Eco Friendly Eating

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Can you believe the New Year is only a couple of weeks away?!

How do you feel about New Year's resolutions? Do you embrace them? Despise them? Or are you somewhere in-between? Regardless of how you feel about New Year's resolutions, it's natural to reflect upon your life and lifestyle this time of year. Many of us set resolutions or intentions around health, dieting, exercise, nutrition, mental wellbeing, or work/life balance.

What about considering the health of our planet? Recently, over 11,000 scientists agree there is no doubt our planet, Earth, is facing a climate emergency.[1] The breadth of information about climate change creates curiosity as to what you can do to help impede the environmental crisis. Luckily you can improve your health and the health of the planet with eco-friendly eating!

Below is a list of 3 actions you can take to preserve, promote and protect yours and the planet's health!

1. Eat more plants & fewer animal products

As Michael Pollen once said, "'Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants." A diet that focuses on plant-based options (fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, grains, oils, and beans) does not mean you need to be vegan or vegetarian. Instead it encourages you to choose options to eat more foods from plant sources.[6] Animal-based foods are more resource intensive than plant-based foods.

- 2,500 gallons of water are needed to produce 1 pound of beef; that is 625 gallons of water for one 1/4lb burger! 477 gallons are required to produce 1lb of eggs; about 900 gallons of water are needed for 1lb. of cheese; and about 1,000 gallons of water are required to produce 1 gallon of milk.[3]

- Nitrous oxide is a greenhouse gas with 296 times the global warming potential of carbon dioxide. Around 65% of all human-related emissions of nitrous oxide are from consumption of livestock.[3]

- 51% of all worldwide greenhouse gases come from livestock and their byproducts.[3]

- Animal agriculture is responsible for up to 91% of Amazon destruction."[3]

A shift to a plant focused diet is not only better for the environment, but also for your health. Diets with less meat are associated with decreased risks of cancers, heart disease, obesity, stroke, high blood pressure and cholesterol. [4]When you are creating your meals, focus on filling up your plate with vegetables and use meat/dairy in smaller amounts or as a garnish. Substitute beans, rice, tofu, tempeh or other plant-based alternatives. See the resources at the bottom of the page for more information.

2. Reduce food waste

In 2017, we threw away 38.1 million tons of food; 44% coming from homes and 33% from restaurants.[5,6] This has a great impact on both the environment and your wallet. The resources it takes to transport food to your tables accounts for 50% of U.S. land and 80% of freshwater used in the United States.[7, 3]

When food is thrown away it produces methane gas which is 21 times more powerful in relation to global warming than carbon dioxide.[8]

The average family of four in the United States can save $124 a month, which is about $1500 a year by reducing their food waste. Learning how to prepare, plan and get creative with ingredients is essential to reducing the amount of food wasted and getting that money back in your wallet! See the resources below for more information on how to get started.

3. Package free when possible

The idea that we will stop eating packaged food is unrealistic. Life is busy; fresh foods can be expensive and time consuming to prepare. However, you will be so much healthier when you eat a diet with limited processed foods and rich in fresh fruit, vegetables, nuts, beans, and grains. Most ultra-processed food is usually found overly packaged. Examples of ultra-processed food include; chips, candy, boxed cooking mixes, packaged baked goods, instant noodles, energy bars, fast food burgers, hot dogs, etc.

Reducing the amount of ultra-processed foods you eat is associated with increased nutritional value, weight loss, decreased risks of obesity, heart disease, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, diabetes and cancer[9]. The key dietary culprits in processed foods include high amounts of sugar, sodium and unhealthy fats. The more whole foods you eat, the less trash you are adding to landfills. You will also save valuable resources that normally would be used for the production, delivery and storage of processed foods.

No need to wait for the New Year! You can get started eating eco-friendly today! See the below resources for more information:

• Harvard University Plant-focused diet

• Physicians Committee Plant-focused diet

• Thrifty, planning, food storage and preparation tips

• Reducing food waste

• Misfits Market

Resources:

[1] https://academic.oup.com/bioscience/advance-article/doi/10.1093/biosci/biz088/5610806

[2] https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/what-is-a-plant-based-diet-and-why-should-you-try-it-2018092614760

[3] https://www.cowspiracy.com/facts

[4] https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/healthy-eating/eat-smart/nutrition-basics/how-does-plant-forward-eating-benefit-your-health

[5] https://www.epa.gov/recycle/reducing-wasted-food-home

[6] https://www.thinkeatsave.org/top-tips-on-reducing-food-waste/

[7] https://www.thinkeatsave.org/environmental-impact-of-food-waste-in-the-us/

[8] http://www.ijpsi.org/VOl(2)1/Version_1/E211417.pdf

[9] https://www.lhsfna.org/index.cfm/lifelines/may-2019/the-many-health-risks-of-processed-foods/