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Meatless Menus For Dining Out

VEGETARIANS AND VEGANS LIVE, ON AVERAGE, SIX TO TEN YEARS LONGER THAN MEAT-EATERS.

MEAT-EATERS ARE TWICE AS LIKELY AS VEGETARIANS TO DEVELOP HEART DISEASE.

Can eating vegetarian help reduce your risk for some chronic diseases? Studies have found that vegetarians have lower triglycerides, blood pressure and blood glucose. Their body mass indexes (BMI) were lower and their waist measurements were smaller than their carnivore counterparts.

These benefits are due to a plant-based diet. Compared with those who eat meat, vegetarians eat more fiber, less saturated fat and less cholesterol. Fruits and veggies are also packed with vitamins, minerals and other healthy compounds, which can help protect against chronic diseases. Even small changes to a meat eater's diet can be helpful. A few times a week, choose low-fat, plant-based foods instead of higher fat, animal-based ones.

But what happens when you want to go out to eat with your meat-loving friends? Don't fret. Most restaurants can accommodate you.

Before You Go
If you can, plan ahead. Look up menus of specific restaurants online to see if they offer choices that appeal to you beyond cheesy fries. If you're not looking for any restaurant in particular, do an Internet search for vegan or vegetarian restaurants in your location and see what pops up.

Best Bets
You can almost never go wrong at an ethnic restaurant. Asian restaurants such as Chinese, Japanese, Thai, Indian and others have many vegetarian items on their menus. Italian, Greek and Middle Eastern restaurants also offer many meatless options. At most Mexican restaurants, food such as vegetarian bean tamales and veggie enchiladas often fit the bill.

At the Restaurant
Once you're at the restaurant, these tips might help ensure your meal will be what you expect:

- 👀 Check the menu for a V or leaf, marking dishes as vegan or vegetarian.
- 👀 Have a question about a dish? Ask the waiter about its ingredients.
- 👀 Ask whether the chef can alter an item to make it vegetarian.

Restaurants know that healthy eating is desirable, so you will find meatless meals at more places than ever — even at fast food restaurants. Bon appetite!

Sources: The American Academy of Nurse Practitioners, March 1, 2010; Nutrients, May 27, 2014