than non-vegetarians. Blatner estimates the average person could shed up to 30 pounds by sticking to the flexitarian diet for 6-12 months.

"Vegetarianism is one of the healthiest and smartest ways to eat," she says, "and it is perfectly acceptable to pepper in meat and still be able to gain all the health benefits."

As a bonus, eating less meat is both environmentally and economically smart.

"Meat and poultry tend to be the most expensive items on a grocery bill, so downsizing can save money and is also an earth-friendly way to reduce greenhouse gases," Blatner says.

The Flexitarian Diet aims to make it easier for people to transition to eating less meat. The diet promotes fresh, natural, and seasonal foods but also includes staple items from the pantry and freezer. Sprinkled throughout it are "Flex Troubleshooters" -- tips for overcoming obstacles to eating more plant foods and losing [weight](#), based on Blatner's experience counseling [overweight](#) patients.

The Flexitarian Diet: What You Can Eat

An experienced cooking instructor, Blatner created more than 100 quick, easy, and healthy [recipes](#) focused on five main ingredients -- dishes like Millet Paella and Protein Popcorn. The recipes, designed to be filling, are accompanied by [nutrition](#) information. Most include a "flex swap" option for including animal protein.

A typical Flexitarian Diet day provides 1,500 calories, divided into three meals and two snacks. [Breakfast](#) is 300 calories, lunch is 400, dinner is 500, and each snack is 150. Dieters can lower calories to 1,200 per day by eliminating snacks, or increase them to 1,800 calories by doubling the breakfast portion.

Although meat is limited, the [diet plans](#) contain approximately 50 grams of protein daily.

Flexible five-week meal plans allow dieters to mix and match the calorie-controlled recipes to create their own customized meals.

A sample day on the diet might include:

- **Breakfast:** Apple and Almond Butter Toast or Sunflower Raisin Oatmeal
- **Lunch:** Avocado and Black Bean Wraps or Marinated Garden Lentil Pita
- **Dinner:** Curried Quinoa Salad or Fried Brown Rice with Asparagus and Almonds
- **Snacks:** Pizza Popcorn or Chocolate Mousse with Raspberries

The Latest Diets



New diets and weight loss tricks pop up every month. Get the facts on how the new diets work and what's right.

[Atkins](#)
[Best Life Diet](#)
[Biggest Loser](#)
[Cabbage Soup](#)
[Hallelujah Diet](#)
[Jenny Craig](#)
[NutriSystem](#)
[Ornish](#)
[South Beach](#)
[3 Day Diet](#)
[Weight Watchers](#)
[Zone](#)
[All Diets A-Z](#)

Related to diet and weight loss

[Alli](#), [apple cider vinegar](#), [low carb diet](#), [high protein diet](#), [weight loss](#), [metabolism](#), [Mediterranean diet](#), [diet pills](#), [trans fat](#), [BMI calculator](#), [detox diet](#), [diabetes diet](#), [Body for Life](#)

© 2008 WebMD, LLC. All rights reserved.

The diet includes a wide variety of foods, including familiar ones found any grocery store along with some more unusual ones, like kefir, sunflower seed butter, and tofu mousse, which may require a trip to the health food store.

And dining out is no problem on the Flexitarian Diet. The book offers strategies for making healthy choices from restaurant menus.

The Flexitarian Diet: How It Works

As the name suggests, this diet is all about flexibility. Readers can make their own choices from flexible meal plans, flexible [fitness](#) options, and recipes that can be vegetarian or not. Follow the five-week menu plan, or adopt the Flexitarian Diet model as your new diet plan for life. Or do neither and simply focus on trying to eat more plant foods and less meat - it's up to you.

On the Flexitarian Diet, you can choose to follow one of three flexitarian levels: beginner, advanced, or expert. Beginners are encouraged to start out by having two meatless days and a limit of 26 ounces of meat or poultry per week. Advanced flexitarians have three or four meatless days and limit meat or poultry to 18 ounces per week. And the expert flexitarian eats meatless five days of the week and gets only 9 ounces of meat or poultry weekly. Regardless of your chosen level, meat becomes more like a condiment or side dish instead of the focal point of your meal.

More important than how much meat you eat is the amount of plant foods, like beans, nuts, whole grains, and produce, that you add to your diet.

"Try tacos with half meat and half black beans, or spaghetti sauce with half meat and half white beans," says Blatner. "No matter where you start, you will begin to stretch your food dollar, improve the nutrition of your meals, and be surprised to discover a new family favorite even the kids will love."

As you start eating foods with less refined sugar, additives, and preservatives, your cravings for processed junk foods will be tamed, says Blatner.

To round out this healthy lifestyle plan, The Flexitarian Diet includes five "flex fitness factors" to help readers find ways to work more activity into their days.

"Fitness has to be part of a healthy lifestyle, so whether you run marathons or walk in the mall, I have provided recommendations, equipment, motivation to overcome barriers and tips to encourage everyone to find fun forms of fitness they enjoy," says Blatner.

The Flexitarian Diet: What the Experts Say

"The Flexitarian Diet is a fresh approach to eating that's balanced, smart and completely doable," says Ellie Krieger, RD, host of the Food Network's *Healthy Appetite*. "It drives home the idea that you don't have to go to extremes and give up any foods to eat well because [healthy eating](#) is so flexible."

Experts agree that most foods can fit into a healthy lifestyle, especially if the mainstays of your diet are phytochemical-rich plant foods that are naturally low in calories and help you feel full. You can rack up additional calorie savings by eating less fatty meat like hamburgers and by limiting your meat selections to 4 ounces of lean cuts.

"This is an excellent way to help most cooks break free of their usual meals and encourage them to experiment with different grains, beans, soy and more to broaden their culinary horizons," says Krieger, author of *The Foods You Crave* cookbook.

The Flexitarian Diet: Food for Thought

You can't go wrong on this healthy meal plan that is pro plant, not anti-meat. *The Flexitarian Diet* can teach you how to become a part-time vegetarian, how to add more disease-fighting, economical, and earth-friendly plant foods to your diet, or simply how to scale back those giant portions of meat.

Most people are already following a flexitarian diet to some degree. You probably already eat peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, grilled cheese sandwiches, eggplant Parmesan, cheese or veggie pizza, pasta with marinara sauce and bean burritos -- all vegetarian foods.

The Flexitarian Diet can inspire you to take it up a notch and include more meatless meals without drastically changing what you already eat. As a result, you can [lose weight](#) slowly and improve your health -- maybe even live a little longer.

The Latest Diets



New diets and weight loss tricks pop up every month. Get the facts on how the new diets work and what's right.

- [Atkins](#)
- [Best Life Diet](#)
- [Biggest Loser](#)
- [Cabbage Soup](#)
- [Hallelujah Diet](#)
- [Jenny Craig](#)
- [NutriSystem](#)
- [Ornish](#)
- [South Beach](#)
- [3 Day Diet](#)
- [Weight Watchers](#)
- [Zone](#)
- [All Diets A-Z](#)

Related to diet and weight loss

[Alli](#), [apple cider vinegar](#), [low carb diet](#), [high protien diet](#), [weight loss](#), [metabolism](#), [Mediterranean diet](#), [diet pills](#), [trans fat](#), [BMI calculator](#), [detox diet](#), [diabetes diet](#), [Body for Life](#)

© 2008 WebMD, LLC. All rights reserved.

The Latest Diets



New diets and weight loss tricks pop up every month. Get the facts on how the new diets work and what's right.

4 Top Picks

[Healthy Foods and Treats for Your Dog](#)

Is Your Diet Meeting Your Health Goals?
Know Your Health Risks? Get a Personalized Report
Diet Community: 121-Pound Weight Loss -- Before and After Photos

- Atkins
- Best Life Diet
- Biggest Loser
- Cabbage Soup
- Hallelujah Diet
- Jenny Craig
- NutriSystem
- Ornish
- South Beach
- 3 Day Diet
- Weight Watchers
- Zone
- All Diets A-Z

Related to diet and weight loss

Alli, apple cider vinegar, low carb diet, high protein diet, weight loss, metabolism, Mediterranean diet, diet pills, trans fat, BMI calculator, detox diet, diabetes diet, Body for Life

© 2008 WebMD, LLC. All rights reserved.

[View Article Sources](#) 

© 2009 WebMD, LLC. All rights reserved.

SHARE
What is this?

Digg 








[More...](#)

©2005-2007 WebMD, Inc. All rights reserved.
WebMD does not provide medical advice, diagnosis or treatment.

My Notes:



WebMD on facebook




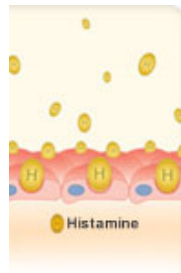
Kat Bethanne Barry Denise Jason John

Seasonal Allergy Symptoms?

[Learn About the Role of Histamines](#)
[Discover Common Nasal Allergy Triggers](#)
[Get Powerful, 24-Hour Nasal Allergy Symptom Relief](#)

[Learn More](#)

From Our Sponsor



SPONSOR

As You Journey through Menopause, Vivelle-Dot Is By Your Side



Find Out What the Menopause Journey May Mean for You
Learn about a Tiny Patch That Could Make a Big Difference
Get Tools, Information and Support for Your Menopause Journey



VIVELLE-DOT (estradiol transdermal system) IS AVAILABLE BY PRESCRIPTION ONLY.

INDICATION

Vivelle-Dot is used after menopause to: reduce moderate to severe hot flashes; treat moderate to severe dryness, itching and burning in or around the vagina; help reduce your chances of getting osteoporosis (thin weak bones); and treat certain conditions in which a young woman's ovaries do not produce enough estrogen naturally. Vivelle-Dot 0.025

[Prescribing Information](#)



