



# Chew On This!

## How your plate can help prevent chronic health conditions

*A whole foods plant-based diet focuses on whole plant foods, rather than highly processed foods and animal products, such as meat and dairy.*

By Claire Charlton

**H**alf of adults have one or more chronic health conditions – heart disease, stroke, cancer, diabetes, obesity or arthritis – accounting for seven of the 10 top causes of death and 86 percent of all health care spending in 2012, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. We might appear to be helplessly sick until we die, yet science shows that when we adopt a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes, we can prevent and reverse chronic disease.

“The beauty is there’s not one diet for heart disease, one for diabetes and one for cancer. It’s the same dietary approach that has been shown to work for these major killers, as well as many other chronic conditions,” says Caroline Trapp, N.P., Ph.D., who specializes in diabetes care at Michigan Premier Internists of the Millennium Medical Group PC in Southfield.

Trapp refers to a “whole foods plant-based diet,” or WFPBD, which focuses on whole plant foods but without highly processed foods and animal products, such as meat, dairy, eggs and fish, so prevalent in the standard American diet. Thumb through any book by a medical expert who touts this lifestyle and you’ll read about people who have cured disease,

experienced remission and reduced or eliminated need for medications.

As with many positive lifestyle habits, more is better, but even modest changes offer benefits – and plenty of local resources exist to help along the way. Plant curious? Our experts address some of the most common myths regarding this diet. As always, and especially if you are taking medications, consult with your physician before making major dietary changes.

### **Myth: A WFPBD lacks important nutrients such as protein and calcium.**

Plants are our No.1 source of vitamins and

minerals and our only source of fiber and phytonutrients. For protein, general preventive dietary guidelines are 10 to 15 percent daily. Overall, vegetables provide about 16 percent, but powerhouse beans, peas and lentils average 26 percent protein, and they’re all cholesterol-free. There are 18,000 legumes (things that grow in a pod) to choose from, so you’ll never be bored!

We all need protein, but it doesn’t have to be packaged with saturated fat, cholesterol and hormones, as found in meat and dairy. For calcium, we say “beans and greens for teeth and bones” because not only do they have the calcium we need, but also the companion



**Caroline Trapp**

## Live Longer, Live Better

Our lifespans are increasing, yet our health spans are not.

“We’re spending the final 10 to 15 years of our lives battling very serious chronic diseases that impact the quality of our lives,” says interventional cardiologist and Michigan PRIME columnist Joel Kahn, M.D., of the Kahn Center for Cardiac Longevity in Bloomfield and Grosse Pointe Farms and author of “The Whole Heart Solution.”

Kahn does share some good news about the diet’s impact on health.

“The body responds in 30 minutes to what you eat, positively or negatively at every level. Within one meal, you can alter what is going on and what your genes are expressing,” he says.

Through continual education, Kahn has mined six steps to reduce risk of early death:

1. Don’t smoke
2. Walk 30 to 40 minutes a day
3. Keep your waist thin: Less than 40” for men, less than 35” for women
4. Sleep seven hours each night, not less
5. Enjoy the occasional alcoholic beverage, if you like
6. Eat more than five servings of fruits and vegetables each day



*Fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes full of fiber can help decrease blood sugar levels.*

nutrients needed to escort calcium into the bones. Kale, turnip greens, broccoli, fortified orange juice and tahini are all high in calcium but free of cholesterol.

We hear that fish is high in omega-3 fatty acids; fish get this nutrient themselves from underwater plants, but fish contain cholesterol and varying amounts of heavy metals and other toxins like mercury, even when “wild caught.” English walnuts, pumpkin, chia and hemp seeds and ground flax are great omega-3 sources, and we recommend varying them from day to day.

Nutritionally, we benefit from broadening our plant foods and making animal products a very small portion of our diet, or eliminating them entirely.

*Source: Nutrition expert Kerrie Saunders, M.S., L.L.P., Ph.D., of [www.drfood.org](http://www.drfood.org) and president of the Plant Based Nutrition Support Group*

### **Myth: Plant-based diets are tasteless and boring.**

When we move away from the overpowering flavor of fatty foods, we begin to notice the flavors of fresh fruits and vegetables, and our

tastes change for the better. That’s when you bite into an apple and say, “Oh my gosh, this is so good!” Because there are many varieties of beans, countless vegetables and many grains available, this is not a diet of limitations.

Studies show that when you eat fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes, all full of fiber, your body adjusts, your blood sugars come down and you’re eating lighter yet feeling full. If you can cook rice, boil pasta, cut vegetables and cook beans, then you have the makings of many meals.

*Source: Caroline Trapp, D.N.P., Ph.D, director of diabetes education and care, Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine 🌱*

## Learn More & Get Support

- Plant Based Nutrition Support Group, 248.919.8726, [www.pbnsng.org](http://www.pbnsng.org)
- VegMichigan, 877.778.3464, [vegmichigan.org](http://vegmichigan.org)
- Forks Over Knives, [www.forksoverknives.com](http://www.forksoverknives.com)
- Nutritionfacts.org, informative site with videos exploring the science behind plant-based diets
- Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, [www.pcrm.org](http://www.pcrm.org)
- Prevent and Reverse Heart Disease Program, [www.dresselstyn.com](http://www.dresselstyn.com)
- Engine 2 Diet, [www.engine2diet.com](http://www.engine2diet.com)

## “I believed it was my fate”

For years, Marc Ramirez suffered from diabetes, a disease he shared with his mother and six of his seven siblings.

“I tried counting calories, carbs and sugars. I tried portion control. I’d lose weight, but I was never able to eliminate medications; my body was still sick,” he says.

Like many, he blamed his genes until, in 2011, he tried a plant-based diet.

“Within days, my sugars plummeted. In three months, I’d lost 45 pounds and soon after was off all meds for diabetes, high blood pressure and cholesterol,” says Ramirez, 48, of Clinton Township. “Science says we are predisposed to our genetics... but they are finding that how we fuel our bodies determines how our genes express themselves.”

Ramirez and his wife, Kim, became Food for Life instructors through the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine and now run Chickpea and Bean, a nonprofit that helps others transition to plant-based lifestyles.

“Much of America is suffering from chronic illness, and even the CDC says these are preventable, all driven by lifestyle,” Ramirez says. Read his story at [www.chickpeaandbean.com](http://www.chickpeaandbean.com).

## Recipes for Life

*Courtesy of Steve Weller, executive chef at GreenSpace Café in Ferndale*

### **Jicama Mango Salad**

*Serves 5*

- 1 large ripe mango
- 1 medium jicama
- 3 tablespoons lime juice
- 2 tablespoons red onions, sliced into thin strips
- 1 tablespoon jalapeño, seeded and minced
- 2 tablespoons cilantro leaves, chopped
- Sea salt to taste
- White pepper to taste

1. Peel mango and slice flesh off the seed, then slice into julienne strips.
2. Peel the jicama and slice into julienne strips.
3. Toss in a bowl with all ingredients. Serve immediately or chill for later. Prepare up to 24 hours ahead.

### **Sautéed Kale with Lemon and Garlic**

*Serves 5*

- 1 tablespoon olive oil or water for sautéing
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 bunch kale, bottom stems removed and coarsely chopped
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice, freshly squeezed
- 1/4 teaspoon sea salt, or to taste
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper

1. In a large skillet, heat olive oil or water, garlic and chopped kale on medium. Cover and cook three minutes. Remove lid, stir and cook three minutes or until liquid evaporates.
2. Transfer to a bowl and toss with lemon juice, salt and pepper.
3. Get creative: Add chopped toasted pecans, sesame seeds or thin-cut vegetables. Eat your greens!