

The Teenage Vegetarian

Because the younger generation is often more in touch with world culture than adults, teenagers are in general more attuned to the environmental movement, to issues involving organic farming and with the reasons for becoming a vegetarian. So as more and more teenagers experiment with vegetarianism, the better informed they are about what it really means to live meat free, the better. Then even if they do not continue their lifestyle as a vegetarian, their experience was an educational one and they will be well informed should be chose to continue as a vegetarian in later life.

For parents of teenagers who wish to explore the vegetarian lifestyle, there are more reasons to celebrate than worry. There are numerous health benefits to developing a vegetarian diet and if their new passion reduces the amount of fast food and junk food they eat, that's a good thing. You will naturally worry if your teenager is getting enough protein if they forgo the eating of meat. By helping them learn about a well rounded vegan or vegetarian diet, they can derive all of their nutritional needs from natural foods and realize the many benefits of a vegetarian life along the way.

A basic level of knowledge your teen should become educated about early on is the various scales of severity that they can "go for" in their move into a vegetarian lifestyle. Many times a teenager just wants to be able to stake the claim to being a vegetarian. In that case, simply giving up meat may be sufficient. It is possible to design a program like that and still enjoy cheese, eggs, fish and diary and the transition to such a diet is not as extreme.

Another word of caution that your teen may take to heart if they seek adult counsel about trying a vegetarian lifestyle is the difficulty of making the transition. Teenagers are naturally impulsive and extreme so they may just "go vegetarian" in one day so they can go to school and lay claim to the title. But they can still have that reward and plan to ease into a vegetarian discipline and avoid the problems that an extreme change of diet can cause, especially for active teen bodies. For example, even if the new teen vegetarian just excludes meat from one meal, that still counts as starting their path toward a meat free life. And if that is not sufficient for your youngster, just cutting meat out of lunch and dinner may be enough.

One of the biggest concerns that you should help your teen be ware of is their vitamin needs in any new diet program. While a switch to a total vegetable diet will have many positive influences, you should make sure they are getting enough protein and other essential vitamins that they used to get from meat in their

diet. Calcium, B12, zinc and iron are all essential vitamins especially to young people that must be found elsewhere if they decide to stop eating meat. You can help your teenager enjoy a successful exploration of the vegetarian lifestyle and not face health risks by just being aware of their vitamin needs and making sure they get those vitamins in pill form until their food replacement program gets them what they need.

It's a tricky walk to guide a teenager through an interest in a vegetarian life because it is possible that many of the new foods they will have to get used to may not have the right tastes which will tempt them to give up the program. While as a parent you can have an influence over making their home life vegetarian diet a success, you may need to help them understand that their choices are limited when eating out so they are prepared to make the sacrifice for the sake of staying within their vegetarian guidelines.

Even though teenagers are compulsive and extreme, deep down they do not want to get sick or eat the wrong things. It's a balancing act to allow them to try things like becoming a vegetarian and for us as parents to both do all we can to make it a good experience but also to bring the wisdom they count on their elders for so they can explore the vegetarian lifestyle fully and then walk away from it if they wish and have learned a little bit about vegetarians along the way.

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