

VEGGIE, STEADY, GO!

Ready to turn over a new leaf? Lifetime veggie **Rhalou Allerhand** explores the health implications of vegetarianism for runners

Having been raised vegetarian, I've never knowingly eaten meat or fish and often get asked how on earth I manage to stay upright, let alone run marathons. But I can honestly say my meat-free diet has never interfered with my fitness. If anything, I think it gives my running the edge. While many probably can't imagine going a single day without eating meat, be it for cultural, moral, ethical or health reasons, vegetarianism is on the rise. From Sir Paul McCartney urging us all to abstain from meat on Mondays, to Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall encouraging us to eschew animal products in favour of vegetables, vegetarianism has been making a comeback and more of us are either cutting back on the amount of meat we eat or opting for a totally meat-free existence.

Many athletes are already in on the act and opting for healthy meat-free diets to fuel their rigorous training regimes. Serena Williams recently won Wimbledon on a raw food vegan diet, outstripping her carnivorous counterparts with ease. Tennis star Martina Navratilova has won more grand slams than anyone else on a vegetarian diet, ultrarunner Scott Jurek holds his plant-based diet responsible for his success and even former heavyweight boxing champion Mike Tyson is a devout vegan these days.

WHY GO VEGGIE?

Aside from the environmental impact of meat production (think overfishing, rainforest destruction from cattle grazing and methane from livestock contributing to global warming), vegetarians are healthier, live longer and suffer less from diseases. According to *The Vegetarian Times*, a vegetarian diet reduces the risk of chronic degenerative diseases, such as obesity, coronary artery disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and certain types of cancer. Cutting back on meat impacts your energy levels, your waistline and your pocket – there has never been a better time to consider going vegetarian.

TIPPING THE BALANCE

As a runner, a balanced diet is not only important for health reasons, but is also vital for athletic performance. Anyone who's ever skipped dinner the night before race day will know that no matter how hard you train, if you don't get your nutrition right, it can drastically affect your running. Eating more fruit and vegetables is arguably good for you, but if you're considering cutting out a major food group, you need to get the balance right. Replacing your meat with extra chips won't do you or your running any favours! So, how can you embrace a vegetarian lifestyle and still get the most out of your running?

TOP TIPS FOR TURNING VEGGIE

MAKE THE TRANSITION TO HEALTHY VEGETARIANISM WITH EASE

Choose what's right for you!

Just because you're not 100 per cent veggie doesn't mean you're cheating! You don't have to cut out meat completely right from the off. Take baby steps and eat meat-free as often as it feels right for you.

Cook from scratch

Following a recipe and cooking the entire meal will help you see what goes into your food, making you more aware of what you eat.

Veggie supplement

If a whole meal based on veg is a big ask, try supplementing your dinner with veggie alternatives, such as soya products, to ease you into a meat-free existence.

Full of beans

Include more bean dishes in your diet. High in carbohydrate, rich in protein and low in fat, beans are perfect for endurance sport – good old-fashioned beans on toast will do the trick!



Embracing a veggie diet will be better for the planet and will do your running no harm at all

THE VEGGIE RUNNER

A vegetarian diet is actually well suited to running, because complex carbohydrates provide a great source of energy for engaging in arduous activity. 'Contrary to popular opinion, if you eat plenty of fruit and vegetables, carbs, nuts, pulses, eggs and cheese, you shouldn't really be lacking anything,' says Harley Street nutritionist Gareth Zeal. 'Eat a quantity relative to exercise and try to have one bean dish a day. Eggs and cheese contain plenty of vitamin B12, and as a runner you'll be getting enough vitamin D from exposure to sunlight. You only really need worry if you're a vegan, in which case taking a vitamin B12 supplement is vital.'

THE GREAT PROTEIN DEBATE

It's a common misconception that vegetarians don't get enough of the nutrients that their carnivorous counterparts derive from meat sources. 'The prejudice against vegetarians and vegans is incredible,' says Gareth. 'A lot of very successful, highly competitive athletes don't eat meat. Day-to-day, as long as you have enough carbohydrates for daily energy expenditure, you'll be getting enough protein. Protein deficit doesn't have any basis in reality. Humans are very efficient in getting what they need in a 24-hour period and if you eat vegetables, eggs and cheese, you'll be getting enough protein.'

Elite British marathon runner, ex-Olympian and Marathon des Sables veteran Fiona Oakes has been a vegan for most of her life for ethical reasons, and agrees you can sustain good levels of sporting ability on a vegetarian diet. 'The idea that protein in meat affects athletes needs to be dispelled, as it's not true,' she says. 'People need to be more open to new ideas. Vegetables are full of protein, as are nuts, pulses, and anything green and leafy.'

Fiona credits pine nuts with getting her across the Sahara Desert during the Marathon des Sables. 'They're my secret weapon, they're absolutely marvellous! They make an excellent source of protein, fat and calories to see you through a race.'

In short, Fiona has this advice: 'keep it fresh, cook from scratch, and eat nuts, pulses and whole foods.' And with a marathon PB of 2:42 under her belt, Fiona is living proof



**'A LOT OF VERY
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VEGGIE ON THE GO

NUTRITIONIST GARETH ZEAL SUGGESTS THESE TASTY VEGGIE SNACKS TO HELP FUEL YOUR RUNNING

Fresh pineapple

This tropical fruit speeds up tissue repair, so makes a great treat for post-run recovery.

Flaxseed oil

Add to post-run protein shakes, top up your houmous or dress your salad with this excellent oil that's packed with essential fatty acids, providing approximately 50 per cent more omega-3 than fish oil.

Purple fruits

Blueberries, cherries, prunes and blackcurrants make perfect recovery snacks. All dark purple fruits contain bioflavonoids, which are anti-inflammatory, antioxidant and great for recovery. Try www.cherryactive.co.uk for a post-run recovery juice.

DIY flapjacks

Make your own flapjacks using macadamia and Brazil nuts, seeds and flaxseeds, to create your very own healthy energy bars.

that a meat-free diet has never inhibited her performance, so why not do yourself (and the planet) a favour and go veggie?

MEAT-FREE MONDAYS

If you want to try a vegetarian diet, but you're not ready to commit 100 per cent, try Meat-Free Monday. An initiative launched by the veggie-loving McCartney family, Former Beatle Paul McCartney and his fashion designer daughter Stella are encouraging us all to do our bit to help protect the planet by having one meat-free day a week. Even reducing your meat intake by a few meals a month will make a huge difference to your diet and, in turn, the environmental impact associated with the meat industry. Visit www.meatfreemondays.com for details and recipe ideas. ■