

PREFACE BY
T. Colin Campbell, PhD, & Howard Jacobson, PhD

THE PLANT-BASED JOURNEY



**A Step-by-Step Guide
for Transitioning to a Healthy Lifestyle
and Achieving Your Ideal Weight**

LANI
MUEL RATH

FOREWORD BY
Neal Barnard, MD



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To everyone on, beginning, or thinking about the journey—

I wrote this book for you.

CONTENTS

Preface by T. Colin Campbell, PhD, and Howard Jacobsen, PhD	TK
Foreword by Neal Barnard, MD	TK
Introduction	TK

SECTION ONE: AWAKENING

Chapter 1: Making the Plant-Based Connection	TK
Chapter 2: My Plant-Based Journey	TK

SECTION TWO: SCOUT

Chapter 3: The Plant-Based Plate	TK
Chapter 4: The Good News Guide to Hunger Satisfaction	TK
Chapter 5: Getting Your Kitchen and Pantry Ready	TK

SECTION THREE: ROOKIE

Chapter 6: Making the Switch: Transition Timelines	TK
Chapter 7: Plant Yourself!	TK
Chapter 8: Creating Systems for Success	TK

SECTION FOUR: ROCK STAR

Chapter 9: Plant-Based on the Road	TK
Chapter 10: Family, Friends, and Food Pushers	TK

SECTION FIVE: CHAMPION

Chapter 11: The Ten-Day Plant-Based Makeover	TK
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SECTION SIX: THE KEY SUPPORTING PLAYERS

Chapter 12: Fit for the Cause	TK
Chapter 13: Mastering Strength of Mind	TK
Chapter 14: Crowd-Pleasers and Can't Misses	TK
Breakfast	TK
<i>Pumpkin Muffins</i>	TK
<i>Crispy Coconut Waffles</i>	TK
<i>Pancakes Pronto</i>	TK
Lunch and Dinner	TK
<i>Black Bean Polenta Pie</i>	TK
<i>Game-Changer Chili</i>	TK

Country Comfort Corn Bread TK
Golden Turmeric Rice TK
Miyoko's Sundried Tomato Pesto TK
Lickety-Split Lasagna TK
Portobello Pot Roast TK
Tacos in No Time TK
Speedy Burritos TK

Dressings, Sauces, and Toppers TK
Sweet and Sour Dressing TK
Tahini-Lemon Sauce TK
Mbegu's Spicy African Peanut Sauce TK
Sweet Bean Cream TK
Cranberry Sauce with Dates and Oranges TK
Apple Vinaigrette TK
Nutty Plant Parmesan TK
Lime Chipotle Chickpeas TK

Dessert TK
Banana Ice Cream TK
Rice Cooker Baked Apples TK
No Sugar, No Oil Pecan Apple Crisp TK
Colleen Holland's Double Chocolate Cherry Truffles TK
Berrylicious Fruit Tart TK

Onward! TK

APPENDICES

Resources TK
Shopping List TK
Plant-Based FAQs TK
Plant-Based Replacements for Dairy Milk, Eggs, and Oil TK
Metric Conversion Charts TK

Endnotes TK
Acknowledgments and Gratitude TK
About the Author TK
Index TK

PREFACE

As my son Tom and I signed the contract, I knew *The China Study* wasn't going to sell a lot of copies. Turned down by a dozen publishers who knew the market cold, the manuscript was accused of being "too full of science" for ordinary readers. Its message was too far out of the mainstream to be convincing. And, the kiss of death, it was a food book without recipes.

So when a small Texas publishing house, BenBella Books, took on the orphan manuscript in 2004, my expectations were modest. At best, I hoped, it might find its way into the hands of a few serious policy makers and science bigwigs, and thereby influence public discussion in a roundabout way. After all, the weight of evidence favoring a whole food, plant-based diet was overwhelming. The challenge, I thought, was just getting people to see the truth.

I was neither delusional nor imaginative enough to have foreseen what happened next. From a slow start, *The China Study* has now sold over one million copies worldwide. My work and that of the colleagues we profiled in the book have been brought to even wider audiences thanks to films like *Forks Over Knives*.

Now I had another puzzle on my hands. If *The China Study* was so convincing, and it was reaching an audience in the millions, then why was the world so slow to change?

We know that:

- **consumption of animal products is clearly linked to unhealthy weight, disease, disability, and untimely death;**
- **industrial-scale animal agriculture is the single biggest contributor to the most immanent threats to our environment, including climate destabilization, drawdown of our aquifers, and the rise of antibiotic-resistant "superbugs"; and**
- **our meat-heavy Western diet promotes cruelty to other life forms and to economically and politically disadvantaged humans.**

So why on earth wasn't the message, now widely heard, changing our food system more quickly and systemically?

Nine years after *The China Study*, I published *Whole: Rethinking the Science of Nutrition* (also with BenBella, a loyal partner for all these years) to explain

what I thought was holding us back. I identified two main obstacles: all the moneyed interests exerting “subtle power” on the system, and a mind-set that elevated unrelated facts at the expense of large, observable patterns.

My background is in biochemical and epidemiological exploration, with an unavoidable minor in public policy due to my decades of trying to convince political functionaries to create policy based on science, not corporate largesse or threat. *Whole* explored both of those domains in its answer and prescription. Yet there was a companion book to be written—and I wasn’t the one to write it—about how people can move from understanding to action.

While I’m no expert on behavior change, I know firsthand (and have heard personal stories from literally thousands of people) that there’s a big difference between *knowing* about the benefits of a plant-based lifestyle and actually *living* it. So when my *Whole* contributing author and cowriter of this preface, Howard Jacobson, told me that Lani Muelrath was working on the book you now hold in your hands, I knew it was the companion volume to *Whole* that needed to be written.

Lani has been on the plant-based journey far longer than we have (decades, in fact, before I coined the phrase “whole food, plant-based” to describe more accurately than “vegan” the dietary pattern shown to promote individual and global well-being). As she humbly writes, she’s made all the mistakes so you don’t have to.

It’s one thing to have a guide who’s already mastered the path you’re about to walk; it’s another thing entirely when that guide has devoted herself to understanding how and when and why people succeed and how and when and why they stumble. Lani’s own transition to a whole food, plant-based lifestyle and subsequent health, energy, and fitness are admirable and instructive. But it’s her experience coaching thousands from initial awakening to unconscious competence that makes her a powerful partner on your own plant-based journey.

As researchers, we have long love affairs with valid data and validated theories. We’re happy to report that this book contains both. Not only has Lani scoured the medical and nutritional literature to present her case for a plant-based diet, but she has also devoured the literature on habit formation and behavior change, exercise physiology and brain function, and psychological processes of decision making.

The most useful data, however, comes from Lani’s own research. She surveyed over 1,200 people at various stages of the plant-based journey to

discover what they found helpful, what strategies did and didn't work, and what advice they'd give to someone just about to take the first step.

This book represents the culmination of their combined experience with Lani's wisdom, compassion, humor, and "just the facts" outlook. If you are just starting out, or finding yourself struggling to eat in accord with your knowledge and your values, or looking to take your plant-based game to the next level, then *The Plant-Based Journey* is your new best friend.

We wish you abundance, harmony, and joy on your plant-based journey.

—T. Colin Campbell, Ph.D, and Howard Jacobsen, Ph.D

FOREWORD

So much has happened in the past few decades to fuel the fire of the plant-based movement, and it has been very exciting to see things unfold. Since the founding of the Physicians Committee back in 1985, we have been conducting clinical research studies to test the effects of eating a low-fat vegan diet on health. We have consistently found that this way of eating brings benefits in a wide range of health areas. One of our biggest studies, funded by the National Institutes of Health, was conducted with people who had type 2 diabetes, and the results were impressive. A plant-based diet was found not only to be even more effective than a more conventional “diabetes diet,” but it also was more powerful than oral diabetes medications. Many of our study participants were able to completely get off of their medications or significantly reduce the amount of their daily dose(s). In our numerous studies on diabetes since then, the outcome has been the same. A low-fat vegan diet has been shown to be therapeutic for myriad conditions in numerous other research studies conducted through our organization and many others. For everything from heart disease to migraines, depression to arthritis, plants have proven to be powerful mechanisms for healing the body and promoting health.

When people participate in our research studies, it is typical for it to be their first encounter with eating a plant-based diet. Accordingly, they need some guidance on how to get started and integrate this new diet into their current lifestyle. Thankfully, we have a wonderful group of staff members on our clinical research team who are full of knowledge and have years of experience to share. And once our participants get the first few weeks under their belts (which by that point may likely be a little looser than when they started), they’ll have fallen into an eating pattern that will feel almost second nature. Although it may be hard to believe right now, in time, a plant-based diet will feel like home—natural, easy, and right—but getting there is a journey.

Like our research participants, you, too, may need some guidance as you’re getting started. Lucky for you, you have Lani to help you. She escorts you through the transition step by step, offering valuable support and advice along the way. For everything from restocking your kitchen to

eating on the road, Lani helps you to steer through the obstacles like a pro. So, are you ready to take the wheel? With a book like this in your hands, the answer is yes!

Buckle up and enjoy the ride. The plant-based journey takes you to the very best of places.

—Neal Barnard, MD

INTRODUCTION

In Gary Larsen's classic *There's a Hair in My Dirt*, the story's heroine, Harriet, has a series of encounters with wildlife while on a day's walk in the woods: a tortoise on the trail, a fledgling bird fallen from its nest. In her heartfelt compassion for the natural world, Harriet innocently tries to help, yet with disastrous results. She tosses the tortoise into a pond, mistaking its needs for that of a water-going turtle, thus sending it to its doom. She scales a tree to place the chick back into its nest, not understanding that the survival of just one offspring is critical to the entire species' survival. Harriet is brimming with caring and compassion for the natural world. Yet while earnest about making a positive difference, she lacks the practical knowledge about how to be most helpful. This results in her repeatedly thwarting the desired outcomes of her endeavors.

In similar fashion, you may be bubbling over with enthusiasm for the plant-based lifestyle. Perhaps you've been freshly inspired—or have renewed passion about—your health, your weight, the environment, and the significant difference a plant-based lifestyle can make for it all. This inspiration has brought you to this juncture and underpins your quest. Just like Harriet, you care! And caring is the place from where any change necessarily springs forth.

Where you may need a boost—just like Harriet—is in the practical, personal connection portion of the program. This is exactly what you'll find in this book. The highly successful model for your quest—*The Plant-Based Journey*—is drawn from over four decades of both personal practice and experience coaching thousands on their successful transitions to the healthy plant-based lifestyle. This journey invites you to center what you eat on predominantly whole plant foods: vegetables, whole grains, beans and legumes, fruits, nuts, and seeds. There are straightforward, sound, proven ways to set yourself up for successful transition. They are simple to learn and easy to implement, and they are assembled for you here. You'll discover how to keep it uncomplicated, inexpensive, doable, and delectable. You'll find out how to leverage simple systems that support your new ideal. We'll also dismantle and clear away obstacles that may be getting in your way—for the conventions of eating extend to beyond just what you're used to putting on your plate.

THE JOURNEY'S PATH

When people come to me for help in changing to a plant-based diet, many times they ask questions about nutrition and meal ideas. Yet even more often they have become tangled in the transition. They need practical guidance to help them not only set up their kitchen but also unravel their previous practices of eating—and thinking. They are often at the juncture between knowing enough about the shortfalls, compromises, and serious hazards of continuing to eat in the fashion they have been, sincerely desiring something better for themselves—yet floundering when it comes to making the shift. Without practical knowledge of some basics, along with being properly equipped with the tools needed for real, lasting change, they, like Harriet, inadvertently impair their success. For food—beyond providing us with good nutrition—is also about habits, family, friends, workplace, travel, social situations, traditions, and comfort. How do you successfully navigate all of that?

This is where the steps as spelled out for you in *The Plant-Based Journey* come in. Though each of us brings a uniqueness to the journey of changing to eating a plant-based diet, there are universal stages along the way, which are explained below. Think of them as levels of proficiency through which your expedition will progress. There are no set intervals, no rules of pace on the journey through each of these stages. Progression through them is an individual affair.

Section One: Awakening

This is the first stage you will go through in transitioning to a plant-based diet. Everyone starts this journey as the result of an inspiration. Some event, person, or circumstance has alerted you to a new way of looking at what you eat. You have, literally, become awakened to a new possibility—the plant-based lifestyle. Awakening is what gives your journey its first legs and is the single most important element of transition. In section one, we'll establish a quick reconnect with your reasons for embarking on this journey—your “why.”

Section Two: Scout

In section two, we'll focus on plant-based eating basics. This is the investigative stage, where those initial questions and curiosities are addressed. What does a plant-based lifestyle look like in your kitchen, in your shopping cart, and on your plate? How do you morph your current shopping, cooking,

and eating styles to align with your new ideal, and avoid common pitfalls? What food preparation tools will help make the whole thing easier? As Scout, you are gathering information. It's a reconnaissance mission.

Section Three: Rookie

Soon emerging, and often overlapping with the Scout stage—because you will no doubt be inspired to start eating more whole plant foods while still in the investigative process—is the Rookie stage. Here, you apply the knowledge from Scout reconnaissance to specific action. It's time to eat! You'll strategically increase the presence of plant foods on your plate and create simple systems for successful implementation, crowding out animal products and highly processed foods. Quite quickly, what used to feel awkward you now find yourself accomplishing with ease. Soon you are eating plenty of plant-based foods each day to make and keep you healthy, happy, satisfied, and trim.

Section Four: Rock Star

When 90 percent of your calories come from a variety of whole, plant-based foods, you've clearly achieved Rock Star status. You continue to sharpen the tools of expertise with greater confidence and ease and are inspired to evolve your plant-based practices onto a bigger stage. That means preparedness for travel, vacations, a busy work schedule, and restaurant dining—not to mention those family and social situations that seem to present themselves at every turn. Increasingly, you'll build the skills for making the practical connection between what you *know* about a plant-based lifestyle and what you *do*.

Section Five: Champion

As Champion, at ease with the basics, you've also assembled and are consistently practicing strategies for flourishing in a healthy, happy, plant-based lifestyle. Now that you are eating predominantly whole plant foods, you have new know-how for some of the more complex challenges of the journey. At this level, you'll leapfrog your enjoyment and expertise for successful lifestyle longevity.

Section Six: The Key Supporting Players: Exercise and Mastering Strength of Mind

In this section you'll find out how physical activity and mobilizing your mind for change add enormous oomph to your journey. Together, they poise you

for positive transformation, enhancing brain function and setting you up for making better choices—while dismantling hidden obstacles and increasing ease, satisfaction with, and sustainability of your plant-based lifestyle.

• • •

Throughout these six sections, we'll restore your birthright—the pure joy of eating. Food is meant to be relished with gusto, free of overstructured artifice, bodily discomfort, disease, cognitive dissonance, or a looming threat of weight gain. When you take back your fork, you reclaim your freedom. Your body and beltline will thank you forever.

You may be completely new to this journey or in the middle of any of the above stages. Excellent! Simply step in and move forward from wherever you are. Dip back as needed into previous stages to refresh your know-how. This has the effect of elevating your journey and averting black-and-white thinking—perhaps the number one downfall of lifestyle change. At every step of the journey—from Awakening to Champion—keep mindful of the fact that the closest thing to perfect is continued overall improvement. What a relief! With this understanding, your journey—already underway with the first signs of Awakening—will be one of brilliant, sustainable success.

MORE LIGHT FOR YOUR JOURNEY'S PATH

While researching this book, I gathered over 1,200 responses to surveys about personal experiences on the plant-based journey. In these surveys, I asked specific questions about what my clients and readers found helped them successfully advance along the plant-based path. I asked them what worked for them, the suggestions they might have for those just setting out, and what they wish they had known *before* they got started. Providing insights and reflections from the front lines of change, these surveys—along with my decades of coaching experience—are referenced, reported, quoted, and otherwise woven into the fabric of this book.

In your hands is the handbook and companion for taking your plate from plant-spare to plant-prolific, and for opening the door to true eating freedom. Excited to get going? Your plant-based journey is now underway.

Devotion and keeping it simple will merrily ferry you through the early stages. With heart, enthusiasm, and a little bit of planning, it will soon become second nature, deeply satisfying—and more fun, rewarding, and liberating than you ever imagined.

SECTION 1

AWAKENING



The Adventure Begins

CHAPTER 1

Making the Plant-Based Connection



Your imagination has been captured, your heart won. Whether you want to lose weight, increase day-to-day vigor, lower your cholesterol, reverse or prevent disease, enhance athletic performance, exert less impact on the environment, or simply live in a more compassionate world, the plant-based lifestyle sounds like just what you are looking for. You’ve awakened to new possibilities. You’re primed and ready! In this chapter you will explore the first stage on your plant-based journey—identifying your “why”—under-scoring your motivations for eating plant-based.

My guess is that your journey began before you even opened this book. Something you read, someone you talked with, or something you heard has ignited in you the inspiration to recast your lifestyle in a fundamental way: by what you put on your plate. Your reasons for embarking on this journey may be multiple, or you may have one overriding incentive for embracing the plant-based lifestyle. Yet don’t be surprised if before long you become aware of a growing list of compelling reasons that support your choice. Cultivate your connection to each of them. Having multiple motivations further energizes your quest.

WHY PLANT-BASED?

Research tells us that the most common reasons people move to eating meat-reduced or meat-free are to improve their health and/or the lot of animals, followed by a concern for the environment.¹ Living a plant-based lifestyle has a positive and powerful impact on all three areas. The truth is that if you can get control of your food, you can get control of more than you ever imagined.

To help you flesh out your purpose in going plant-based, what follows is a snapshot of the common reasons that people make this far-reaching lifestyle change. Rather than providing an exhaustive discourse on reasons for becoming plant-based, the intention of this chapter is to put important information into your hands so that you can make your own informed decisions about the journey, and to underscore the importance of being connected with your “why” for getting started.

We’ll start by hitting closest to home—your weight, health, and how you feel in your body.

Weight Loss and the Dietary Holy Grail: You Can Be Full without Being Fat

My own weight challenges spurred me on a decades-long quest to find a way of eating that would allow me to, bottom line, be well fed without being fat. This search finally landed me happily on the whole food plant-based doorstep. Eating this way has allowed me to easily maintain—while eating to my heart’s content—a weight 50 pounds lighter than the one at which I found myself almost twenty years ago. More details in chapter 2.

You’ll be relieved to know that there is no reason to shrug off your weight problem—if indeed you have one—as, “it’s in my genes.” Though it may be, the research tells us that behavior trumps genetics. What you eat has more bearing on your fat or lean condition than do your genes. Predisposition is not destiny. Bestowing vitality and glowing health, a plant-based diet will restore—or help you find for the first time ever—your ideal weight, without you having to chronically go hungry, fanatically exercise, or micromanage every bite. As much as you can certainly be as healthy as possible “at any size,” there is a distinct correlation between obesity and advancing disease—to say nothing of the well-being, slender physique, and joy of living that can be yours each day when you make the switch to whole plant foods.

TALKING MEAT WITH BILL GATES AND MICHAEL POLLAN

GATES: Why should people consider replacing meat in their diets?

POLLAN: Three principal motivators: health, because we know high consumption of red meat correlates with higher chances of certain cancers; the environment, because we know that conventional meat production is one of the biggest drivers of climate change, as well as water and pollution [*sic*]; and ethics, since the animal factories that produce most of our meat and milk are brutal places where animals suffer needlessly.²

Troublesome Twosome: Slashing Animal Products and Processed Foods Is Proven to Improve Your Health

Two mealtime monoliths have put our well-being in a precarious position: animal products and highly processed, refined foods. Together, these comprise roughly 90 percent of the calories we, as a nation, consume.^{3,4} Both have proven direct links to obesity and disease. A closer look at some of the problems related to eating them will edify your journey.

Americans obtain over 60 percent of their calories in the form of highly processed foods made with refined sugar, oil, and white flour. These show up in pastries, candies, and fast foods, which have hijacked our taste buds with a false “fed” promise—they encourage us to take in far more calories than do whole plant foods to get to our fullness point. In other words, fiber-deficient edibles—as all animal products also are—present problems for hunger satisfaction. Along with other essential nutrients, refined food products have had the fiber ripped out of them. Both are waiting for the fiber absolution that never comes—and animal products never had fiber in the first place. It’s not as if nutrients such as fiber are optional for your well-being—they are essential for cellular normalcy and disease protection. When you fraction foods and alter their composition, you change what your body does with them. When the foodstuffs get robbed, so does your health. This also has enormous implications for weight control—more on that in chapter 4 (page TK). Remember, just because it’s edible doesn’t mean it’s food.

The leading causes of degeneration, debilitation, and death in the modern world—heart disease,^{5,6} strokes, complications from obesity such as type 2 diabetes, and certain forms of cancer⁷—are largely nutritionally controllable and thus not entirely unavoidable.⁸ This means that often you can eat your way out of them through the adoption of a whole plant foods

diet.^{9,10,11} This has been demonstrated by multiple programs, perhaps the best known being Dr. Ornish’s Program for Reversing Heart Disease. Scientifically proven to reverse heart disease, the Ornish program, which includes adoption of a plant-based diet, is currently offered in hospitals and qualifies for coverage by Medicare.¹² Kaiser Permanente—as an HMO having a decided interest in keeping people healthy—recently issued a directive “. . . to help physicians understand the potential benefits of a plant-based diet, to the end of working together to create a societal shift toward plant-based nutrition.”¹³ A report by the Union of Concerned Scientists says we could save 100,000 lives and \$17 billion annually in health care costs from heart disease if Americans *simply ate more fruits and vegetables*. These are astonishing numbers—and it doesn’t stop there (italics my own for emphasis): “If Americans ate just *one more serving* of fruits or vegetables per day, this would save more than 30,000 lives and \$5 billion in medical costs each year,” and “if Americans were to follow current U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) recommendations for daily consumption of fruits and vegetables, those numbers would go up to more than 127,000 lives and \$17 billion saved.” The report goes on to challenge Congress to slash farm policies that subsidize and thus proliferate Big Ag’s massive production of junk and fast food, undeniably contributors to the problem.¹⁴

Eating More Whole Grains Is Linked with Lower Mortality Risk

Increasing evidence links consumption of whole grains with decreased risk of mortality. Evaluating statistics from more than 100,000 women and men over a period of about twenty-five years, researchers compared the participants’ whole grain intake with mortality data. They found that for every serving of whole grains (28g/day), overall death risk dropped by 5 percent, and by 9 percent for cardiovascular disease-related death. The study concludes, “These findings further support current dietary guidelines that recommend increasing whole grain consumption to facilitate primary and secondary prevention of chronic disease, and also provide promising evidence that suggests a diet enriched with whole grains may confer benefits toward extended life expectancy.”¹⁵ It’s really quite simple. Eat abundantly of whole plant foods and you build a proven protective barrier between you and a landslide of poor health.

Can You Get Too Much? Animal Protein Intake and Cancer

Too *much* protein? And here you thought we were going to address the plant-based FAQ “where do you get your protein?” In truth, the answer to that question demands a reframing of the entire issue surrounding protein.

There is a distinctly prejudiced attitude that lurks behind the “where do you get your protein?” question. The presumption is that protein is the ultimate macronutrient that we must unquestionably pursue and ingest—and the more of it, the better. This ubiquitous perspective prevails in advertising and oral tradition. “High in protein!” featured on a product label is perceived by the public as an unquestioned positive. Certainly protein plays a crucial role in the structure and functions of the body, having a hand in everything from making muscle to bolstering immunity. No one is arguing that. Yet when it comes to protein, the recommendation for high levels of it in our diet is long outdated and needs to be reevaluated, and our requirements for it based on science rather than special interests.

Actually, most people consume twice the amount of protein needed. Even the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND) proclaims that, “most Americans eat more protein than they need.”¹⁶ The recommended dietary allowance (RDA) for protein for both men and women is 0.36 grams per pound of body weight—a little bit more for pregnant or nursing women, easily met with their typical increased calorie consumption. These amounts are in alignment with those recommended by the World Health Organization and AND, and are easily satisfied or surpassed by eating enough calories from a variety of whole plant foods.¹⁷

A diet of excessive animal protein is correlated with increased risk for multiple health problems and chronic disease.¹⁸ The high-protein habit also hijacks a portion of our plates that should be devoted to plant-produced nutrition while littering our plates with edible landmines. In the heavily referenced, definitive *The Mystique of Protein and Its Implications*,¹⁹ T. Colin Campbell²⁰ underscores the health risks undeniably linked to our love affair with eating animal protein, which makes it surprisingly easy to surpass our dietary protein requirements for optimal health. Consumption of concentrated protein as found in animal protein increases the body’s production of IGF-1—insulin-like growth factor.²¹ One of the body’s important growth promoters during fetal and childhood development,

IGF-1 normally tapers off after puberty, when our need for growth spurts naturally declines. An elevation in IGF-1 levels later in life promotes the aging process.²² High levels of IGF-1 have been shown to foster the growth, proliferation, and spread of cancer cells, making IGF-1 a hot topic in oncology.^{23,24,25} In contrast, *reduced* IGF-1 in adulthood is associated with diminished oxidative stress, decreased inflammation, enhanced insulin sensitivity, and longer life span.^{26,27,28}

The preeminence of animal protein was originally based on the finding that, gram for gram, it promoted more weight gain than did plant-based protein. However, “growing bodies of people faster also means growing cancer faster, both of which are promoted by hormone growth factors.”²⁹ When cancer has been initiated, a high-protein diet that exceeds the amount needed by the body has been shown to promote cancer growth. Casein—the primary protein in milk—has been called “the most ‘relevant’ chemical carcinogen ever identified.”³⁰ Interestingly, this problem with excess protein pertains only to animal protein, as research has linked diets high in animal protein to the proliferation of cancer—while high amounts of plant protein have not.

In contrast, low-protein diets have been shown to *inhibit* the growth of cancer, without risk to any other aspect of health. *The China Study* concluded, “People who ate the most animal-based foods got the most chronic disease. Even relatively small intakes of animal-based food were associated with adverse effects,” while those who ate the most plant-based foods were the healthiest and tended to avoid chronic disease.³¹ Distinct correlations also exist between countries with animal protein-rich diets and diseases of lifestyle, such as cardiovascular diseases, and complications from obesity such as diabetes.³²

Clear correlations have been found between populations that consume low percentages of animal products and proteins and *reduced* incidences of disease.³³ Upon a review of the literature, sixteen scientists from ten countries concluded that diets that are protective against cancer are primarily made up of foods of plant origin.³⁴ Reducing intake of saturated fats and trans fats—the former found in animal products and both of which are found in refined food products—has been found to reduce the risk of Alzheimer’s disease and dementia.³⁵ No studies documenting an *increase* in lifestyle diseases from eating a whole foods plant-based diet exist.

From Single Nutrients to Whole Foods for Health

The entire isolated nutrients lens through which we've become accustomed to viewing our diet has created a misinformed mind-set about nutrition. "Carbs," "fats," and "protein"—terms that have become the darlings of the processed foods and diet industries—do not accurately inform you about what's in your food. It constructs a can't-see-the-forest-for-the-trees problem, where single nutrients are the individual trees while the entire forest—"wholistic" nutrition—is undervalued and overlooked. This is a convenience for the food supplement industry, which has quite profitably figured out how to leverage our single nutrient obsession with its push of powders and pills. Whole foods can be refined and highly processed to isolate nutrients from their original form of delivery, put in a package, and sold to you at a greatly inflated price in the form of, for example, protein supplements and fatty acid capsules. The cost is even greater when you consider that, in reality, this plant plundering—reducing complex plant foods to emphasize one nutrient—diminishes the nutritional richness of the whole, real thing.

We don't eat nutrients; we eat food. Overanalyzing and dissecting foods in an effort to compartmentalize them by nutrient content sells them short on what they deliver as whole entities—providing the perfect synergy of what you need for optimal nutrition.³⁶ For example, legumes are more concentrated in amino acids—the building blocks of protein—than many other plant foods. But to call them a protein is an oversimplified misnomer. They are also rich in starch, fiber, vitamins, and minerals. Legumes are not designated to play just one position; their strength—as with other whole plant foods—lies in their ability to play all over the plate, giving them the full court advantage with the superior qualities they quite literally bring to the table.

See Red Meat—and Say No: The Red Meat and Chronic Disease Connection

In 2012, the *Journal of the American Medical Association* issued precautions about including meat on your menu, stating that "consumption of unprocessed and processed red meats is associated with chronic diseases" and ". . . increased risk of total [disease], cardiovascular disease, and cancer mortality."³⁷ The Harvard School of Public Health publicized these findings that same year, affirming that red meat, especially processed meat, contains

ingredients that have been linked to increased risk of chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease and cancer.³⁸

Chicken and Eggs Increase Disease Risk

Although marketing has driven a “poultry is healthier fare” campaign, chicken has not lived up to the promise. Even in the leanest cuts of chicken almost 25 percent of the calories are from fat—a hair shy of the 28 percent fat in lean beef—and with just about the same amount of cholesterol.³⁹ Compare that to beans, rice, and vegetables, which contain an average of 10 to 15 percent calories from fat—*sans* cholesterol.

The public health picture with chicken only gets worse. When it comes to bacteria, chicken is a hot mess. That intestinal “bug” that went around the office last year? Possibly caused by salmonella or campylobacter, fun-sounding bacteria that have been detected on approximately one-third of the chicken products in our supermarkets. Present in the chicken feces, the bacteria is easily splattered onto the skin and muscle tissue during “processing,” a polite term for slaughter and evisceration.⁴⁰ Sure, you can kill these bacteria with cooking, but you might want to prepare dinner in a hazmat suit.⁴¹

Cooking chicken presents a problem of its own. Heavily cooked chicken apparently can form cancer-causing chemicals. And these aren’t chemical additives—they actually form from the flesh itself sizzling on your seemingly innocent backyard grill.⁴² Yikes. And how do you think bird flu epidemics make their way into our population? Domestic bird farms provide perfect breeding grounds for influenza viruses that hitch a ride on migratory birds.

Egg consumption increases the risk of cardiovascular diseases in a dose-response manner—the more you eat, the worse it gets. Researchers discovered that those who consumed the most eggs had a 19 percent increased risk for developing cardiovascular disease and a 68 percent increased risk for diabetes, compared with those who ate the fewest. For those already with diabetes, the risk for developing heart disease from eating the most eggs jumped by 83 percent.⁴³ Eating eggs is also linked to developing prostate cancer. By consuming 2.5 eggs per week, men increased their risk for a deadly form of prostate cancer by 81 percent, compared with men who consumed less than half an egg per week. Incidentally, the same study revealed a link between red and processed meat and the advancement of prostate cancer.⁴⁴

Peril in the Milk Pail: The Problems with Dairy Products

Should you just switch out the beef and the chicken for that seemingly innocent “perfect food,” milk? Cow’s milk can grow a newborn calf to double its weight in about fifty days—in contrast to humans who double birth weight in 180 days.⁴⁵ Have we a mismatch?

Dairy products come with their own bucketful of woes—in addition to the issues surrounding casein. Dairy devotees may find that along with the cheese and yogurt come asthma, diarrhea, anemia, arthritis, migraine headaches, allergies, constipation, gas, bloating, eczema, runny nose, acne, and fatigue, along with an elevated risk for a variety of serious illnesses, including type 1 diabetes.⁴⁶ On top of all of this, the National Cancer Institute has said, “Milk-drinking is one of the most consistent dietary predictors of prostate cancer in the scientific literature today.”⁴⁷

If you step outside the milk carton propaganda, you might find the very idea that the milk of another species is optimal and “needed by every body”—let alone necessary for human health—curious. We know that just the presence of large amounts of calcium in dairy foods consumed doesn’t guarantee stronger bones.⁴⁸ High intake of cow’s milk has even been associated with increased risk for bone fractures and death.⁴⁹ A look at the epidemiology around the world reveals that the very countries that consume the most dairy, calcium, and animal protein have the highest rates of osteoporotic bone fracture.⁵⁰ And the inverse is so—in countries where they’re not obsessed with the milk moustache, we find reduced risk of developing bone disease.⁵¹

Once you find out some of the contaminants in dairy milk—such as, among other goodies, rocket fuel—you start to rethink it.^{52,53,54,55} Simple food web science explains it. Chemicals and pesticides work their way into our waterways, where they are taken up through the roots of plants, which are then eaten by livestock. These substances are sequestered in the animals’ fat stores—right along with additional amounts that are applied to crops destined for the dairy cow feedlot. As a dairy cow prepares to make milk, her body mobilizes her fat stores to produce milk for her offspring. This results in the release of chemicals that have been bioaccumulating in the milk—now in a far more concentrated form—which then become exponentially concentrated in the bodies of humans who consume dairy products. What we end

up with is a hand-me-down payload of contaminants. This carries lifelong consequences for the humans at the receiving end of dairy products in the form of immune suppressors, carcinogens, and neurotoxins.

Infectious agents taint the milk as well. Somatic cells—white cells and tissue debris, otherwise known as pus—proliferate in the milk supply.⁵⁶ This is a “drink your milk!” deal breaker for a lot of people. The fact that white blood cells are showing up in cow’s milk is an indication that there’s a health problem for the cow. And with the use of antibiotics to control disease in dairy cows, antibiotic residue in milk leads to decreased effectiveness of antibiotics in humans.⁵⁷

BEYOND YOUR BELTLINE: MORE REASONS TO GO PLANT-BASED

The food you eat is arguably the biggest health, medical, environmental, conscience, and socio-political decision you make every day. With so much crossover among human health, issues of the environment, and well-founded concerns with livestock raising and “harvesting”—a term loosely used in the meat, poultry, fish, and dairy industries to euphemize the grim reality of the process from feedlot to food purveyor—it can be hard to separate them into different categories of reasons to plant-base your plate.

Proven over and over again to trump heredity and environmental carcinogens⁵⁸ while handing back your good health, the plant-based lifestyle also represents the biggest move you can make to reduce the multiple, complex problems directly related to the factory farming of animals.⁵⁹ The avalanche of animal products and highly processed edible food-like substances devoured annually not only places our health in peril—it also delivers a deluge of environmental and ethical disasters. Plant-based living is a prescriptive for improvement on all fronts.

Wake Up and Smell the CAFOs: They’re Bad News for People and Animals

CAFOs—concentrated animal feeding operations—have been called the biggest offenders when it comes to environmental degradation.⁶⁰ Methane emissions from livestock and feedlot runoff pollute our air and waterways. Previous reports about the effects of livestock production on greenhouse gas

emissions from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 2006 showed the emissions to be far lower than what we now know. In 2010 UNESCO reported that “at least 51 percent of human-induced greenhouse gas emissions” are attributable to livestock production. This value is a significant upward revision from the FAO’s 18 percent calculation,⁶¹ representing an enormous shift in perspective and injecting impetus for innovations in our food supply.⁶² Although the exact numbers may be up for debate, the problem is not.

The energy demands of livestock production are staggering, resulting in a serious loss of the calories and protein in cereals and legumes that could otherwise be used to meet human nutrition needs directly.⁶³ It takes thirty to forty times the fossil fuel energy to produce one pound of animal product than it does to produce just one pound of grain, but the energy requirements of producing animal products are just the tip of the wasteful iceberg with their real cost. When you factor in what is used to irrigate feed crops and pastures as well as the drinking water directly given to livestock, 50 percent of all the water used in the U.S. is given to the animals we eat.⁶⁴ Turning off the faucet while brushing our teeth will never have quite the impact on water conservation as simply choosing broccoli over beef, chickpeas over chicken.

Factory-farm animals are routinely administered “rapid grow” hormones.⁶⁵ This has become standard practice in the meat and dairy industries, where time is money, and we—right along with the animals—are the victims. Hormones are fed to beef cattle to make them ready for market all that much sooner, and bovine growth hormones are given to dairy cows to stimulate a higher level of IGF-1. These antibiotics and hormones are passed via the food chain right on to you in a supermarket smorgasbord of chemical-laden meat and milk.⁶⁶

Increased public awareness of living conditions and treatment of livestock has also inspired the growing pull to plant-based eating. An important example in that realm is the plight of dairy cows. Cows, like all mammals, must be impregnated to produce milk, so they are kept in a constant unnatural cycle of impregnation, birth, and milking, with short rest between pregnancies. Most are kept indoors, with little to no access to outdoor concrete or dirt paddocks. Other problems include widespread infections and lameness,⁶⁷ surgical removal of their tails and dehorning (generally without painkillers), and separation of mother and baby. When a calf is born, he or she is rapidly removed from their mother to make the mother’s milk available for dairy collection. Male offspring are then often raised for veal, while females become

the next generation of dairy cows. Dairy cows usually meet their end at beef slaughterhouses, when, at two to five years of age, their milk production slows or they are too crippled or ill to continue in the dairy industry.⁶⁸

Conditions for poultry are no better. Broiler chickens, bred and fed to rapidly grow from the size of your fist to the size of a soccer ball in about forty-five days, cannot bear the weight of their unnaturally large breasts and spend most of their time squatting.⁶⁹ Degenerative diseases and premature death abound. Over 90 percent of egg-laying hens spend their entire lives in battery cages—wire cubicles so small that not even one hen can extend her wings, let alone several more chickens in each cage—resulting in multiple health problems so common that the industry has a term for it: “cage fatigue.”⁷⁰

If you think switching to free-range and grass-fed meat and poultry is the answer, you’ll have to think again: Apparently there aren’t enough land and water resources to make this feel-good myth a viable option. And facility regulation does not inspire confidence.⁷¹ Many of the problems of factory farms persist in smaller, free-range production.⁷² And should you labor under the delusion that cows are building their bodies with plentiful green grass while contentedly roaming the lush green countryside, five minutes with Howard Lyman will enlighten you otherwise. Lyman is the conscience-driven soul who, after thirty-five years as a cattleman, was compelled to go public about the cattle industry’s problematic practices in his book *Mad Cowboy*, seating him smack dab on Oprah’s couch. His exposé of the problems with which ranches are riddled also landed him and Ms. Winfrey in court as they took turns on the hot seat of a defamation suit by the cattle industry. Says Lyman, “Evidently, telling the truth can get you into trouble.” Apparently, according to Lyman, the famous marketing line “beef—it’s what’s for dinner”—often applies to what the cows themselves are fed.⁷³ Conditions and treatment of livestock directly impact public and private health, and, along with depletion of natural resources, compounds an enormous ethical issue.⁷⁴

Something’s Fishy: Problems Presented by Fish—Whether Farmed or Fresh

For those who do cut out animal products, fish is often the last to go. A significant source of cholesterol and saturated fat, fish gets a lot of health hype for its omega-3 fatty acid content. But remember your sixth grade science: toxic elements such as mercury from our polluted waterways work

their way up the food chain and become concentrated in the flesh and fats of fish. Farmed fish brings in a whole new set of complications. Not only are farmed fish fed meal made from smaller fish taken from contaminated areas, but they are also fed by-products from cows—another potential avenue for disease transmission through the food web.⁷⁵ Worldwide, supply for seafood like tuna and salmon is resulting in rapidly depleting populations of fish.⁷⁶ The problems associated with animal consumption—whether environmental, health, or ethical—are apparently associated with every farmed, harvested, or cultivated critter on our planet.

TAKE BACK YOUR PLATE

So how did we get into this mess hall mess? If it's all so simple, why didn't someone tell us? And why is there so much contrary information out there about good nutrition, keeping us in "what-should-I-eat!" whiplash? A little research reveals conflicts of interest all over even the U.S. Dietary Guidelines—guidelines that many a fine upstanding American citizen has come to accept as healthy mandate. The problem is, special interests have their fingerprints all over these guidelines—from subsidized food programs to sponsorship of nutrition education curriculums, brochures, and lesson plans implemented in our schools. Talk about moments of awakening. And apparently the USDA is obligated to promote dairy products, which, of course, shows up on the guidelines as well.^{77,78}

Hope sprang with the publication of the 2010 U.S. Dietary Guidelines extolling the virtues of plant-based eating, stating, "Vegetarian-style eating patterns have been associated with improved health outcomes—lower levels of obesity, a reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, and lower total mortality." The guidelines then devote two full pages to plant-based nutrition, showing exactly how to easily pull together a healthy food plan. Uncle Sam's stamp of approval! While the USDA should be applauded for devoting space to plant-based eating, the guidelines need to take it several bites further. For even though they are clear about what we should be eating *more* of—fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes—when it comes to what we should be eating *less* of, the guidelines use vague terms such as "cholesterol" and "saturated fat." Readers are left to their own devices to figure out where these come from. People don't eat cholesterol and saturated fat—they eat foods that contain them: meat and dairy products. Even Marion Nestle, professor

in the department of nutrition at New York University, is quoted as saying that USDA Secretary Thomas Vilsack waffled when asked why the guidelines didn't clearly advise to reduce meat consumption. "This is no doubt to avoid the politically impossible 'eat less meat,'" Nestle responded.⁷⁹

Where do you get the straight story? Interestingly, the Harvard School of Public Health—while supportive of the progressive elements of the 2010 USDA guidelines—takes issue with several of its details. Harvard suggests limits on animal products and getting our calcium from sources other than dairy, and has stated outright that the U.S. Dietary Guidelines are too lax on refined food.^{80,81} Brilliant! Still, the U.S. government keeps pumping funds into research on heart disease and cancer while government subsidies push more meat, dairy, and refined foods onto our plates.

At the same time, a report on the healthfulness of our grocery purchases in light of compliance—or lack thereof—with the 2010 Guidelines stated, "Overall, consumers purchase too few fruits, vegetables, and whole grains and too many refined grains, fats, and sweets." In fact, the average consumer purchased barely half of the recommended whole plant foods.⁸² Apparently, even the official proclamations guiding us to be healthy eaters are falling on dietary indiscriminate ears, easily influenced by convenience, marketing push, and taste-enhanced edibles.

But there's hope in high places. A 2009 advisory from the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* presented a report pointing to the importance of ". . . various plant food-oriented recommendations . . . supported by literature evidence . . . that likely would improve health and the environment . . . oriented toward increased plant food consumption and some toward vegetarianism."⁸³ No doubt recommendations such as this exerted some degree of influence on the 2010 Guidelines. And encouraging words—directly from the 2015 U.S. Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee notes—bring hope for weaving insight and vision into future dietary advisories by simply asking the question, "What is the relationship between population-level dietary patterns and long-term food sustainability and related food security?" Clearly, the environmental impact of food as played out in the "production, transport, retail, waste, etc." cycle, and the acknowledgment that viable dietary patterns exist that are "more plant-based," is on the table for committee discussion.⁸⁴

The point I want to make is this. The wheels of government grind slowly, let alone those connected with healthy living. Thank goodness the government can to some extent protect us from a food contamination outbreak. But they

can't protect us from the dietary damage we inflict upon ourselves. It is up to us as individuals to see the writing on the kitchen wall—and take charge of our own health by taking back our dinner plates. We cannot count on health care reform to do the work for us. Not when large-scale private interests still have such enormous influence over government policy on everything from pharmaceuticals to free school lunches. And not while health care is still perceived as disease management. Our goal should be health promotion and disease prevention. Making the paradigm shift from early detection to early prevention is going to need to be a grass-roots movement. It starts with what you eat, which influences what your family eats, which then spreads to community and country. While genetics may load the launch pad, it is lifestyle that ignites the rockets. When you boil it down like this, the most immediate method of escaping these health-damaging—as well as conscience-compromising and environmentally ravaging—problems, and enjoying radiant health, is clear: Eat more whole plant foods and less of everything else.

MODELS FOR CHANGE

Even as change from the top comes slowly, projects that support plant-based eating are being generated at the grass-roots level and moving into encouraging expansion. Such take-back-your-plate initiatives inspire us to action. They provide us with models for change and the hope that healthier fare will become more available on a larger scale. Here are a couple of examples.

MUSE School: The Amis Cameron Connection

Suzy Amis Cameron and her husband, film director James Cameron, became environmental activists years ago. Inspired by such pro-plant-based diet works as *The China Study*, *Forks Over Knives*, *Food Choice and Sustainability*, and *Food Revolution*, they transitioned to a plant-based diet in 2012. Once they made the connection between personal dietary choices and the environment, they overhauled everything from the pantry to the family farm to eliminate animal products—overnight. “The connection between food and the environment has been a major eye-opener,” says Suzy. “Our family is benefiting greatly from eating plant-based—but the environmental piece has become our primary focus.”⁸⁵

A natural outcome of their interest was the creation of the environmentally focused MUSE School, located in southern California. Founded by Suzy and her sister Rebecca Amis in 2006, MUSE was created “to inspire

and prepare young people to live consciously with themselves, one another, and the planet.” At MUSE, conscious living now means being conscious right down to what they eat in the school dining room.

At MUSE, students and staff are growing fresh fruits and vegetables as they increase the presence of plants on their plate. “We are gradually moving toward a 100 percent plant-based menu—because we do call ourselves an environmental school,” Suzy says. “By fall 2015, we will be all plant-based.”⁸⁶ And the Amis Cameron team isn’t stopping there. They are planning a global campaign to persuade people to move toward a plant-only diet in order to sharply reduce global carbon emissions and improve their health.

Hampton Creek

Challenging the multi-billion-dollar chicken egg industry, Hampton Creek, a northern California technology company pioneering in food, is screening plants for their functional capability in food products. Plants like the Canadian yellow pea are able to replace the function of a chicken’s egg in foods like mayonnaise and cookie dough—even scrambled eggs. Bill Gates—along with several other investors, to the tune of some \$30 million—has leaned substantial financial weight into Hampton Creek’s mission to make the food system better, by making the healthier options the more affordable one.⁸⁷ “Using plants is better because they are more sustainable, healthy, easy to transport, affordable, and efficient—and without the environmental externalities,” says founder Josh Tetrick.⁸⁸ A personal tour and taste test at the Hampton Creek kitchen with Tetrick proved the gustatory worthiness and market viability of their products—underscored now by the Hampton Creek shelf presence at Safeway, Costco, Whole Foods Market, Target, Amazon, and Walmart, as well as its growing use in industrial food products from companies such as General Mills and Ikea. Taking the eggs out of mayonnaise, cookies, and scrambled eggs and replacing them with plant ingredients is proving to be more sustainable and less costly—good news for discriminate and budget-minded consumers.

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News and research urging the shift to a plant-based diet continue to multiply. Perhaps some of the incentives touched upon here have given you a fresh connection or cause for commitment, compelling you forward on the

plant-based journey. Whether your reasons are singular or many, your desired changes small or sweeping, it's time to make your ideals resonate on your plate.

This transition—shifting to a plant-based lifestyle—is for each of us a personal journey. It's a journey I've traveled now for over four decades. Perhaps telling you a little about my own is a good place to continue.

PLANT-BASED JOURNEY RESOURCES

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