

Real Common Sense

October 2022

Whole food plant-based diet for children

Hello, this is Dr. Ellen. In this month's '*Real Common Sense*' newsletter, I want to write about the benefits of a whole food vegan diet for children (i.e., beyond infancy and after weaning from breast milk). I have seen so many young patients over the years suffering from maladies that at least in part arose because of the *foods* they were regularly eating. Most had been tried on more conventional approaches to help diminish their chief complaints, often described as food allergies and gut and behavioral issues. Those approaches, both conventional and 'alternative', had not achieved significant results. Bringing their child to see me was oftentimes a 'last resort'. Using the Ellen Cutler Method (ECM), I was able to help patients find their way back toward wellness. ECM allows me to discover the optimal detoxification, dietary modification, supplementation, and energetic desensitization for each person. Without exception, specific foods and dietary patterns needed to be changed and going toward a plant-based whole food diet was the optimal choice.

By the way, if you didn't get a chance to see my previous newsletters, you can find them on my new website, www.drellencutler.com under 'Media'.

What is a Whole Food Plant-based Diet?

Eating a plant-based diet means making meals and snacks from fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, legumes, and whole grains (and mushrooms). Vegans eliminate all animal foods, including meat, poultry and fish, and all animal products such as dairy and eggs. Some vegans also eliminate products that come from any animal source, such as honey and bee pollen. Vegetarians do not eat meat or poultry. However, some eat fish (pescatarians). A vegetarian diet could also include both dairy and eggs, making them lacto-ovo-vegetarians. Those eating dairy products but not eggs are lacto-vegetarians.⁽¹⁾

A healthy whole food plant-based diet emphasizes the importance of eating foods that are minimally processed. As a rule of thumb, the less processed and fresher foods are, the healthier they are. Oftentimes, some minimal processing is required to get foods to the consumer, such as freezing (e.g., berries) or dehydrating (e.g., beans). Much less desirable are the addition of chemicals and use of chemically treated packaging that can adversely affect optimal health. Even cooking can have unwanted consequences. Enzymes naturally occurring in plant-based whole foods can be inactivated by heat. Cooking, especially at high heat, can cause production of advanced glycation end-products (AGEs), which have been implicated in the development of many chronic, inflammatory diseases.

Why a Whole Food Plant-based Diet for Kids?

The main reason for raising children on a whole food plant-based (especially vegan) diet is to decrease the risk of major illnesses, including heart disease, cancer, obesity, and diabetes. American children often have fatty streaks in their arteries even before finishing high school. These are precursors to the cholesterol plaques found in cardiovascular disease (CVD). Children who eat a plant-based diet limit foods high in saturated fat and cholesterol, thereby limiting the appearance of these fatty streaks.⁽²⁾ In fact, plant-based childhood dietary patterns are associated with lower adulthood CVD risk. Eating plant foods with their nutrients including fiber and polyunsaturated fatty acids have been shown to have protective effects.⁽³⁾ Also, adolescents raised on a plant-based diet usually have an easier time maintaining a healthy weight and have fewer problems with acne, allergies, and gastrointestinal problems than their peers that eat animal products.⁽²⁾

Plant-based diets may also provide benefits for specific problems. For example, several studies have suggested plant-based diets can be helpful in attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). One study found that a plant-based diet is associated with lower risk of ADHD in children aged 7-13.⁽⁴⁾ Another showed that preschoolers aged 3-6 with "processed" and "snack" dietary patterns were positively correlated with ADHD symptoms, whereas "vegetarian" dietary patterns were negatively correlated.⁽⁵⁾ In a third study looking at the dietary impact on inattention in children with ADHD and emotional dysregulation, those eating less fruits and vegetables were more likely to have more severe symptoms of inattention.⁽⁶⁾

Eating a plant-based diet can have other advantages beyond your child's own health. Saving animal lives is perhaps the most obvious benefit for eating a plant-based diet. The factory farming of animals for meat is not only inhumane but is responsible for a high percentage of greenhouse gas emissions. Eliminating (or even reducing) the amount of meat consumed can indirectly decrease the production of these gases. Plant-based eating can reduce your child's carbon footprint.⁽⁷⁾

Implementing a Whole Food Plant-based Diet in Kids

Plant-based diets in children usually meet or exceed recommendations for most nutrients and have higher amounts of fiber and less total fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol than those on an omnivorous diet.⁽⁸⁾ However, those micronutrients found primarily in animal foods may need to be replaced with plant-based sources or supplementation. A well-rounded plant-based diet for your child provides enough calories, protein, and fiber. The gastrointestinal tract can be eased into a high-fiber diet by gradually increasing high-fiber foods into your child's diet.⁽⁹⁾

Some of the nutrients that can be deficient in a whole food plant-based diet are vitamin B-12, riboflavin (vitamin B2), calcium, zinc, iron, and, if sun exposure is not adequate, vitamin D3. However, this can be addressed by using the growing number of fortified vegan foods and/or supplementation. Sources of the omega-3 fatty acid linolenic acid should be emphasized to enhance the body's synthesis of the essential long-chain fatty acids, docosahexanoic acid (DHA) and eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA). Plant-based supplements are also now available containing both DHA and EPA.⁽⁸⁾

Although bioavailability of zinc and iron from plant foods may be low, dietary practices that enhance absorption of zinc and iron can eliminate this potential problem (as can fortified foods). Zinc absorption can be increased by sulfur-containing amino acids (cysteine and methionine) found in seeds, nuts, grains, and vegetables; citric acid found in citrus fruits; malic acid in apples; tartaric acid in grapes; and higher levels of dietary protein.⁽¹⁰⁾ Enhancers of iron absorption include vitamin C (both synthetic and dietary), citric acid, malic acid, and vitamin A and β -carotene.⁽¹¹⁾

Many plant-based foods have significant amounts of protein. Your child should be able to get enough protein from a balanced plant-based diet if proteins are added with foods such as

- Beans and other Legumes
- Tofu
- Dairy alternatives like almond and oat milk
- Tempeh
- Seitan
- Nuts and seeds

The focus should be on whole plant food protein sources, rather than protein bars and shakes.^(1,7)

Nutritional professionals who counsel families on whole food plant-based eating should be consulted to review the adequacy and, where needed, identify good sources of nutrients that may be inadequate (including supplementation as needed).⁽⁸⁾ The younger the child, the more important the consultation. (Please see the quote below.) This may be especially true with picky eaters or those with food allergies that have not been successfully addressed.

When transitioning your child to a plant-based diet, offer your child plant-based meals and allow them to choose which foods they would like. It is better not to make separate meals for your children, so also make sure the rest of the family is happy with each meal. Introduce new foods gradually. Meals can initially sometimes contain your child's old 'favorite foods' as they are gradually weaned down from them.⁽¹⁾

Ellen Cutler Method (ECM)

The greatest strength of ECM is that all interventions are based on findings uncovered through its energetic testing. In this way, ECM practitioners can identify the optimal means of helping to

rebalance the causative disharmonies and blockages and can then help desensitize the individual of any obstructions to the optimal use of those means that have been identified. Of course, previously unidentified, newly discovered issues can be desensitized as well. This certainly applies to adopting a whole food, plant-based diet, especially in children. Food sensitivities such as those to gluten-containing grains, corn, and other plant-derived foods can be accurately identified using ECM to optimize the plant-based diet and its health-promoting benefits. In many cases, desensitization allows formerly sensitive foods to be added to the diet.

Be well, be healthy, and remember...

“The younger you are in life, the more healthy foods have a positive effect and unhealthy foods have a negative effect .”

— Dr. Joel Fuhrman

Dr. Ellen

References:

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