

50 Questions you've always wanted to ask a vegan

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FAQ #1: Do you eat peanut butter?

Yes, many vegans eat peanut butter. The word 'butter' here refers to the creamy consistency of ground up peanuts, not the butter that is produced by the dairy industry. Most people tend to hear the word 'butter' and equate it with dairy. The same question often comes up when talking about chocolate because people sometimes assume cocoa butter has dairy butter in it (thankfully it doesn't!).

FAQ #2: Would you kill a spider that you found in your bathroom?

Most vegans try to adopt a compassionate view of the insects and animals they encounter in their homes – by relocating them if possible. With the example of a spider this is easy enough if you have a glass jar and a stiff piece of cardboard to assist you. For more persistent critters many compassionate folk would try to deter or remove the creatures humanely. Ultimately it is up to each individual to act in accordance with their beliefs in these sorts of situations.

Of course, the best piece of advice is to ensure that your home is clean and that food is stored securely to prevent insects setting up home in the first place!

FAQ #3: Do you only eat things that are green?

No! Although greens should be an important part of anyone's diet, whether meat-eater or vegetarian, they're not all that vegans eat. Of course, like anything, it depends on the person, but in general vegans eat a wide range of foods including grains, vegetables, fruits, nuts and seeds. Plant foods come in a range of colours, including purple, orange, pink, green, blue, yellow and black. Many people find that when they adopt a vegan diet they begin to eat a much wider range of foods than they ever ate as an omnivore.

FAQ #4: Isn't being vegan really hard work?

Being vegan is surprisingly easy once you get the hang of it. There are lots of options around these days and most restaurants are able to accommodate those who don't eat animal products. As for cooking, if you have access to fresh fruits and vegetables, you're halfway there! There's also a bewildering array of vegan snack foods available, as well as plenty of cosmetics, toiletries and clothing items.

FAQ #5: If you don't wear wool how do you keep warm?

There are many warm vegan materials around these days. Hemp and linen can be very warm, as can synthetics. Primaloft is a brand of insulating material that is often used in jackets and can be just as warm as down. Layering is also a good option in the cold weather.

FAQ #6: Do you eat fish?

Neither vegans nor vegetarians eat fish by definition. Someone that eats fish, yet no other meat, is called a Pescetarian. Unfortunately many people seem to think that vegetarians eat white meat. This may well be because it was popular to be a 'white meat vegetarian' a few decades ago, for health reasons.

FAQ #7: Don't you feel sad that you'll never taste delicious foie gras?

Personally, no, I don't! For many vegans taste is simply not a good enough reason to subject an animal to suffering and take away its life.

FAQ #8: How do you flavour your food?

Vegetarians and vegans flavour their food in a very similar way to most other people – with herbs and spices! Dried, fresh, powdered – it all works. Garlic and onions also provide great flavours, as do many other vegetables like tomatoes and aubergine. You can buy or make vegan mayonnaise, tomato ketchup or salad dressing if you like and vegetable stock is fairly common in most shops if you haven't got time to make it. Then there's peanut and sesame oil, soy sauce, vinegar... the list goes on!

FAQ #9: Shouldn't you put more energy into caring about people who suffer?

Vegans and vegetarians often get asked this question. The implication is that because many vegans are concerned about the suffering of animals, they can't be too worried about humans who are suffering from poverty and disease.

Simply put, the two aren't mutually exclusive. It's perfectly reasonable to care about both animals and humans and many vegans do. As veganism is mostly about not using animal products it doesn't have to take up much of your time. It's mostly just a matter of choosing a plant-based option instead of an animal based one. This leaves plenty of time for other sorts of activism if you choose, whether that be helping people, animals or the environment.

If you think about it, veganism actually helps people as well as animals because it is a lifestyle that can support the human population in a more efficient way. It is possible to feed more people on a plant-based diet than a meat-centric one.

FAQ #10: Couldn't you just stop being vegan for one day?

Asking a vegan to give up their beliefs regarding eating animal products for one day is a bit like asking someone if they could stop believing that men and women should be equal for one day. No matter whether it's Christmas, Thanksgiving, a birthday or some other special occasion many vegans would have trouble putting aside such fundamentally held beliefs - even for a day.

FAQ #11: Would you eat meat if it came from a cow who died of old age?

This question slightly misses the point of veganism, but to answer literally: no, I wouldn't. Some vegans might, depending on their reasons for avoiding animal products. Although the general consensus is that eating meat isn't vegan under any circumstances as it supports the assumption that animals are ours to use as we wish.

FAQ #12: Don't you need to eat meat for muscle growth and strength?

*No! You rather need to eat **protein** for muscle growth. Meat does happen to be quite high in protein, but many other foods are also good sources, including chickpeas, lentils, beans and soy products.*

FAQ #13: Would you eat meat for a million dollars?

This is another of those questions that tends to miss the point a little, but for the sake of argument I'll try and answer. It isn't the easiest of questions if taken literally. There are many vegans out there who would eat meat if such a hypothetical pay-off were actually in the offing and probably just as many who wouldn't. From an ethical perspective a million dollars might be justified as someone could potentially eliminate a lot of suffering by injecting the money back into animal welfare and education programs. However I'm sure there are people who would not eat animal products for any sort of monetary or material reward. Still, it really does depend on the circumstances and the individual.

FAQ #14: How do you find the time to prepare your food?

The perception that eating vegan food means you need loads of time to make everything from scratch is a bit of a myth in reality. There are plenty of plant-based dishes you can prepare at home that take less time than cooking meat and vegetables or other standard fare. There are also numerous take out options, frozen meals and convenience foods available if you prefer not to cook from scratch or don't have time.

FAQ #15: Isn't it really difficult to eat out at restaurants as a vegan?

Surprisingly this isn't really such an issue. If you're lucky enough to have some vegetarian or vegan restaurants near you then you'll be all set (why not suggest one for your next dinner out with friends?).

If you don't have any veg-friendly restaurants around and are eating out try going for options like Turkish, Lebanese, Indian, Thai or Italian foods – all these cuisines have dishes that are traditionally vegan. Many also have side dishes that you can combine to form a meal. If there's nothing on the menu try asking if the chef can 'veganise' an existing dish on the menu for you by leaving out the necessary animal ingredients.

If you're really worried about eating out at a restaurant, phone them ahead to make sure there is something on the menu that you can eat.

FAQ #16: Can you breastfeed as a vegan?

Being vegan is mostly about avoiding the consumption and use of animal products in your own life. If we take the term 'animal products' literally this must also include human breast milk as it is a (human) animal product. However, human breast milk is mostly an exception to this rule. Many vegans breastfeed their children and encourage breastfeeding because:

- it is reportedly better for an infant's health (it is after all the ideal baby food and contains all necessary nutrients to support early life)*
- it's environmentally friendly (no formula, packaging, bottles etc)*
- it doesn't harm or exploit another species*

This last point is key. Many vegans believe that cow's milk for example should not be harvested for our own consumption, but rather belongs to the baby calf who it is produced for in the first place. It is not meant to support human life and was rather intended for a quickly growing young calf. This is supported by the numerous negative health implications of drinking milk – most of which stem from over-consumption of animal protein.

FAQ #17: Surely you support killing off pests, rodents and other animals who are a nuisance?

Unfortunately many small animals like mice, rats and cockroaches (and larger ones like deer for that matter) have bad reputations these days. Most of them undeserved.

At any rate – does a rat really deserve to be so maligned by the human race? We are much bigger, generally more intelligent and have an infinite capacity for compassion. Why must we pick on animals that are so much smaller and more vulnerable than us? The reputations of these animals as pests are largely undeserved. If they are present in large numbers the root problem can usually be traced back to human intervention – either the killing off of predators or the introduction of these so-called 'pests' to new areas. When we

interfere with biodiversity history shows that it nearly always comes back to haunt us.

As to whether I support the killing off of pests and rodents – I must say that I don't. I would always prefer animals and insects be relocated or removed or deterred where possible. I suppose the only situation where I would advocate anything else is if I were in a life or death situation. Obviously this is one of the finer points of living a cruelty-free lifestyle and one that depends on an individual's ethics. Anyone care to chime in?

FAQ #18: Are you allowed to eat x / y / z?

The phrasing of this question can be a pet peeve of some who live a plant-based lifestyle. To ask if someone is 'allowed' to eat something or is they 'can' have something implies that they are following some sort of strict rules about their diet. Vegans, just like any other people, can eat whatever they like and are allowed to have all sorts of different foods. There are no vegan police.

However, vegans make choices before they eat a particular food. If it's from an animal, chances are they won't want to eat it (chances are it won't even look like food anymore). It's not that they can't eat something or are incapable of eating certain foods, it's just that they don't want to. We all have the same digestive systems!

FAQ #19: Don't you care about plants?

Yes, I care about plants. I love plants and yes I do eat them. Another very clever distraction technique in this question – if vegans really were compassionate they wouldn't eat plants for fear of hurting them, right?

Well, a couple of points:

- Plants are not sentient and do not feel pain (or that's the current consensus anyway).*
- We need to eat something to live. Martyrdom is a bit passe.*
- If the questioner was actually concerned about humans eating plants they would surely have to abstain from eating meat themselves. Feeding plants to animals over a long term period before killing them and eating them is very inefficient and a great waste of plant lives! Ultimately vegans therefore consume less plants than omnivores by missing out the middleman (or 'middle-animal').*
- The jury is still out on the issue of plants and 'feelings', but many vegans would be happy to learn more about plants and the way in which they register pain (including me!).*

FAQ #20: Does going vegan really make a difference?

Yes! Many people believe that going vegan does make a difference. It makes a difference to your own personal health for one, but also to the health of our planet and the lives of animals. It's tempting to think that the problem is too big for one person to really make a difference, but if everyone thought like this nothing would ever change.

One person has the power to influence others and encourage people to talk and think about these issues. Most people who live a plant-based lifestyle will have met or had some kind of contact with a vegan or a vegetarian that made them begin to think differently. This is the beauty of being human – we can evoke change simply by choosing to live in a way which reflects our values.

FAQ #21: Won't animals take over the world if everyone goes vegan?

This question is often in the back of people's minds when they hear someone state that they are against all forms of animal exploitation and would rather we didn't use them for any purpose. Visions of cows crowding the streets and lab monkeys run riot are generally the first thoughts to surface, quickly followed by sadness and anger that various species would inevitably die out and become extinct. How do I know? Because I used to have the same thoughts before I went veg. I knew there were so many animals in the world and I worried that if we stopped exploiting them we would surely lose breeds that were currently in existence and no doubt be the worse off for it.

What I failed to realise was that many of the breeds of animals that make up the majority of the planet's animals (chicken, sheep and pigs for example) are only here because we have consciously bred them to be here. They have no particular skill or evolutionary trait that has seen them survive for this long – except for the ability to be easily farmed and then to be easily turned into 'tasty' meat once dead. Indeed, many breeds could no longer survive in the wild as they have been bred too large, too docile and too deformed to function normally.

The other thing I failed to realise is that there is no giant 'vegan switch' that one could flick to turn the planet veg. People would not go vegan overnight and more than likely it would be a very gradual shift taking decades. Demand for meat and dairy would go down and supply would mimic this. Farmed animals after all, are only bred and born into this world to live short and miserable lives because we are willing to eat them.

Ultimately this question is another of those cleverly masked distraction techniques. Many people falsely believe that veganism isn't logical and that if you followed plant-based arguments through to their logical conclusions all you would have at the end of your conversation is a blubbing heap of emotion. They aim to pick holes in veganism wherever they can so that the whole argument for cruelty-free living can be written off. Unfortunately more often than not vegan logic is pretty coherent if one stopped to think things through for a while. Just ask any vegan why they stopped eating animal

products – I can guarantee that most will have been sceptical at some stage but then reached a point where they simply couldn't ignore the logic of avoiding animal products in their lives.

FAQ #22: How do you live on such a limited and restrictive diet?

Following a vegetarian or vegan diet can seem restrictive to those who are used to eating meals that consist primarily of meat and dairy with vegetables as side dishes. However many people find that when they put vegetables, fruits, grains and legumes center-stage they have much more variety in their diets than ever before!

The truth is that most of us eat the vegetables, grains and fruits that we know, that we grew up with and that are familiar more often than not. Unknown produce can seem strange and foreign. If we aren't confident in preparing and working with certain foods they can seem like far too much effort. But if we do take the time to get to know these new foods and go through a little preparation trial and error, we can benefit greatly.

There is a vast array of foods in the plant world that are tasty and delicious and that will liberate your tastebuds and inspire you to get cooking. Artichokes, okra, quinoa, bulgar, lentils, fava beans, dragon fruit and persimmons are just some of the foods that I've come to love since saying goodbye to bacon and butter but there are many more. Start exploring here.

FAQ #23: Can you eat bread?

Yes! Vegans can eat bread. However, it pays to check the ingredients that are used as sometimes egg, milk or butter is included. The more highly processed the bread is, the more likely it will have some kind of animal derivative in its ingredients. Some E-numbers and substances like mono- and diglycerides are derived from animal products too so watch out for these.

FAQ #24: What do you wear on your feet if you don't wear leather?

There are many alternatives to leather that are used for footwear and often cruelty-free footwear is easier to find than you think. I own shoes that are made of canvas, vegan 'leather', hemp and synthetic materials. Here's a few companies that stock vegan shoes:

- Vegetarian Shoes*
- Moo Shoes*
- Vegan Shoes*
- Simple Shoes*
- Birkenstocks (not all are vegan!)*

I think Simple are currently my favourite as they make the ultimate eco-friendly shoes using recycled tyres and natural materials like hemp, bamboo and cotton.

FAQ #25: If you have children will you raise them vegan?

Personally, yes; if I was still vegan at the time I would raise any children I might have in a vegan household. This is of course a very personal decision and one that most people don't make lightly. There are vegans who will on occasion cook non-vegan foods for other people, there are those who raise their children vegan until they are old enough to choose for themselves and there are those who don't raise their children vegan for various reasons. However, it should be noted that a well planned and balanced vegan diet can be healthy for every stage of life, including pregnancy and for small children.

FAQ #26: Can you eat chocolate? Doesn't it have cocoa butter in it?

Yes! I eat chocolate. And yes, it does often have cocoa butter in it. However despite the slightly misleading word 'butter' which has come to be strongly associated with dairy, cocoa butter is vegan. The butter here is a pale yellow vegetable fat that is extracted from cocoa beans. Other vegan butters include nut and seed butters like peanut butter, pumpkin seed butter and almond butter.

FAQ #27: Do you need to take loads of supplements to stay healthy?

Generally it's recommended that people eating a plant-based diet take a B12 supplement. Other than that it's best to get all of your nutrients from a variety of whole plant foods. Protein, calcium, iron and many other important vitamins and minerals can easily be obtained by eating a wide variety of grains, legumes, fruits, vegetables and nuts and seeds (in fact, these are often the best sources).

Of course, if you are concerned about your health it is best to consult a doctor or qualified nutritionist.

FAQ #28: Do you think animals should have the same rights as humans?

No, I don't. I believe that all animals should have some rights, but not necessarily the same rights as you and I. The right to vote is of very little use to a chicken, as is freedom of speech for example. I do however think that all animals should have the right to live out their natural lives in relative peace, free from human exploitation and abuse. I also think that we have a responsibility to act on behalf of animals to make sure the environments in which they live are sustainable.

FAQ #29: Don't you know that we need calcium for strong teeth and bones?

It's true, we do need calcium to maintain strong and healthy teeth and bones. There is however a misconception about where calcium comes from and which foods are the best sources.

The mainstream consensus seems to be that milk and other dairy products are the best sources of calcium available to us. This is partly true as these products do have a lot of calcium, but they may not be the 'best' sources. There is evidence to suggest that the high amount of animal protein in cow's milk actually negates the amount of calcium that is available to us.

Plant based sources of calcium like sesame seeds and dark green leafy vegetables on the other hand are good sources of calcium and contain no animal protein. High consumption of animal protein is linked with many contemporary diseases as well as being detrimental to calcium intake so this is good news all round.

FAQ #30: What about the animals killed in plant production?

I've heard this question several times and know others have also had it posed to them too. Usually it is an effort to try and educate the misguided vegan by letting them know that even though they are doing all they can, animals will still die in order for them to eat – therefore making veganism, and their individual efforts, a failure.

This kind of logic is often employed when discussing plant-based ethical living, but to quote Colleen Patrick Goudreau of Compassionate Cooks: 'Don't do nothing because you can't do everything. Do something, anything'. Just because we cannot physically live without making any negative impact on the other creatures that we share the planet with doesn't mean we shouldn't try.

Also, if the questioner was genuinely concerned about the field animals that are accidentally killed in the production of plant foods they would surely chose a plant-based diet themselves. Doing so would eliminate much of that suffering because to eat meat is to consume a much greater amount of plant foods. This is because the majority of plant foods produced are fed to animals who are raised for our consumption.

FAQ #31: What's wrong with eating eggs and cheese? It's not hurting the animals.

Unfortunately the cruelty involved in dairy and egg production is often overlooked as milk and eggs are thought of as animal by-products in our society. Many assume that to not eat these products would be wasteful and, in the case of cows, that they actually need to be milked in order to be comfortable. Following this logic it seems we are doing these animals a favour, or at least using products that would otherwise be wasted...

But when we stop and think about the realities involved, it's soon clear that the dairy and egg industries are full of cruelty towards animals, no matter how well they are kept, how small the farm on which they are raised or how humane the farmer. All of these animals have unnaturally shortened lives and are usually slaughtered for consumption once they are no longer able to produce at an 'efficient' rate. Spent layer hens and dairy cows often end up in inferior processed products like pies and sausages. They also endure considerable suffering during their lives and, even if produced in a 'humane' way where they have 'access' to the outdoors, these animals are seldom able to spend enough time in their natural environments.

Often those who suffer the most are the baby male chicks and calves who are of no use to these industries. Male chicks are often ground alive or gassed as it is the most efficient means of disposal and male calves usually go on to become veal in a few short months of being born.

FAQ #32: Won't I feel really isolated if I go vegan?

Generally this depends on where you live and how accepting your family and friends are. It's certainly true that it is possible to feel isolated as a vegan if you don't know any other vegetarians or vegans and if your family and friends give you a hard time. However, if your family and friends are supportive of your new lifestyle and if you live in an area where there are vegetarian restaurants (or other restaurants that are willing to accommodate you) you shouldn't really have much of a problem.

It's also a good idea to try and meet a few vegans if you can. There are many meet up groups online and other regional groups that are run by vegan societies and other organisations.

If you are feeling isolated as a vegan or vegetarian for whatever reason, I'd encourage you to stick with your new lifestyle. Sooner or later your friends and family will get used to your new lifestyle and you'll feel much more comfortable. In the meantime, try getting in touch with vegans online through forums and message boards.

FAQ #33: Why eat meat substitutes if you think it's wrong to eat animals?

These days it's very easy to find vegan sausages, burgers, hot dogs, bacon and even cheese! It might seem odd that vegans and vegetarians would be interested in eating these products when they have made a conscious decision to eliminate the original versions from their diets, but as with many vegan issues – opinions are divided.

To many, faux meat products are just as abhorrent as their namesakes and eating them would no doubt be a pointless exercise when there are so many fresh vegetables, fruits and legumes to choose from. Others however enjoy the taste of meat and would quite happily eat vegetarian versions as they offer

taste, convenience and can easily be substituted at a family barbeque if everyone else is eating meat.

Whether you choose to eat meat substitutes or not, it's worth remembering that these products can be heavily processed and that basing all meals around them is probably not a good idea. It's best to get some variety by using beans, legumes and grains as the base for your meals as well.

FAQ #34: I can understand vegetarianism, but isn't veganism a bit extreme?

Vegetarianism is a fairly well known dietary choice these days, but veganism, although increasingly popular, is still a minority choice. Most people know a vegetarian or two through work, family or friends, but vegans are still relatively unusual in many social circles. So to eliminate not only meat but also dairy, eggs and other animal products from your diet can sometimes be seen as a little extreme. Furthermore, the things that make vegans different from vegetarians (like avoiding dairy and eggs) often seem like they are byproducts of animal suffering – the small and trivial things that don't really matter. This couldn't be further from the truth! Often people have no idea how much of these seemingly small and trivial foods they really eat. The dairy, egg, leather and other animal byproduct industries are often just as cruel as the meat industry and usually operate on an equally large scale.

Many vegans feel that going one step further than avoiding meat to eliminate all animal products is not extreme, but rather a compassionate and logical step after becoming vegetarian. It is also a very healthy and green choice!

FAQ #35: Isn't it really expensive to be vegan?

This is a common misconception. In reality it is only as expensive as you want it to be!

Fresh vegetables and fruit can be expensive, but if you buy in season foods and shop around locally these foods are quite affordable. Legumes, beans and grains are also generally very cheap and go a long way if you cook at home. Nuts and seeds can be expensive, but you do not need to eat too many of them so they should last you long enough to be economical.

There are many expensive vegan products on the market, including faux meat and cheese products, nut butters, chocolates, exotic grains and vegetables and other processed foods, but you do not need to buy and eat these products to be vegan. Potatoes, beans, lentils and greens are all very cheap and versatile.

Going vegan can leave you out of pocket, but it can also be a great way to save – it really depends on your approach to buying and cooking food.

FAQ #36: Can vegans drink alcohol?

Yes! There is nothing to prevent vegans from consuming alcohol. However, most avoid certain types of alcohol that is clarified using insinglass (made from the swim bladders of fish) or that contains gelatine or eggs.

FAQ #37: Have you ever cheated?

Personally, no - I haven't ever cheated. Sure – there were times when I was first starting out as a vegan when I would accidentally eat something that had hidden dairy or gelatine in it (there are still times when I accidentally screw up no matter how much I learn about food & animal products) but I wouldn't call this cheating as it wasn't a conscious decision. Cheating implies that you'd know something had animal products in it and eat it anyway. For me this isn't such an issue because many animal products like milk, cream, eggs and of course meat, simply don't equal food to me anymore. And I cook a lot more from scratch (there's not much hidden dairy in a carrot!).

Like most things in the veg world, people will undoubtedly have different takes on the idea of cheating on a plant-based diet. Is it okay? Is it not? What if you really want a bite of a snickers bar?

FAQ #38: Don't you end up spending hours reading labels in supermarkets?

I find that my shopping trips take pretty much the same time as they did before I went vegan.

Of course, reading labels to find out what is in your food takes time to get used to, but once you're familiar with the most common non-veg ingredients it's easy enough and shouldn't take very long to quickly scan the back of the packet. Besides, most of us are creatures of habit and will tend to buy the same items week after week (if you do this make sure to check any packaged and processed foods every now and then as sometimes companies can change their recipes without notification).

Another way to get round label reading is to buy mostly whole foods!

FAQ #39: Aren't animals on earth for humans to eat?

The idea that animals are on the earth for humans to use, eat and exploit arises mostly from various Christian ideas. Namely, that God put animals here for us to use and that we would have dominion over these animals - a pretty human-centric idea if you think about it.

Regardless of how the areas in the bible that deal with humanity's relationship to other species are interpreted, I do not think animals are here for us to eat and use – definitely not in the way that we currently do. I rather think that the notion of 'dominion' implies that we should care for, help and live with other

species the best that we can. We have the ability to feel compassion and to empathise – let's use it.

FAQ #40: Would you eat meat if it was made in a lab?

While I can't see any ethical problem with synthetically grown meat, I'm not sure I'd want to eat it anyway. Why eat the replicated dead flesh of an animal? It just doesn't seem like good karma to me. Even soy based fake meats have nutritional value and I'm just not sure lab meat with all the associated cholesterol and lack of fibre would sit well with me. Also, why waste your energy chewing when you could be eating plants?

FAQ #41: Can people who are allergic to soy be vegan?

Yes! Although many vegans do eat soy, there are also many who don't. It's not necessary to a vegan diet and there are many other foods that provide adequate amounts of protein. Whole foods (vegetables, fruits, legumes, grains, nuts, seeds) are a good place to start. If you do want to eat processed vegan foods there are also many that don't rely on soy. Soy milk can easily be replaced with hemp, oat, nut or quinoa milk and faux meats can be made out of beans or nuts.

FAQ #42: How do you deal with cravings for meat and dairy?

To be honest I don't really have any cravings for meat and dairy these days, although I did when I first went vegan. If you do miss certain foods there are many vegan products out there that can quickly and easily satisfy your cravings for pizza with loads of cheese or a hearty meat-like stew. Vegan cheese, milk, cream, bacon, sausage, pies, chicken and ice cream are all available at most health food stores (or online) and often reproduce the qualities we associate with animal products like fatty, creamy, savoury, chewy etc. There are also lots of plant-based ways to satisfy your cravings such as making dishes with aubergine or Portobello mushrooms when you feel like something meaty or by adding a little nutritional yeast to a dish for a cheese-like taste.

FAQ #43: Are plants sentient?

Most vegans get this question at some stage - what about plants? are they alive? why do you eat them and not animals? don't they move away from certain stimuli indicating they want to avoid 'pain' as animals do?

Most of the time vegans answer that they do not eat animals because they are sentient. They have interests and desires of their own. They clearly seek to avoid pain. This forms the basis of the argument to include animals in our moral considerations and to give them certain rights.

Most people believe that plants on the other hand are not sentient, even

though they may exhibit behaviour indicating they want to avoid pain. They don't have interests and desires of their own, nor are they aware of themselves as beings as separate from other beings. They do not have a central nervous system like animals do.

There is however a lot of research being done in this field at the moment and opinions on plants and their differences from animals may change. In the meantime I think it's important that we give those beings that we do know are sentient consideration and try to limit unnecessary suffering by going vegan and not eating them.

FAQ #44: Can you eat potatoes?

Yes. Vegans and vegetarians eat potatoes. I'm not sure where the idea that we can't comes from, but this is a question I've heard before. (Maybe it's because some people put butter on potatoes??).

FAQ #45: Are you going to try to convert me?

Personally I would love it if everyone I knew went vegan for the animals, the environment and their own health. But I know first-hand that no amount of persuasion will ever get someone to make a lasting change like the switch to a vegetarian or vegan diet. These changes must come from the individual concerned. Persuasion or education can be great for sharing knowledge about vegan issues but it is understanding of the issues and an open mind that are key. At the end of the day if a person doesn't believe that going vegan is the best thing to do, then no amount of persuasion is going to change that.

So, no – I don't try to convert people. I merely try to share information about veganism that I was lucky enough to find and let others decide what to make of it.

FAQ #46: Why can't vegans accept other people's choices to eat meat?

Live and let live is a saying that many of us often hear. But for many vegans this is a slightly difficult concept to get to grips with. Most people who have eliminated animal products from their lives believe that we shouldn't be eating or using animals. Often they believe this because they think it is wrong – morally or otherwise. Most who hold this opinion think it's wrong because animals have some interest in avoiding suffering. That is, they have a sense of self. If this is the case it is very difficult for a vegan to accept that we can all choose whether we want to eat meat or not because there is another party involved – the animal. This party, whether pig, cow or fish, deserves some consideration, meaning that the issue is not morally neutral.

FAQ #47: What do you eat?

I eat a wide variety of foods that are mostly vegetables, fruits, legumes, whole grains, nuts and seeds (or made of these things). That includes foods like mushrooms, tomatoes, corn, broccoli, lettuce, carrots, asparagus, peas, sprouts, cauliflower, onions, garlic, ginger, artichokes, zucchini, kale, capsicums, spinach, chard, potatoes, cabbage, grapes, strawberries, peaches, apples, bananas, dates, plums, kiwifruit, pineapples, apricots, melon, passionfruit, lentils, red kidney beans, butter beans, chickpeas, pinto beans, black beans, red lentils, green lentils, bulgur, cous cous, rice, noodles, bread, cereal, muesli, oats, almonds, cashew nuts, brazil nuts, pine nuts, walnuts, nut butters, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, flax seeds, olive oils, nutritional yeast, herbs, spices and more.

This probably represents only a fraction of the kinds of foods I eat. Most of the food I eat is either in it's whole state (if a fruit or a vegetable) or made at home from a combination of plant foods.

FAQ #48: Do you feel weak and tired all the time?

No! In fact many people report that once they eliminate all animal products from their diet they feel as though they have more energy than ever before.

If you are feeling weak and tired on a plant-based diet it is likely not veganism that is to blame but rather a deficiency of some sort. People can become deficient in vitamins and minerals on both an omnivorous and a vegan diet and it is important to consult with a registered nutritionist or dietician if you suspect you might be missing out on a particular nutrient.

FAQ #49: Can vegans drink caffeine?

Yes, vegans can drink caffeine. Coffee beans are 100% vegan in and of themselves. Many vegans drink coffee black or with soy milk to replace cow's milk.

FAQ #50: Isn't it natural for us to eat animals because we're at the top of the food chain?

Saying it's natural for us to eat other animals because we're at the top of the food chain is really a bit of an easy way out. I have yet to see a human wrestle, kill and eat a lion with nothing more than their own strength, hands and teeth. Even if our superior intelligence (superior on a scale devised by us that is) does put us at the top of the food chain, don't we have a moral obligation to protect other species rather than harm them? Doesn't our superior intelligence and capacity for empathy mean we should treat other animals mercifully? And is there any necessity to eat other animals when we have such a wonderful array of alternative foods available?

Sarah Moon

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