



Healthy Diet, Healthy Planet

or: How do I go about harmonizing a healthy diet with lowering my carbon footprint?

by Ana Prados

These days, there are strong advocates across the entire spectrum of nutritional choices, from 'paleo' diets with a high percentage of daily calories derived from animals, to entirely plant-based diets. Even professional athletes swear by a multitude of nutritional plans. A consensus that may be emerging from both the conventional and holistic or non-conventional medical community is that the 'ideal' nutritional plan varies greatly with the individual. That puts us on a detective mission to discover what a healthy diet really means to each of us.

The process can take weeks to years and involve anything from allergy elimination diets to spending the next vacation or two learning how to cook from scratch. Your ideal nutritional plan may end up somewhere in the middle, although many people stay healthy on diets at either end of the spectrum. Once you've figured out the nutritional plan that works best for your health, it's time to make it work for the health of the planet.

If you can stay healthy on a plant-based diet, congratulations--you are already eating for the health of the planet! But those of us who feel better on non-vegetarian or higher protein diets have some additional detective work to do to strike a balance between maximizing our health and minimizing the adverse environmental impacts of the food we consume.

This may not be as difficult as it seems. We may find that [eating meat as little as once or twice a week](#) is sufficient, or discover a love for fish; fish can be a better option than other types of meat if harvested or farmed sustainably. What's more, some types of small fish such as sardines are both more sustainable and better for our health when compared to larger fish such as tuna, which contain larger amounts of mercury and other toxins. (Go to [Seafood Watch](#), enter the name of any fish, and quickly learn which



fish and/or fishing regions to avoid. There is also an app that will yield the same information.)



Unfortunately, many food allergies involve plant-based foods. So if your detective work leads you to gluten, corn, or soy allergies or sensitivities, don't assume you are confined to a life of eating meat, fish or eggs at every meal. Swap soy for lentils or chickpeas, and experiment with gluten-free and corn-free whole grain alternatives. Some gluten-free grains such as quinoa and oats have greater protein and nutritional content than their gluten-based counterparts, and both your body and the planet will thank you.

Regardless of the diet we may ultimately choose, avoiding prepared foods, eating locally grown whole foods, and even growing our own, are among the many ways we can remain healthy in a sustainable fashion.

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