Why So Many Elite Athletes Are Going Plant-Based ?(Planet Vegan Episode 3) Transcript

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Protein Myth and Plant-Based Motivation

When a person thinks about a plant-based diet, the first question that comes up is where do you get your protein? >> Societies who eat a lot of fiber don't get colon cancer. They don't have words for colon cancer in their language.

>> So fun to see you know, the protein myth is finally being debunked. >> Society has trained us to thinking that you need meat to get protein. >> It's odd because now I get my protein >> [music] >> from the souls of my opponents.

>> We have over hyped and over blown this protein obsession. >> When they found out that I was plant-based, everybody came up to me like, "You're [music] on drugs." >> And the people there told me like, "Oh, you can't be vegan and do CrossFit." And that just like really boosted my motivation. I was like, "I'm going to freaking show you." >> Future generations are going to look at us like, "Dang, they used to eat meat?" >> Going plant-based is like having sex. [music] If you didn't enjoy it, you weren't doing it right. >> If I could still be at the top of my game and eat this way, then why not? >> Doctors automatically assume if you're vegan and you're not feeling well, [music] then the problem has to do with your diet. >> The most important thing we can do in terms of health and longevity is what we put in our mouth.

>> [music] [music] [music] >> Having the chance to [music] learn about the many vegan alternatives currently on the market was a fascinating experience. >> [music] >> But it led me to question if eating a diet of only plants is truly the healthiest option for human beings. That's when I heard about a group of doctors [music] and nutritionists in Washington, D. C. who were prescribing a plant-based diet and other lifestyle changes to their patients [music] to treat and even reverse some of our top killers, such as heart disease, cancer, and type 2 diabetes.

>> [music] >> I'm Dr. Neal Barnard. I founded the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine and the Barnard Medical Center. And uh my job here is to make sure that [music] we are advancing healthy diets as quickly as possible. The Physicians Committee is here in D. C.

[music] We do lots of things. First of all, we run research studies for all the people who wonder, >> [music] >> "What is a vegan diet going to do for diabetes or weight or cholesterol or chronic pain? >> [music] >> Is it safe? Is it beneficial?" We are the people doing those studies.

Uh secondly, we do a lot of policy work. [music] So, that means we go down to the U. S. government and and push healthier diets on them as well as on medical organizations. [music] We work with the AMA and others in a big way. We have educational programs, >> [music] >> and we also >> are trying to change how research is done. Instead of [music] testing a drug on a rat or a mouse, why don't we explore human biology >> [music] >> in ethical ways to really understand the the diseases and how we can intervene. >> PCRM has a plant-based focus. [music] So, we are interested in plant-based diet for prevention of disease, but if you have a chronic disease [music] as most of us do, like heart disease, diabetes, um if you've [music] had cancer, you're interested in cancer prevention, uh we talk about that, too. So, it's it's never too late to adopt a plant-based [music] diet, and that's really our message to people. >> Everyone who walks into Barnard Medical Center, everyone on the staff, from [music] the people that check you in to the people that submit your bills to insurance, to the nurses who take you back to the rooms, to the doctors, to the dietitians, are all on the same [music] mission. We all have the same philosophy. Everyone follows a plant-based diet. Our primary goal is, you know, [music] not to run patients through as many as we can, it's really to help patients fundamentally adapt a healthy lifestyle and and achieve optimal health.

The year before I went to medical school, I had a job at a hospital in Minneapolis and I didn't know what I was getting into. I was the the morgue attendant, [music] meaning if somebody died in the hospital, I was there to deal with the body. And [music] what that really meant was when they would do autopsies, the doctor who was doing

the exam would explain to me what killed the person. >> [music] >> And one day they opened up a body. Like the guy had died of a heart attack in [music] the hospital the night before, probably from eating hospital food, but that's a different story. So anyhow, he he cut the ribs off the chest and that exposed the heart which was filled with [music] atherosclerotic plaque which I was seeing for the first time. And he explained to me that this is your bacon and your eggs and >> [music] >> so that it causes this hardening of the arteries. There is no better education >> [music] >> to actually see coronary arteries which we just hear about, to be able to slice one open and see that narrowing, um that atherosclerotic plaque [music] is is like concrete in the arteries. The at the end of the exam, he leaves the room and I've got to clean up. So I [music] put the ribs back in the chest and I sewed up the skin and finished up. And I went up to the cafeteria and they were serving ribs for lunch. And I can't [music] tell you um it smelled like a dead body and it looked [music] like a dead body and I suddenly realized it it is a dead body, not a human body, but it a body nonetheless. And I didn't become a vegetarian on the spot, but that started me thinking and reflecting on our relationship with food and as time went [music] on, I started to realize that food is a critically important issue. Your food choices dictate your health, the the health of the earth and all its inhabitants. So [music] it's it's big stuff. Meeting with the doctors at made me realize that I'd never really thought much about the impact that food has on our bodies.

Doctors, Disease Prevention, and PCRM

>> [music] >> I wanted to dive deeper into this topic and thought that I'd start by seeing if there were any vegan athletes out there who were living their healthiest lives as plant eaters.

>> [music] [music] [music] >> I found out that there are a ton of vegan athletes. But there has to be some kind of flaw. How can you be competitive eating nothing but plants? I wanted to meet with some of these vegan athletes to learn how they do it. And the first one that I met with certainly showed me that vegans can be pretty awesome. [music] >> My name's Cam F. Awesome. First of all, I'm a bad [__] >> [music] >> I've been on the USA national team for about 10 years.

I've won eight US national championships, four Golden Glove national championships, three PAL championships, international gold medals. I've pretty much won everything except for >> [music] >> the Olympics. I'm close to 400 fights now. I'm like the best in my head. Probably not in real life. >> [music] >> In 2012, lost a bet and had to do the Engine 2 28-day vegan challenge. And around day 20 is when the food stopped tasting [music] terrible because I found out it takes like 17 days for your taste buds to adjust and [music] then I think I kind of got the the liquor out of my system and all the badness out of my system and >> [music] >> then I kind of felt the burst of energy. In the 28 days I lost 32 lbs and [music] around day 26, day 27 when I started getting used to it, I was kind of a little bummed out because I liked the way I felt, but I didn't want to be like a vegan because they're weird people.

So, [music] I told myself I'll just secretly do it for a little bit longer and after about a year I started like meeting cool vegans. I was like, "I guess I can like come out the vegan closet." There's a lot of athletes going plant-based. I'm not happy about it. I used to be one of the famous ones, one of the [music] best vegan athletes and now I'm not even top 1,000. Thanks a lot, Rich Roll.

>> [music] >> My name is Rich Roll. I'm an ultra endurance athlete. I'm an author, podcast host, husband, and dad of four kids. So, I compete in ultra endurance multisport events, specifically long-distance triathlons, things that are longer than a typical Ironman. In the past I've specialized in a race called Ultraman, which is a double Ironman distance triathlon that circumnavigates the Big Island of Hawaii over 3 days. It's a 320-mi event. Uh in 2009 I was sixth [music] in that race. Uh then in 2010, uh a buddy and I did something called Epic 5 where we did five Ironmans on five Hawaiian islands and we completed that. And then this past year I competed in a race called the Otillo Swimrun World Championships in Sweden where a teammate and I, Chris Hauth, who's also my coach, were the fastest [music] Americans. And that's a 75-km race. It's about 40 mi of running and 6 miles of swimming all told. My whole life growing up, I basically ate what I call the window diet. If you can drive your car up to a fine dining establishment, roll the window down, and they hand you food through your window, that's what you eat. And that's how I ate for most of my life. And so, during that period of time, I was 50 lb overweight and just had an episode late one night shortly before my 40th birthday where I was walking up a flight of stairs to go to bed late one night and had to pause.

I was winded. [music] I was out of breath. Sort of buckled over with tightness in my chest. And it was a terrifying moment >> [music] >> because heart disease runs in my family, and my mother had been telling me my whole life that I had to watch what I eat. And you know, when you're young, you're just like, "Whatever." You don't pay attention to that kind of thing.

>> [music] >> And it all kind of clicked in and crystallized for me in that moment. And that really began my journey into [music] exploring food as medicine and repairing my well-being. And that's what ultimately led me to a plant-based diet. >> [music] >> Everywhere I go, [music] the people really want to know who I is and who I be. They stop and stare when they see me. If I said it once, no need to repeat. [music] Run up on me, watch you fall to your knees. Tip my hat when it's time for the kill. Ain't no peace when you're really real.

>> I'm Tu Ivan Rantiga. >> [music] >> And I'm an online fitness coach for women who are either vegan or who want to go vegan. About 5 years ago, I was scrolling on Facebook and I came across this video series of [music] slaughterhouse in Finland, where I'm from. And something made me click on it. I didn't want to watch it. I watched just a couple of seconds, and [music] that made the switch for me. And that blindfold was just ripped off. And from that moment, I was like, "Okay, I have to go vegan." And at the time, I was actually eating a lot of animal products. I was like eating tons of meats, eggs, and dairy because I was like all focused on like building muscle and gains. I thought I would lose all of that because I didn't know anyone who was like an athlete or anything, but I was like just for the ethics I have to do this and I just decided I'm going to try and figure out a way.

I found CrossFit and I got into CrossFit and then people there told me like oh you can't be vegan and do CrossFit like it's just really stupid. You're just going to compromise on your performance and that just like really boosted my motivation. I was like I'm going to freaking show you.

>> [music] >> What happened when I switched to vegan, my fat percentage dropped to like 13% which is like quite good for CrossFit like females and that massively helped in my gymnastics. Like I went from zero to 15 pull-ups, I got my first muscle-ups and yeah I I I thought like being like the worst gymnast ever actually like was able to improve a lot. >> Yay, food.

>> Thank you. Thank you so much. >> Meeting with Cam, Twee, and Rich showed me that being strong and fit on a plant-based diet was indeed possible, but I wanted to learn about something that I heard was difficult to get from plants.

Protein. I heard about a man living in the mountains of Norway who told me that if I met with him, he'd teach me everything that he'd learned.

Vegan Athletes and Performance

[music] >> [music] [music] >> My name is John Venus. I'm a vegan public figure focusing on health and fitness. I make YouTube videos showing how to be fit and healthy and compassionate on a plant-based [music] diet and I just try to spread the message online.

I started lifting weights I'd say 6 [music] years ago after meeting my girlfriend who is now my wife and she lifted weights and I didn't lift weights at that point. I was just doing soccer. So, I figured, you know, if my girlfriend's lifting weights, yeah, I'm going to I better start to catch up with her basically. And then it evolves more and more. I looked more into >> [music] >> you know, how to optimize my training to maximize muscle gains. But, I don't compete. I'm not a professional bodybuilder or anything. It's [music] just something that I love doing.

Initially, I went vegan for ethical reasons and I was prepared to take a hit on the physical side of things. But, in reality, to my surprise, the opposite happened. I really felt like it was important for me to push myself as hard as possible and to actually prove that not [music] only can you maintain your gains and your muscle, but you can build an incredible physique if that is your goal.

And I'm not the only one doing this. There have been like an explosion of vegan bodybuilders now and it's so fun to see that that myth, [music] you know, the protein myth is finally being debunked.

>> I was definitely impressed that Jon was able to build a great physique eating nothing but plants. But, I'd always heard that plants are an inferior source of protein and don't you need to eat meat to get protein?

>> [laughter] >> Oh my gosh, excuse me for a minute. Um it should occur to people that if animal foods are the only source of protein, how is it that a cow grows to be 1,200 lb on nothing but grass? How is it that chickens and turkeys grow to adult size eating nothing but corn? The connection that people aren't making is that there is plenty of protein in plants. >> The US government says that a woman needs about 46 g of protein a day, a man about 56 g per day. What if as an experiment one day you decided to eat 2,000 calories of broccoli, that's all you eat in a day. What you would discover is you would get g of pure protein. The next day, if you had 2,000 calories of lentils, you get 157 g of protein. Now, hopefully you're not eating just broccoli or just lentils. Eat some broccoli and some lentils and all kinds of other stuff. But, what you discover is you are easily getting all the protein you could ever need, and that's even true for high-level athletes.

>> The protein myth. How long do you have? >> I said talking about this. So, when we talk about protein, what are we actually talking about? Does anybody even really know what that word means? In truth, what we're talking about is amino acids.

There's a number of amino acids, nine of which are dubbed the essential amino acids. These are the amino acids that our bodies cannot synthesize on our on their own. We need to get them from the foods that we're eating. And when you're eating plant-based, you're just getting those amino acids lower on the food chain, the same place that the animals that you were previously eating were getting [music] them from. >> So, instead of looking at just like, okay, this is a protein source, I started to understand that the protein accumulates over the the course of the day. And um then I realized like I was eating way too much protein. And but people also don't realize that protein also accumulates into excess fats. Like, it doesn't just like magically form into muscle, especially if you're not working out.

>> people who take a 30-minute walk on their lunch break, >> [music] >> and then have like a 60-g protein shake for a walk. They're not athletes. They're They They literally walked.

>> We have overhyped and overblown this protein obsession to such a large extent. Most people are walking around eating anywhere from two to five times as much protein as [music] they need. >> The obsession in the United States and other Western countries with animal-sourced protein literally comes from marketing. >> Teen athletes are using protein supplements to make them stronger and a lot faster.

>> Taking the right protein [music] to build the size and strength needed to compete with the best in the world. >> New Weetabix on the go protein, a proper breakfast bottled. >> If you're training for a marathon or you're a professional football player or you're a professional boxer, professional cyclist, guess what? You're not eating 2,000 calories a day. You might be eating 5,000 calories a day. So, what happens to your protein intake if you eat 5,000 calories a day? Well, it goes up. So, so the answer is not more protein. It's more food. Real food. If an athlete wants to go on to a really high protein diet because they're going to do a marathon or a triathlon or something like like that, um I recommend they eat exactly the same foods that they would eat if they were going to play ping pong. It's just that they're going to eat a lot more because they're burning calories. And in the same way as their their lungs will take in more air and they don't have to think about oxygen. Just you're taking more air and oxygen happens to be part of it.

When you're exercising your muscles, you take in more food and protein is part of it. You're going to be fine. >> Everything has protein in it. Like there's not a single vegetable that doesn't have protein. And some like good vegan protein sources we think of like legumes, whole grains, tempeh, tofu, seitan, lentils, edamame, chickpeas, other beans, [music] other soy products. When people stress about protein they say, "Just Google." Takes you like 3 minutes to learn like a massive list that is high in protein and then you just involve them in your meals and you're good to go. >> I'm asked about my protein more frequently than anything else and my answer is always I get my protein from the soles of my opponents. Because no one really [music] cares about the answer.

They just have like a they have a rebuttal for whatever you say and they just want to have a conversation about why their diet is right. And if you answer like that, you just end that conversation.

>> [music] >> We all get a laugh, they kind of feel bad, and I walk away from the situation not being hated. >> I don't know of any doctors that are treating patients in [music] the developed world for a protein deficiency. It just doesn't exist.

Meanwhile, we're all fiber deficient. [music] People are not eating enough fruits and vegetables. I've been doing this for 11 years. I'm 51 years old right now. I can go out and still compete at a very high level. I've never had any problems building lean muscle mass, getting stronger, [music] repairing my body, recovery. All of that is completely in check. And believe it or not, if you're just grazing on a wide variety of >> [music] >> healthy plant-based foods close to their natural state, you are not going to have a problem meeting your daily recommended allowance of protein. It's really a non-issue.

>> Rich Roll has been vegan for more than a decade and is still able to perform as a high-level athlete. But I wanted to see if there were any other athletes who have been vegan for even longer.

I came across a guy who's been vegan for more than 20 years. And to my surprise, I found him in the gym. >> [music] [music] >> My name is Torre Washington. And I am a competitive bodybuilder, coach, trainer. And I was raised to a mother who was a Seventh-day Adventist. And Seventh-day Adventist was the kindling to me further becoming this vegan activist that you see now.

>> Torre told me that he was raised as a strict vegetarian with his mother in the US until he moved in with his grandparents in Jamaica. But when he returned to the US as a teenager, it was his Jamaican heritage that inspired him to adopt a vegan lifestyle and stick with it for what's been more than two decades. >> I actually didn't start for health or for the animals or for the earth. I started this based on not being a hypocrite. Because in the Rastafarian culture, it was supposed to be [music] no meat, no form of byproduct from an animal whatsoever. But a lot of Rastas just adapted the the marijuana, the donning of the locks, the music culture, but they didn't take it as far with the food aspect. [music] They still eat chicken and fish. And so I said, you know, if I'm going to claim to be Rasta, let me go all the way. And so that from that moment on I decided to make that shift into [music] eating strictly just plants for nutrition. And I did that in 1998. [music] Who would have known at that time in my life I took that step.

Look where I Look where it landed me. Think about a young kid moving back from Jamaica to the US. >> [music] >> These kids picked on us because we sounded differently. Like, "Hey, you need to go back on a banana boat. What's wrong with you? Why you sound like that?" During that time, you know, you want to do something to kind of make yourself seem to stand out.

Then I found Arnold Schwarzenegger. And he had this superhero look. And so I wanted that superhero look, so I decided to >> [music] >> follow his lead. And just started working out. Then once I started high school, I started working out even more.

And to the point where people were afraid of me because of how I looked. Not that I was fighting or going to beat people up, but I had this look like you can kick some ass.

>> [music] [music] >> So I was vegan in '98. And by 2009 I started competing. Now I'm IFBB Pro, which is the highest you can get when it comes to the pro rankings.

There's not many people who plant-based or vegan that have the IFBB Pro status who gained it while already being plant-based or vegan, which put me in the same ranks as Arnold Schwarzenegger, someone who I kind of looked up to. Over the year 2009 to now, I can't even tell you. I think it's been more than 25 shows and always within the top five or top 10.

Do I look like I'm not getting protein? I mean, really. >> By cutting out the animal middleman, they actually get those amino acids or those proteins in a much more healthful form [music] because when when they come from the animal sources, they're accompanied by fat, cholesterol, hormones, and a whole [music] host of things that have a negative impact on our health and our physiology. And science and research shows this, that populations that are plant-based um live longer, have uh less disease, less dementia, and importantly, remain more functional throughout their lifetime. Human beings can get all of the protein they need from eating nothing but plants.

>> Hi, my name is Tia Blanco. I'm a professional [music] surfer. I'm 21 years old and I've been vegan now for 5 years. I would say that my biggest accomplishment so far has been winning gold medals for the United [music] States in 2014 and 2015.

It was some of the best moments of my life representing my [music] country. I was born as a vegetarian. I've never had red meat in my [music] whole entire life. When I was about 13, I would say, I switched to pescatarian and um I started eating like eggs and fish because I was just embarrassed.

Protein, Recovery, and Plant-Based Nutrition

Like I wanted to eat what all the other kids ate. I didn't want to be an outsider. And I didn't really [music] know why I didn't eat meat. Like my parents raised me to not eat meat, but I never did that research on my own. So, um I would say when I was like 14 [music] or 15 years old, I started watching different documentaries. I watched Earthlings. [music] I read Forks Over Knives and The China Study.

And I just felt very enlightened. And [music] then um a couple of days following, I went on YouTube and I and [music] I watched um Behind Glass Walls.

And if you've seen that, it's very very hard to watch. And I just remember crying my eyes out like the whole night and I was just like, there's no way I could ever support the people that do this to these animals. Like it's just not fair. When I went vegan, I noticed a huge switch [music] in energy levels. Um I just felt strong, but just like have all this energy [music] to do what I want throughout the day. So, I think it definitely gets rid of fatigue.

>> [music] >> I was amazed that all of these athletes were benefiting from eating an entirely plant-based diet. But what exactly are the benefits that they're receiving?

>> The primary benefit of plant-based eating for athletes is improved recovery time. And so, you know, you can do these studies you can do with blueberries, you can do it with a variety of plant foods. You can do it blinded where you feed people smoothie, a fake blueberry smoothie versus a real blueberry smoothie with real blueberry powder versus some fake blueberry taste and they both taste the same, they look the same. Um but the group that actually got the real blueberries, you know, you you um you do all sorts of, you know, exercise test the next day and you the recovery time in terms of strength, in terms of power bounces back so much quicker. So, basically it just allows you to train that much harder. Now, it's the training that's actually got to give you the performance, right? It's nothing you put in your mouth that's going to be a substitute for putting in the time. It's just that you can put in more time where your body can heal faster, recover faster, be and you can work and train that much harder eating healthy and supporting your body.

>> I credit my adoption of a plant-based diet with everything that I've been able to accomplish as an athlete. And there's a little bit of misunderstanding out there. People think that I compete despite [music] my dietary proclivities and preferences, but it's actually quite the opposite. The holy grail is recovery. [music] You don't get stronger or faster during the workout. It's what happens in between those workouts that make [music] you better. And as every athlete knows, the faster, the more expeditious [music] you can recover and bounce back in between workouts, the harder you can train, the longer you can go. >> So, when an athlete starts a plant-based diet, they're they're lowering their inflammation, which would be caused by meat [music] in the diet and dairy and animal proteins in the diet. Um they're getting improved blood flow throughout all the blood vessels in their body. So, especially as an athlete, you want blood flow. You want blood to the muscles. The blood is what carries the oxygen. You [music] want as much oxygen getting to your muscles as possible. So, you know, there people I see advertisements online, take this to improve your oxygenation. [music] You can do that with food, you know? Like eat better food, eat plant-based foods and you're going to improve the oxygenation. [music] Um you're going to recover faster. That increased blood flow is going to help get the the waste out of your body. So, the products of metabolism, the the the basically the waste products [music] for when you're working out, you're going to be able to get rid of those faster. You know, you're going to feel better overall.

>> The vegan diet has allowed me to have quicker recovery time and be healthier, >> [music] >> which is kind of annoying because I used to always hear old people talk about, "You're not going to be young forever." And like,

"Yes, I am." And although I'm not old yet, this feels like I'm reversing the age process. >> It started out with the distance [music] runners. And then it was tennis players like Serena Williams and Venus Williams and Novak [music] Djokovic who, you know, after you win Wimbledon and the US Open and you're you're vegan and you he started his own vegan restaurant and it just became cool. And then football players started doing it showing it's not just the endurance athletes, it's the muscle athletes, too.

>> Before he retired after a 9-year career with the NFL, Derrick Morgan, a defensive lineman for the Tennessee Titans, inspired a large portion of his team to start eating plant-based to improve their recovery times and increase their performance on the field. Charity Morgan, Derrick's wife, was whipping up incredible meals in the kitchen acting as the plant-based chef for the team. >> So Derrick was the first one that said, "Okay, I'm going to walk down this this road of trying a new way of eating." When he started doing more and more and more research, he kept coming up with this plant-based, plant-based, plant-based, take out meat, take out dairy >> [music] >> to where he couldn't ignore it. And he said, "Okay, I'm just going to try it." He never wanted to commit to it, neither did I. I said, "Oh, I'm just going to try it for 2 weeks and see how I feel." But once he started that first week and then the second week and he realized how he felt and he realized he had less mucus in his chest and less inflammation, that's when he said, "Okay, I can't I can't go back to what I was eating before." And the same [music] with me, it's no comparison because I was waking up every day walking straight to my coffee machine and pushing the button and going, "Okay, need my coffee." Those days stopped when I started eating plant-based. I had way more energy. [music] And I couldn't I can't I couldn't forsake that for anything.

To unlearn something is probably the hardest thing to do and I I tell people a upon walking this journey of being plant-based or being vegan or whatever journey you want to walk down, it's mental. [music] It's 100% mental.

>> When we were all born in the delivery room, nobody asked for fried chicken, pork chops, or ice cream. Those are all learned habits. And just like we learned dysfunctional dietary habits, we can jettison those unhealthy dietary habits and adopt new ones. And once we adopt a plant-based diet, you uh learn to love it, and you don't miss what you used to eat. In fact, you're happier because you know you're no longer harming yourself, harming your health, and harming the world around you.

>> With the way I cook, I never sacrifice on the flavors. So, I'm [music] constantly I'm going into like my archives of how I make this or how I make that. I go to my old culinary books from school. And I just take out the meat and the dairy, and I leave everything else the same. Make what you always make. Just find the vegan version of it.

>> So, oftentimes like people think when you eat vegan it's really restrictive, and that's what I thought as well. I thought like you just only eat lettuce and carrots. And then what actually happened, my eyes just started opening because I started to like experiment foods that I never even knew existed.

What I started to eat, it went from like maybe five meals that I was rotating into this like experiencing so much more foods. And I I just like formed a really different relationship with food because I became connected, and I started to actually care about [music] also the flavor and how to actually like enjoy the food rather than just seeing it as fuel.

>> While many people adopt a plant-based diet and feel better than ever, it's no doubt that some people feel the opposite. >> [music] >> So, what are they getting wrong?

You know, from time to time I will hear from somebody that will say, "Oh, I tried to be vegan, or I tried to be plant-based, but I was so weak and so tired, and I started losing weight and I just I had to stop. I always ask them, well, what were you eating? And they say, well, I was eating a you know, a lot of salads and stir-fry. And I said, that's your problem.

Salads are wonderful in terms of their fiber content, their nutrient content, but they have very few calories. Same thing with stir-fry. The vegetables that go in the stir-fry are mainly water and fiber. They're very healthy, but that is food that is fit for a 3-lb rabbit. You're a 150-lb human being. You need food. You need to be eating legumes, beans, peas, lentils. You need root vegetables, potatoes, yams, yucca, sweet potatoes. You need grains, corn, rice, um barley, oats. All of these foods are much more calorie concentrated, much more uh protein concentrated, and they will give you the nutrients that you need to uh not only sustain yourself, but to actually be healthy and get

the full benefits of being plant-based.

>> So, there's two vitamins that are not made by plants. So, with exception of those two, everything else is available in the produce aisle, right? There's nothing There's no you know, vitamin, mineral, you know, protein, anything that we can't get with the exception of these two vitamins. One's vitamin D. Not made by plants, made by animals such as yourself when you walk outside. Sunshine vitamin, right? Um now, people are not getting adequate sunshine cuz they're in their little desk job or whatever. For whatever reason, may need to supplement with vitamin D. It's nothing really to do with your diet. Um and the other one um that's not made by plants is vitamin B12. Not made by animals either, made by little microbes that blanket the earth. So, you know, we used to get all the B12 we need drinking out of mountain stream or well water or something, but now we chlorinate the water supply to kill off any bacteria. So, we don't get a lot of vitamin B12 in our water anymore. Don't get a lot of cholera either. That's a good thing that we live in a nice sanitary world. But because of our of our nice modern sanitary world, we need to get you know, vitamin B12 from some place. Our fellow great apes get all the B12 they need from bugs, dirt, and feces. I prefer supplements. And really the only the best reliable way to get B12 in the modern world is just take a supplement.

>> I always heard that being healthy was expensive.

Longtime Vegan Bodybuilders and Surfers

And once I made the transition, I had to plan my meals out. It may be inconvenient, but it's significantly cheaper. People are used to certain ways of living and you get accustomed to things and it makes you comfortable.

Just like a home cooked meal that your grandma used to make. Well, if you're vegan, you can't have that exact meal that grandma used to make and then you feel like you're losing some of that comfort.

So I do understand the difficulties there, but anything that's worth it's going to take some sacrifice. And it's your health, so you could I mean you could buy new boots, but you can't buy like a new heart. So you might as well keep your body nice. I see a lot of people spend like thousands of dollars on fixing up their like 67 Mustang, but won't spend like $4 on a kale shake because that's too expensive.

>> America's one of the most prosperous nations in the world. And yet we've never been sicker as a society. Right now, one out of every three Americans will die of heart disease. One out of every three. 70% of Americans are obese or overweight. And they're predicting that by 2030, >> [music] >> more than 30% of the population is going to be diabetic or pre-diabetic. And childhood obesity rates are through the roof. We're quickly moving towards 10 billion people. So what is going on? We need a better way to feed the planet. Our current system for feeding everybody, which is predominantly based on animal agriculture, is [music] contributing to these diseases. Meanwhile, it's decimating our planet at an unfathomable rate. [music] We're in the midst of this insane mass species extinction. The runoff from animal agriculture is creating these algal blooms in our in our oceans. Our waterways are polluted. It requires so much land, so much resources, so much water to raise these animals for food.

It's truly unsustainable and it's wreaking havoc on our planet. But, I think it's imperative upon us to take personal responsibility for those choices and as a culture to innovate new ways to feed the planet. Because if we continue down this path, we're only going [music] to get sicker and we're destroying this one planet that that we all share together. Meanwhile, we're creating massive amounts of suffering and violence through the way that we're treating these animals. There is nobody, regardless of your dietary proclivities, that's a fan [music] of factory farming. It's so heartbreaking to know that this is how we're feeding everybody and we really need to innovate and figure out new ways, more compassionate ways to treat ourselves, [music] treat the planet, and treat the animals. >> A lot of people are not aware that what you eat >> [music] >> affects the ocean. Eating meat and supporting animal agriculture is one of the leading causes of ocean dead zones. I believe the reason why I've stuck with this lifestyle is because I love animals so much and I believe that we don't have to harm animals to be healthy.

>> I've always thought that we had all the time in the world to fix all these problems and you know, inspire the world to be a little more conscious and you know, just be healthier. But, you know, now I have a kid [music] and he's

going to grow up in this world. The environment is at a tipping point.

It's just a mess and having that kid just made me realize like, you know, we [music] have to step up our game right now. We don't have time to be passive about this.

>> So, this is our baby Noah and he was born [music] 6 weeks ago. And I guess our lives have changed dramatically since then, but to the better. It's been really great. It's been a really amazing journey so far.

He's a pretty calm, chill baby. And [music] he's uh born vegan. >> Yeah. >> Yeah. [laughter] >> When you look at the dairy industry like the baby cows being taken away from their moms, like imagine I just like [music] had this thought one day imagining someone taking our baby away, how devastating that would be. So, we have to do the best we can and do what matters the most. And [music] to me that is, you know, saving our planet so that my kid and, you know, all the generations to come have a nice place to live in.

>> Jon Venus no longer a vegan. >> Jon Venus sadly no longer being vegan. >> Jon Venus has quit being vegan. >> Jon Venus is no longer vegan. One of the major vegan fitness influencers just became an ex-vegan.

>> And I'm not here >> [music] >> to listen to your uh you know, arguments and to your uh opinions either. Nutrition itself [music] is a very confusing and not really understood topic. We cannot, you know, say for certain that 100% vegan diet is going to be optimal [music] for kids.

>> I can honestly say that I was shocked. Jon was someone who I looked up to ever since meeting him. Were his reasons valid? Should I reconsider my own thoughts on being vegan? It turns out that Jon wasn't the only person to leave veganism behind.

Like, for example, Miley Cyrus and Ellen DeGeneres, who were both once vegan. >> Congratulations, I am also vegan. >> Miley Cyrus is now eating chicken on Instagram. >> They can buy chicken and my wife sing along. >> And Ellen started eating fish for no real reason after 8 years of being vegan.

>> [music] >> It becomes >> I wanted to learn about why this happens, so I sat down with psychologist Dr. Melanie Joy to hear about her take on the matter.

>> A recent study suggests that social pressure actually plays a huge role [music] in recidivism and people no longer maintaining adherence to veganism, and this of course makes sense.

For many vegans, becoming vegan is often one of the most inspiring experiences of their lives and one of the most empowering experience of their lives.

>> [music] >> And nevertheless, it comes with certain challenges. People may find that they become vegan and they lack the social support. They may find that their relationships and communications start to break down. And this challenge can become even stronger when you're trying to communicate across ideological differences. In many places, it's still considered socially [music] acceptable to talk about and to vegans in a way that would be considered completely inappropriate. Vegans, for example, often report that they're [music] teased at the dinner table for their beliefs.

They're teased for their core beliefs. Family members might dangle pieces of meat in front of the vegan and and laugh at them [music] and then tell the vegan they have no sense of humor when they don't laugh along.

>> Whenever I'm cooking, I always make sure there are vegetarian options. They can make do or they can [__] off. >> I would have been vegan so much sooner if if if if it wasn't for vegans. You ever met one? Bro.

>> I want to talk to my kids for a minute. [music] Cuz three of my kids are vegans. I got news FOR YOU. I'M PUTTING meat in your baby's formula bottle when you ain't looking.

>> Sometimes it's pressure [music] from authorities. Sometimes a vegan might, for example, not be feeling well, go

to the doctor. Doctors might automatically assume that if you're vegan and you're not feeling well, then the problem has to do with your diet.

Kids, Family, and Raising Vegan

And I've heard from many, many vegans that they felt pressured to revert back in order to manage whatever problem they might have been dealing with, um, whether it's a physical health problem or sometimes even a psychological problem that they may be dealing with.

>> A few months after John told the world that he was no longer vegan, he posted an apology video, as well as another video claiming that he would never leave veganism behind again. >> You know, I don't I don't I just don't see myself ever changing again.

>> And to be honest, this only confused me further. Luckily, I was able to arrange a meeting with him to ask about why he had a change of heart. >> The fact is that I went into this extreme fear paradigm. I bought into the pressure from, you know, society, from other doctors, from some research that I came across. I pulled the trigger, so to speak, and decided that I was not going to feed my son a vegan diet. And because of that, I didn't feel comfortable, um, you know, being vegan or telling the world that I was vegan myself. My son never, uh, went through any serious illnesses himself, so it was more a psychological thing rather than a immediate threat, um, or health crisis. I changed my mind at once again and went back to, uh, a lifestyle that I felt more in alignment with. >> It was definitely reassuring to hear that John decided to go back to being vegan. Until a few months later when I checked out his YouTube channel and found videos titled, "Is eating meat helping me build muscle?" and "How a vegan diet can ruin your health." So, now he's eating meat? I came across one video that made me realize that John will most likely never call himself vegan again.

>> Catherine, is that I just got out the rifle. He may have spotted something. >> [music] >> So, he spotted three animals. Now, we're just trying to to up on them. >> [music] [music] [music] >> So, I'm super grateful for the whole opportunity and um obviously really thankful for the animal itself um who gave his life uh to us. That's a really important aspect that >> [music] >> you know most of us when we're eating food and we're not even thinking about where it came from. We're not even >> Personally, I'm not bothered at all when vegan influencers stop [music] being vegan. Um vegans are people and people change over the course of a lifetime for [music] a lot of different reasons. People's ideas change, people's relationships change, and that influences them. >> [music] >> Um people's needs change, and this movement, the vegan movement, is a social justice movement. It's made up [music] of many, many people. It's built on foundational values and ideas that are very important and very relevant and will continue to be so. One individual in this movement or a handful of individual in this >> [music] >> individuals in this movement are not going to make or break the movement. The movement is bigger than one or two or even a hundred [music] influencers. Many vegans focus so much on, you know, former vegans and [music] former vegan influencers when in fact that same energy could be used to raise awareness [music] among people who are open to and receptive to the vegan message.

>> I realized that I myself have spent a lot of energy focusing on John and his journey. Energy that could have been spent on my own journey and learning more about what it truly means to be vegan. I also realized that not all vegans represent the vegan movement and that this is a movement made up of unique individuals [music] from all around the world. All with their own story to tell. But at the same time, [music] if John truly was only trying to protect the health of his son, I couldn't blame him.

This made me [music] wonder if feeding a vegan diet to kids is the right thing to do or not. So, I sat down with the doctors to see what the science says.

>> Kids who are raised on a plant-based diet have huge [music] advantages. First of all, they're going to live longer and they are much less likely to become obese. But, their risk of diabetes is less. [music] Their risk of heart disease is less. Their risk of things like asthma and other things that can affect [music] other kids dramatically less. It's It's the biggest gift the parents can give their [music] kids is to raise them on a healthy plant-based diet. >> The largest, oldest association of nutrition professionals in the world, writing the American Dietetic Association, their position paper, in fact, going back a number of position papers they do on everyone a couple years. The [music] last one

2017 very clearly that even a strictly plant-based diet so is appropriate [music] for all stages of the life cycle from pregnancy to infancy, um childhood, adulthood, old age. The position paper was not only that >> [music] >> um safe but actually offers benefits in terms of reducing chronic disease risk. >> The diseases of adulthood [music] start in childhood. A heart attack has its roots when a child is [music] actually in grade school. Um it starts with cholesterol particles [music] that irritate the artery wall and then it forms a little raised plaque. It's very small at first, just a little fatty streak. But, by the time a kid is [music] is finishing high school, they may have even lost one of their arteries, just paved over um by this process. Um it starts in the lumbar [music] aorta, the the arteries going to the lower back. And then after that, it start it [music] hits the arteries to the heart and the arteries to the brain. Um but, it starts very, very early.

The good news is >> [music] >> it can be reversed. It It cannot be reversed by going to chicken and fish and skim milk, but it can be reversed by plant-based diet.

>> People frown their face if they hear about a woman that gave her breast milk to another woman, But, but you eat and drink cow's milk. Like just come on.

Just just think about that for a second. You are drinking the the milk of a mother cow. And [music] you frown your face upon lactating women. I don't know about that.

You know, when you're teaching all the kids these [music] animals and how cute they are and you sing Old MacDonald Had a Farm and you're just like that that nursery rhyme doesn't go Old MacDonald Had a Farm and then you slaughtered them. So then I started letting the kids understand what they are eating. Like you know the little pig that we talked about? Yeah, that's that's that.

>> [music] [music] >> And what is your favorite um food [music] that you like to eat? The buffalo wings that I make and um when Mommy makes french fries.

>> Yeah. >> And do you like broccoli? >> Yeah. That was my favorite. When my mom makes it juicy and and and it tastes [music] like cheese fries, I love it. >> What can you tell them what is your favorite salad? >> Kale salad.

No, what's [music] it called? >> Yeah, you said it right. The one with the lemon on it? >> Yeah, the lemon dress. >> Future generations are going to look at us like dang, they used to eat meat?

They used to eat dead animals? >> We don't make hardcore rules about what they can and they can't [music] eat. We just try to educate them to the best of our ability.

Ex-Vegans, Social Pressure, and Recommitment

So, things like going to the farmers market, going to the supermarket are all home school experiments [music] and opportunities to try to teach our kids uh why we're choosing this food and not this food and um why you know, maybe your friends have that but we don't and [music] and my wife is such a good cook that they prefer her food so that's the way that they eat and when they go to her friend's house we don't say you can't eat that or you can you know I'm not going to be the dad who says hey when you go to a birthday party you can't have a piece of cake >> [music] >> we respect their sovereignty as human beings and they're free to make that choice and then we talk about it on the way home from the birthday party if they have a stomach ache well maybe let's talk about why you have a stomach ache I'm less concerned in them having that piece of pizza or that piece of cake at the birthday party than I am in their daily habits 5 10 15 years from now.

>> You need to unlearn a lot of stuff and you need to challenge your current beliefs because the way that you have been taught is not necessarily the whole truth like it's often been in someone's interest and often there's a financial interest. >> I think it does have to do with big marketing. >> [music] >> For example you know you have animal agriculture they need to get these cows moving and so the best way to do that is to say hey you want to stay fit and lean you need protein. >> You're trying to overcome a default setting that has been implanted since birth milk does a body good you know beef is what's for dinner and now you're coming in and you're telling me like these foods aren't healthy to deprogram someone [music] from something like that requires a tremendous amount of patience

and time and education. Meanwhile we have so much conflicting information you know the internet is amazing it gives us access [music] to answers about everything we could possibly ask ourselves about and a lot of the science is compromised [music] through the way that it's funded and and structured etc. >> What cigarette do you smoke doctor? Tens of thousands of doctors in all branches of medicine in all parts of the country were asked that question. >> Time out for many men of medicine usually [music] means just long enough to enjoy a cigarette.

And because they >> In my lifetime you could go in the doctor's office and there'd be a blue haze and you go into the exam room, either you or the doctor, both were smoking. And we look back now and we say, is that the craziest thing you ever saw or heard? And I mean, no one would disagree with that. Yet, I go in the CCU and and and what's on a patient's tray after they just had a heart attack? You know, bacon and eggs. And you go down, someone just had half their colon taken out because they had colon cancer, and what's on the tray, right? Ham and cheese sandwich.

And we know good and well that that those kinds of foods cause or, you know, one of the root causes of these chronic diseases. [music] You know, one day we're going to look back and say, can you believe we, you know, we used to feed our [music] patients bacon and eggs and ham and cheese? You know, we can all have our own opinions, but we can't have [music] our own facts. And the facts are that that a plant-based diet is really the optimum diet for human health. >> Getting the word out to other doctors and having them tell their patients about it, I think there's a couple things, but I think one is that it seems too good to be true. It seems like, oh yeah, sure, just making a change in what you eat is going to reverse disease. It sounds a little crazy, you know, but we see it here every day. And and there's studies to show that that is the case. >> [music] >> To get people to change around their lifestyle, you know, to get a patient to actually start eating differently after, who knows, it could be 20 years, it could be 75 years of eating one way, that's really tough to do. And so, it's easier for doctors, you know, I I even see this in my practice, it's easier to say, "Hey, take this pill every day." than it is to say, "I want you to eat completely differently than what you're used to.

>> And look, it's your body, your choice. You want to go smoke cigarettes, go bungee jumping, do whatever you want, right? But, as physicians, our duty is to share with you the best available balance of evidence, so you know, someone in your circumstance that does X, Y, and Z will suffer these predictable consequences, likely. Um, and so, then we give you the options. Yes, you can do drugs, you can do And this is the benefit and the risks, and here's what we can do procedurally, the surgically, and and then there's lifestyle approaches. It's such a patientizing attitude to decide for the patients themselves and not even give them >> [music] >> the opportunity.

>> It's not what does the plant-based industry look like in the future. [music] It's what are these meat factories going to do now? Because it is a huge disruptor right now. >> There is mainstream awareness [music] about this diet and you see every day more and more athletes experimenting with it. And not just skinny ultra endurance guys, but MMA fighters and NBA players and NFL players and NHL players and every type of athlete from strength, [music] agility, speed, um you know, athletes that really rely on power and quickness, [music] not just long-distance runners, and they're experiencing the same thing that I experienced and I think that's super exciting.

>> I just feel so good eating a vegan diet and I know that it has [music] sustained me this far and I've always felt very energetic and strong. If I could still be at the top of my game and eat this way, then why not? I'm benefiting animals, myself, and the environment by eating this way, so I'm all for it.

The Bigger Picture and Future of Plant-Based Living

>> If you care about humanity, if you care about the planet, if you care about the animals, >> [music] >> if you care about yourself, adopting a plant-based lifestyle is the single most powerful, most [music] positively impactful choice that you can possibly make. >> As more and more people realize that eating animals is not [music] a necessity, eating animals is taking on a whole new ethical dimension and people are becoming increasingly [music] ethically uncomfortable with this behavior.

>> And the fact that also has all these side benefits that a heart-healthy diet is a brain-healthy diet and a kidney-healthy diet and a liver-healthy diet is the same diet, the one diet to rule them all, that should be the diet we should all eat. >> People often say like an individual can't have an impact and it's easy to just point fingers at politics and

stuff like that. And [music] what I thought as well, like, okay, it's just a drop in the ocean at at the start, but then I realized how many times a day do I make a choice? How many times a day do I eat? And how that [music] accumulates. And then not only that, what I have seen by just leading by example, how massive a difference you can make. >> I tell people going plant-based is like having sex. If you didn't enjoy it, you weren't doing it right. Because when you do plant-based eating properly, >> [music] >> you're going to be healthier, you're going to have more energy, you're going to feel better, you're going to be bouncing off the walls. [music] You feel so good. >> Once we understand what the foods do in our body, and that their power [music] is bigger than we had imagined before, we realize instead of just gradually declining through life, when I'm 30, I'm way overweight, [music] when I'm 40, I'm taking medications, when I'm 50, I can't really play tennis anymore. You you you're on a slow decline. Instead, you can really live. You you you put the power of food to work. And you can stay healthy. [music] And you can play with your kids and your grandkids, and you can really live life.

We're not going to live forever. But while we're alive, let's live well. >> [music] >> And foods will allow us to do that. >> Next time on Planet Vegan.

>> People don't do what they do cuz they're inherently [music] bad. But that's not the reason why. So we never have the chance to actually question the way [music] that we live, because from the moment we're born, these are the values we're given. >> The first time that I walked up close, there was a pig looking back at me through the porthole, and it was the most unbelievable experience. >> [music] >> Once you have seen the footage of what actually is happening to these individuals in animal factories, you can never unsee [music] that.

>> You can summarize what we're trying to do in 10 simple words. Find your voice. Find some friends. And fight like hell. >> [music] >> We going back to the Gold Coast. Fast food yo is burgers and fries and it used to hurt the earth and the birds in the sky [music] but now they making it with plants and it's so much better cuz the animals are safe. No more changes in the weather. We better [music] act fast cuz the ice barely freeze and the world's changing quick. So welcome to planet vegan.

Yeah, okay. We about to change the world, all right? Okay. All around the world it's the same new dance. What you making out of bodies? Yeah, we making out of plants. [music] We got to save the pigs and the fishes in the sea. So hold on to your pants. Planet vegan soon to be. There's a change up [music] in the system. I can feel it in the air but it benefits us all. There's no need to be scared. We're going to change the world and we'll do it in a day. So don't fight the future. Planet vegan's here to stay.

We going back to the Gold Coast. >> [music] >> Yeah.