


Embracing the Plant-Forward Movement in Your Kitchen

NUTRITION CONNECTION

A vibrant collage of fresh ingredients and kitchen tools. In the center is a black cutting board with the text 'IDEAS FOR SHIFTING THE PLATE TO INCLUDE LESS MEAT AND MORE VEGETABLES'. Surrounding the board are various items: a piece of raw meat, sliced red onions, a whole red onion, a wooden spoon and fork, a pomegranate, a loaf of bread, a spoonful of red lentils, a head of cabbage, green apples, and other fresh produce.

IDEAS FOR SHIFTING
THE PLATE TO
INCLUDE LESS
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Plant-based eating seems to be the nutrition buzzword of 2020, but what does that phrase actually mean? Most people associate the term with vegan diets, a meal pattern that can be nutritionally adequate with careful planning. However, that pattern may be undesirable or unattainable for many clients. As CDM, CFPPs, we can instead embrace the term “plant-forward” – a diet rich in plant foods that also still includes animal products.

WHAT EXACTLY IS A PLANT-FORWARD DIET?

There’s no universally accepted definition for this term. Instead, it’s a broad concept focused on increasing the proportion of plant foods that people eat.

Think of your plate like a feature film: the plant-based foods are the star, while the animal products play a supporting role. Here are some of the “celebrities” that might be in greater proportions on a plant-forward plate:

- Vegetables (including fresh, canned, or frozen)
- Fruits (including fresh, canned, frozen, or dried)
- Beans
- Lentils
- Grains
- Tofu
- Nuts and nut butters

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Other foods like meat, fish, and dairy products are nutritious additions to the plate too, just in smaller amounts. Plant-forward eating is more about adding nutritious foods than taking away any category of food.

NUTRITION BENEFITS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Any meal plan that increases foods like vegetables and fruits is likely to have health benefits compared to a standard Western diet. Research suggests this “flexitarian” way of eating may lead to better metabolic health, blood pressure regulation, and reduced risk of type 2 diabetes.

In addition, a plant-forward diet that includes both plant and animal products mitigates the nutritional risks associated with a fully plant-based (i.e. vegan) diet. While a vegan diet can be nutritionally balanced, there are several nutrients of concern related to eliminating animal foods.

For example, most vegan diets fall short in Vitamin B12. This vitamin is required for proper blood and nerve health, and is found almost exclusively in animal products like meat, fish, eggs, and dairy.

Similarly, adequate protein intake may be a concern in a vegan diet for elderly populations. It is certainly possible for most adults to

meet recommendations with plant-based protein. However, decreased appetite in older adults, coupled with an increased fiber intake on a vegan diet potentially causing early fullness, may result in inadequate intake. With newer research suggesting higher protein intakes at each meal may be key to maintaining lean muscle mass, this is an important consideration.

Because vegan diets do not include fish, intake of certain omega-3 fatty acids are lacking. These fats are particularly important for pregnant women (for the developing fetus) and children for cognitive development. There are several suggested benefits for adults as well, including heart health and mental health.

Should someone choose a vegan diet, a dietitian can help with nutritional strategies to meet their needs. But the aforementioned concerns, along with residents’ rights, are reasons why transitioning to an institution-wide vegan meal service is typically not practical.

In comparison, though, this is where plant-forward eating shines. Key animal foods (that are good sources of protein, Vitamin B12, and omega-3s) are still included, making it easier for people—particularly older adults—to

meet their nutritional needs. And since the meals are flexible and not restrictive, consumer satisfaction will likely be higher.

CONSUMER ACCEPTANCE

Managers might be concerned that menu changes may result in decreased intake and/or more food waste. It may take a little troubleshooting to figure out plant-forward meals that your population enjoys, but some of the research on this is reassuring.

For example, a study in the journal *Appetite* tested the acceptance of different burrito bowls in university dining settings. They compared a normal meat-based burrito bowl to plant-forward bowls where two-thirds of the meat was replaced with legumes and vegetables. The latter was found to be just as enjoyable as the regular bowl.

Several studies have found similar results, specifically for taco meat. Many have used a blend of ground beef and mushrooms, and found that up to 45 percent of the meat can be substituted with mushrooms with similar customer satisfaction.

Another study in *Appetite* examined the plant-forward concept in restaurant meals. Shifting the plate to include smaller portions of meat and

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larger portions of vegetables was effective in increasing vegetable consumption while maintaining satisfaction. The study also noted that when vegetables were presented in a more attractive way, perceived satisfaction increased further.

GET CREATIVE WITH PLANT-FORWARD COOKING

Offering new plant-forward meals in your kitchen can be as simple as looking for ways to include more produce in a standard menu dish (provided you're keeping in line with any nutrition regulations, of course). For example, pureeing zucchini into pasta sauce or blending shredded vegetables into meatloaf are both easy options.



But there's also plenty of opportunity for you to flex that culinary creativity! Think of "out-of-the-box" ideas that might be appealing to your clientele, whether that's in a school setting, corporate kitchen, or long-term care facility. Here are a few ideas to get started:

Blended Burgers or Tacos: With research to back up consumer acceptance, these are an easy place to start. Try substituting about a third of your meat with finely chopped mushrooms in your burger patty or taco meat. Not only will this make it a more plant-forward meal, but it also can improve texture and enhance the umami taste sensation.

Loaded Potatoes: With this concept, you could serve baked white and/or sweet potatoes, and offer numerous toppings that can be piled onto them. Plant-based toppings include beans, salsa, green onions, broccoli, avocado, sautéed greens, and/or corn. For the animal products, consider cheese, plain Greek

yogurt or sour cream, BBQ ground beef, taco-seasoned ground turkey, and/or chili. For lower-carb restrictions, mashed cauliflower could be substituted for the potato.

Shepherd's Pie: You can modify your meat-based version to pack in more produce by adding chopped mushrooms, grated carrots, or lentils to the ground beef, in addition to the standard mixed vegetables already used.

Stir Fry: Stir fry can be made in many different ways, so it never gets boring! The base could be noodles, zucchini noodles, rice, or cauliflower rice. Add-ins include any vegetable you can think of: cabbage, peppers, broccoli, mushrooms, carrots, and

CHILI offers a ton of recipe flexibility, so you can play around with different proportions of meats and beans. You can also add extra vegetables to chili besides tomatoes. Peppers, onions, carrots, corn, and zucchini are excellent choices.

more. The protein in the dish can be plant-based by using tofu, or can be animal-based with chicken or steak. If it's necessary to control sodium levels, try using a low-sodium broth and lower-sodium soy sauce.

Grain Bowls: Whole grains like brown rice, quinoa, farro, or sorghum can make great bases for bowl meals. For example, you can make a tropical take on quinoa by mixing it with bell peppers, pineapple, mandarin oranges, cilantro, and lime juice. Or you can create a Greek-inspired bowl, tossing farro with diced tomatoes, cucumbers, parsley, feta, and a vinaigrette. These dishes can be served as sides, or as a main dish by adding chicken, tofu, or fish.

Chili: This winter-time classic offers a ton of recipe flexibility, so you can play around with different proportions of meats and beans. Don't forget you can also add extra vegetables to chili

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besides tomatoes too – peppers, onions, carrots, corn, zucchini, and other veggies can be loaded in there.

French Dip: Make this classic sandwich with a combination of beef and portabella mushrooms for a more plant-forward meal that still honors the traditional taste (and perhaps packs in even more umami flavor)!

Salads: Salads are a fabulous “build-your-own” meal option, though this may not be appropriate for all foodservice settings. Many school districts are starting to incorporate salad bars, where students can customize a meal or side to their liking. The plant-based options are numerous – greens, tomatoes, cucumbers, mushrooms, beans, grilled eggplant, mandarin oranges, dried fruit, nuts...the list could go on and on! Animal-based options can include chopped deli meat, grilled chicken, chili, and cheese.

As you can see, the opportunities for plant-forward meals are endless. Get creative and see what delicious combinations you can come up with that fit your facility’s nutritional guidelines. **E**

MAKE A CLASSIC HOT BEEF SANDWICH with a combination of beef and portabella mushrooms for a more plant-forward meal.



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CE Questions: Nutrition Connection



This Level II article assumes that the reader has a foundation of basic concepts of the topic. The desired outcome is to enhance knowledge and facilitate application of knowledge to practice.

Reading **Embracing the Plant-Forward Movement in Your Kitchen** and successfully completing these questions online has been approved for 1 hour of continuing education for CDM, CFPPs. CE credit is available ONLINE ONLY. To earn 1 CE hour, access the online CE quiz in the ANFP Marketplace. Visit www.ANFPonline.org/market and select “CE Articles.” If you don’t see your article title on the first page, then search the title “**Embracing the Plant-Forward Movement in Your Kitchen.**” Once on the article title page, purchase the article and complete the CE quiz.

1. Which of the following best describes the phrase “plant-forward diet”?
 - A. The standard Western diet
 - B. Vegan diet with no animal products
 - C. Meal pattern with many plant foods and smaller portions of animal foods
2. Which vitamin is a nutrient of concern for those eating a vegan diet?
 - A. Vitamin B12
 - B. Vitamin C
 - C. Vitamin A
3. What is one reason older adults may not get enough protein on a fully vegan diet?
 - A. Plant foods do not contain any protein
 - B. Increased fiber intake leads to early fullness
 - C. Older adults have a greatly increased appetite
4. A plant-forward diet allows for fish, which leads to greater intake of which nutrient (that is involved in cognitive development and heart health)?
 - A. Omega-3 fatty acids
 - B. Vitamin C
 - C. Carbohydrates
5. In research, up to what percentage of taco meat can be replaced with mushrooms and still maintain consumer satisfaction?
 - A. 25 percent
 - B. 45 percent
 - C. 65 percent
6. In the restaurant study in the journal *Appetite*, what was the result when restaurants shifted to greater portions of vegetables and smaller portions of animal foods?
 - A. Customers were angry with the changes
 - B. Customers were equally satisfied
 - C. Customers did not eat the new dishes
7. Which of the following changes would create a more plant-forward shepherd’s pie recipe?
 - A. Using 100 percent ground lamb for the base instead of ground beef
 - B. Using 50/50 ground beef and ground turkey for the base
 - C. Using 10 percent grated carrots, 15 percent lentils, and 75 percent ground beef for the base

