

What's For Dinner?

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FIT TO EAT

Meat-eaters can 'flex' their veggie-lover side

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For The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

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I have a friend who says she is a vegetarian but one day I saw her eating a hamburger. When I expressed my surprise she said she eats ground beef on rare occasions. I called her a psychological vegetarian but she said she was a semi-vegetarian. Well, she was ahead of the curve because today's semi-vegetarian is described as a "flexitarian." This word was recognized by the American Dialect Society as the most useful word in 2003. Registered dietitian Dawn Jackson Blatner has written what could be the most useful book of 2008 with "The Flexitarian Diet" (McGraw Hill, \$24.95)

Readability

Blatner's style is infectious and she encourages the reader to start small and take a relaxed approach to eating the flexitarian way. She reminds us that we all are flexitarians—when we choose a vegetable plate for lunch or eat a bean burrito for dinner we are practicing a semi-vegetarian eating pattern. There are more than 100 recipes to get you started and all come with a "Flex Swap" to convert it from a vegetarian recipe to one that the meat-lovers in your family will like. Blatner also encourages readers to try different grains, like amaranth, buckwheat, millet, quinoa, and wheat berries, and

provides a handy cooking guide to take the guess work out of using these grains. The book will also help you master the use of tofu—which she likes to call “veggie white meat” — to take the fear out of using this soy product with the funny name.

Scientific Evidence

Vegetarians have long been known to be healthier than their meat-eating counterparts. They weigh less while enjoying a wide range of foods, they have reduced rates of heart disease, diabetes and some cancers, and they live about four years longer than the rest of us. This meal plan will also appeal to those who are concerned about the environment and want to eat a plant-centered diet. Blatner, who has worked as a clinical dietitian with patients in her home city of Chicago, takes an evidence-based approach to her meal plan by citing relevant research to support her points. She provides a stepwise plan for those who want to adopt this eating plan: beginning flexitarians can try eating meatless two days week and progress to an “expert” flexitarian by eating meatless five or more days a week.

Extras

The book provides grocery store lists and troubleshooting tips sprinkled throughout. The tips are organized around five themes: frequently asked questions about vegetarianism, time crunch tips, craving control tips, pointers for eating out and tips focusing on wellness, including activity.

Top Tip

Blatner suggests making a dinner deck of cards. Write down five to seven of your favorite dinners on index cards with the recipe name and a list of ingredients. Keep the cards in your purse or car and use it when grocery shopping to remember key ingredients.

This book is a good buy for those who want to explore vegetarianism but don’t know how to get started.

Fried Brown Rice with Asparagus & Almonds

1 serving

Hands on: 15 minutes

Total time: 25 minutes

2 tablespoons rice vinegar

1 teaspoon sesame oil

1 garlic clove, minced

1/2-inch piece of fresh ginger, grated

8 asparagus spears, cut diagonally into 1-inch pieces

3/4 cup cooked brown rice (microwavable or if time allows, simmer your own)

1/2 cup canned garbanzo beans, rinsed, drained and chopped

2 tablespoons slivered almonds, toasted

2 green onions, chopped

In a skillet, combine vinegar, oil, garlic, ginger and asparagus and sauté for 5 minutes. Add cooked rice and chopped beans and sauté for another 5-7 minutes. Top with almonds and green onions.

— From: "The Flexitarian Diet" by Dawn Jackson Blatner (McGraw Hill, \$24.95)

Per serving: 487 calories (percent calories from fat, 31), 18 grams protein, 71 grams carbohydrate, 14 grams fiber, 17 grams fat (2 grams saturated fat), 0 milligrams cholesterol, 74 milligrams of sodium

Nutritional Bonus Points: For every recipe there is a "Flex Swap," or how to use lean meat or fish in the recipe for those times when you want meat. For this recipe the Flex Swap is 1/2 cup garbanzo beans for 2 ounces cooked chicken breast or 9 medium cooked shrimp.

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