



PLANT POWER! PREVENTING TYPE 2 DIABETES

“Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food.” – Hippocrates

The basic principles of a whole-foods, plant-based diet are:

- Excludes refined foods, like added sugars, white flour, and processed oils
- Highlights whole, minimally processed foods; limits or avoids animal products (*“Unprocessed food” or “whole food” refers to food items that have undergone minimal processing and are in their natural state or close to it. This includes fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, grains, meats, and fish that have not been significantly altered from their original form.*)
- Puts an emphasis on plants, including vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, seeds, and nuts, which should make up the majority of what you eat
- Pays special attention to food quality, with many proponents of the WFPB diet promoting locally sourced, organic food whenever possible

For these reasons, this diet is often confused with vegan or vegetarian diets. Yet although similar in some ways, these diets are not the same.

People who follow vegan diets abstain from consuming any animal products, including dairy, meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, and honey. Vegetarians removed all meat and poultry from their diets, but some vegetarians eat eggs, seafood, or dairy.

The WFPB diet, on the other hand, is more flexible. **Followers eat mostly plants, but animal products aren't off limits.** While one person following a WFPB diet may eat no animal products, another may eat small amounts of eggs, poultry, seafood, meat, or dairy.

How could a WFPB diet help prevent Type 2 Diabetes?

According to the American College of Lifestyle Medicine, “dietary interventions using whole food, plant-based (WFPB) diets have been **highly effective in the prevention and treatment of diabetes, offering a safe and effective way to achieve serum glycemic control and insulin homeostasis.** In addition, WFPB diets promote weight loss, which is a primary surrogate of insulin resistance (IR) in most individuals. Healthy plant-based diets not only improve IR but also improve the common modifiable cardiovascular risk factors, including serum lipids, serum glucose concentration, and systolic and diastolic blood pressure.”

The attributes of WFPB diets that are particularly helpful for diabetes prevention and treatment include the **lower fat content, high fiber content, and high-water content, leading to overall lower calorie consumption.**

The Journal of Geriatric Cardiology reports, “the prevalence of type 2 diabetes is rising worldwide, especially in older adults. Diet and lifestyle, particularly plant-based diets, are effective tools for type 2 diabetes prevention and management.”

Plant-based diets are eating patterns that emphasize legumes, whole grains, vegetables, fruits, nuts, and seeds and discourage most or all animal products. **Studies strongly support the role of plant-based diets, and food and nutrient components of plant-based diets, in reducing the risk of type 2 diabetes.**

Local physician Boone Marois, MD, who works in Lifestyle Medicine with MAHEC offers, “The dramatic increase in diabetes is not due to a change in genetics, but rather to a change in our food environment, particularly the increase in ultra-processed foods, added fats, and animal protein consumption.”

It can be hard to know what to believe with all of the chatter about the latest diet trends and food fads.

For most people, it's confusing and overwhelming to know even where to begin to improve our food choices for better health. An acronym you may have seen recently is WFPB.

What is WFPB?

WFPB stands for **whole-foods, plant-based diet.** One way to understand this way of eating is to view it not necessarily as a set diet—but more of a lifestyle. This is because plant-based diets can vary greatly depending on the extent to which a person includes animal products in their diet.

SWEET POTATO AND BLACK BEAN TACOS

Total time: 20 minutes
Servings vary

KITCHEN TOOLS

Can Opener
Skillet
Spatula
Cutting Board
Sheet Pan

INGREDIENTS

2 medium Sweet Potatoes
1 tablespoon Oil of choice
1 tablespoon Taco Seasoning
1 15 ounce can Black Beans, drained and rinsed
6-8 inch Corn Tortillas
2 cups finely shredded Red Cabbage
Juice of 1 Lime
1/3 cup roughly chopped Cilantro
Optional: Goat Cheese and Avocado to top

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Peel and chop sweet potatoes. Spread them out on a baking sheet and drizzle with oil and taco seasoning. Toss until combined. Roast until tender, about 25 minutes.
2. While waiting for the sweet potatoes, prepare the slaw by chopping the cabbage and cilantro and mixing with lime juice and a pinch of salt. Prepare goat cheese and avocado, if using.
3. Rinse and drain black beans. While the potatoes are still warm, mix them with the black beans.
4. Prepare tortillas by placing them on center rack on broil for 1-2 minutes. Then, assemble tacos and enjoy!

Via the Modern Proper



“To truly prevent and reverse diabetes, we must address the root cause and focus on eating a diversity of real whole plant foods such as whole grains, beans, fruits, and vegetables.”

WHERE DO I START?

Begin by talking with your doctor or trusted health professional. You may like to start by adding more fresh fruits and vegetables to your diet as a snack (sliced apple & peanut butter, or carrot sticks & hummus). Or even replacing one or two meat-centered meals each week that focus on whole grains, steamed veggies and a plant protein such as chick peas (garbanzo beans) or lentils (green or red lentils are easy to find!).

The idea here is to **start SMALL.**

Find what foods you like that are more natural (not ultra-processed) and fresh that you may prepare at home, in advance.

Here are two suggestions, and check out the recipe for Sweet Potato & Black Bean Tacos:

Cook a medium sized pot of brown rice and steam a large bag of frozen vegetables such as broccoli, sweet green peas, carrots and/or mushrooms. Open up a can of black beans or garbanzo beans and make a delicious ‘bowl’ dinner that you may wish to add low-sodium soy sauce or a small handful of nuts.

Commit to one salad lunch per week that includes freshly chopped romaine lettuce, chopped cilantro, shredded carrots, shredded beets, sliced cucumber, 1-2 tablespoons pumpkin seeds (pepitas), and thinly sliced avocado. Top it off with an easy dressing of fresh lemon juice, a dash of garlic granules, and a tablespoon of olive oil.

THE YMCA'S DIABETES PREVENTION PROGRAM

If you're at risk of developing type 2 diabetes, there is something you can do about it.

The YMCA of WNC offers the YMCA's Diabetes Prevention Program which helps participants achieve healthy eating, regular physical activity, and modest weight loss—all of which have been shown to reduce the risk of developing type 2 diabetes. Learn more at ymcawnc.org/programs/health-fitness/chronic-condition-support/diabetes.

Contact us at communityhealth@ymcawnc.org or call (828) 251-5910.

Program supported by:



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