

Go vegan or vegetarian for a minimum of 3 days

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15 Feb 2023

Experiential Learning Goals:

1. Acquire knowledge of sustainable practices at different levels, from individual to global.
2. Improve critical thinking to address the various challenges of sustainability.
3. Reflect on the personal values and actions related to sustainability and identify opportunities for improvement in my daily life.

Reflection:

As I was going over the various ELP topics provided, I came across “Going vegan/veg for a minimum of 3 days”, this intrigued me as I had been thinking about trying out vegan for some time. Back home in India, I never thought about the food that I ate or the environmental implications of my choices. I mostly had homemade food and did not have much choice. Moreover, I didn't have much knowledge about veganism. It was only after joining McMaster University in October 2022, that I had the opportunity to explore this lifestyle further individually and understand its implications at higher levels.

My journey started the very next day, as I visited the nearest food place on campus “Centro”. The Plantry had some very interesting options for both Vegan and Vegetarian foods such as Chickpea Shwarma, Cauliflower Wings, Plantry Burger, and a huge variety of smoothies. I had Cauliflower wings which were delicious and tasted almost like traditional chicken wings. This surely is a healthier option as compared to chicken wings with high calories and fat. The cauliflower is coated in a batter made from flour, plant-based milk and spices, and then baked or fried until crispy. This gives them a good crunch and flavour.

This led me to the question: what are plant-based foods? I found out that it includes fruits and vegetables, cereals, pulses, oil seeds, seaweed, flowers, herbs, chocolate, coffee, tea and many more. This kind of plant-based diet doesn't include animal products. Since 2003, WHO has recommended the daily consumption of at least 400 g of fruits and vegetables (excluding starchy foods such as potatoes) to prevent chronic diseases, including heart disease, cancer, type 2 diabetes and obesity. However, the analysis of consumption data carried out by the Louis Bonduelle Foundation in 2019 reveals that in many countries/regions around the world, the consumption of plant-based foods is still well below the recommendations.

Later that evening I tried some green salad which had lettuce and capsicum, which was honestly quite refreshing. By the end of the day, I did feel like having something non-veg, but I wanted to stick to my goal for at least 3 days. The second day started with some lentils and dal

rice with naan. It reminded me of “Dal rice” my mom used to make back home. I enjoyed this with pieces of Naan. I could notice a difference in my energy levels as I had limited my intake of unhealthy fast foods. I could understand how a vegan or vegetarian diet is not necessarily suitable for everyone, and it's important to pay attention to your body's needs. However, I feel that adding more plant-based foods to our meals, even if only a few times a week, can be advantageous. My main worry was that I wouldn't be able to get enough protein while avoiding meat and might end up consuming too many carbohydrates and nuts. I was also concerned about whether I would have the necessary energy to perform my workouts with the same level of effectiveness. Later in the day, I had some Broccoli cheddar ranch, which is a healthy, creamy and crunchy salad alternative. I liked how places on campus, especially “Centro” had vegan and veg labelled properly as VG (Vegan) and V (Veg).

While doing this research, I was reminded of one of our course readings, Canada's 17 Sustainability Goals. Canada's second Sustainability Goal is to “Support a healthier and more sustainable food system”. The Canadian government is dedicating resources towards promoting sustainable and innovative food systems and is committed to ensuring that Canadians have access to safe and nutritious food. Additionally, the government is working to preserve the resilience of food systems by managing the spread and introduction of invasive plant and animal species that may threaten livestock, crops, and agricultural production. This way we as individuals can make a difference by making a change in our food habits.

On the third day, I was excited to try out more vegetarian options. I had a “Just egg plant-based breakfast wrap” and some fruits including muskmelon and grapes as well. It smelled and tasted good, and was fulfilling for breakfast. I remember the taste of eggs, but I couldn't tell the difference between the two and it was worth it. I decided to research more about Just egg, it was eye-opening to me that it even exists. I found out that it's made from “Mung Bean Protein Isolate” and is processed. The mung bean is also one of the most sustainable plants on earth, using significantly fewer resources to grow and cultivate than chicken eggs. I grew up eating lots of eggs and I am biased towards conventional chicken eggs due to their nutritional value. However, a 2020 clinical trial found that cage-free, organic eggs have higher nutritional quality than conventional eggs (and it's better for the animals as well). I am now more aware of the benefits of plant-based eggs, as even lactose intolerants can consume eggs again.

As I researched more about veganism, I learned that animal agriculture is one of the primary causes of deforestation, climate change, and water pollution. The environmental consequences of animal-based food production are severe and cannot be sustained. Animal agriculture is a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions, which are a major driver of climate change. We learned in our lectures about the harmful effects of greenhouse gases and how climate change impacts agriculture, forest and water resources. The production and transportation of feed for livestock, as well as the methane emissions from livestock themselves, all contribute to the carbon footprint of animal agriculture. By choosing a plant-based diet, we can reduce their carbon footprint and make our contributions to combat climate change. I grew more passionate and concerned about the well-being of our planet and its future. During my research (Louis Bonduelle Foundation), I learned that when land is degraded, it becomes less

productive, restricting what can be grown and reducing the soil's ability to absorb carbon. This exacerbates climate change, while climate change in turn exacerbates land degradation in many different ways.

I have now decided to start experimenting with new plant-based recipes, which help me discover new, delicious meals besides having greater nutrient intake from a wider variety of plant-based foods. This will require more time and effort to plan and prepare meals with new cooking techniques. I will consciously start shopping for vegan products and make my contribution towards lowering the carbon footprint through more vegan and eco-friendly product production. I am aware of the fact that some vegan products may be costly, requiring research to find reputable brands and learning to read ingredient labels carefully. The benefits to my health and well-being greatly outweigh the costs.

Opting for a diet that primarily consists of plant-based foods can be a way for individuals to mitigate the detrimental environmental effects associated with animal agriculture, while also supporting a food system that is fair and eco-friendly.



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