

Q&A: Dawn Jackson Blatner



by Charles Stuart Platkin

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Dawn Jackson Blatner RD, LDN, is a [Registered and Licensed Dietitian](#). Dawn passionately believes in using the power of food to prevent and manage illness and maintain optimal health. She helps people make *realistic* and *gradual* changes to their current eating habits and food choices. Dawn teaches "Flexitarian Nutrition", an eating style she developed, which is based on personal preferences and individual lifestyles.



Name: Dawn Jackson Blatner RD, LDN

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Diet Detective: Hey Dawn, thanks for the opportunity to interview you. My first question is really curiosity – I would love to know how and why you became a nutritionist?

Dawn: In college I was watching a television show when I heard this advice, "make a career of what you do in your spare time and you will enjoy your work every day and be successful doing it." In my spare time I would hang out at the college healthfood store reading labels and spent all my money buying products to make healthy recipes out of vegetarian cookbooks. I changed my major to nutrition and became a dietitian to turn my spare time passion into a paying career that I love. Food is like magic to me since it has the power to prevent and manage disease. I feel fortunate I can inspire and educate people on how to use the magic of food to live healthier and happier lives.

Diet Detective: You have a new book -- The Flexitarian Diet – can you explain the title? What it's about? And what makes it unique?

Dawn: Flexitarian is the combination of two words, Flexible + Vegetarian. It is a new way to eat that minimizes meat without excluding it all together. You get the health benefits of a vegetarian diet without having to follow the strict rules. The Flexitarian Diet is the first and only book written to teach readers how to be flexible and casual vegetarians.

Diet Detective: Where did you come up with this concept?

Dawn: I've been a vegetarian for over 15 years but ate meat on rare occasions. Every time I ate meat I felt like I was being a bad and lazy vegetarian. So I developed this style of eating for people who know that vegetarianism is one of the healthiest and smartest ways to eat but just don't want to sit at a BBQ in the corner with an empty bun.

The word flexitarian has been around since at least 2003 when it was selected by the American Dialect Society as the most useful word of the year. So I took the word and wrote the first and only guidebook available to teach people how to be a healthy flexitarian.

Diet Detective: What is a typical day of a Flexitarian Diet?

Dawn: The book contains a flexible 5-week meal plan. A typical day would have 3 meals and 2 snacks. Each day follows the 3, 4, 5 meal plan system: each breakfast contains 300 calories, each lunch 400 calories and each dinner is 500 calories. I recommend 2 snacks per day for 150 calories each. The diet is 1500 calories per day – the perfect amount for most people to lose weight without sacrificing satisfaction. Depending on your activity level, gender, height and weight you may need slightly more or less calories. If you prefer a 1200 calorie plan you can omit the snacks and for an 1800 calorie plan you can double the portion at breakfast.

You can mix-and-match any of the recipes to create a day that is perfect for your preferences and lifestyle. Here is a sample 1500 calorie Flexitarian day:

Breakfast: Green Apple & Sun Butter Toast

Lunch: Southwest Guacamole Burger

Dinner: Cilantro Peanut Stir Fry

Snacks: 1) Cracked Pepper & Salt Pita Chips and 2) Peach & Raspberry Crepe

Diet Detective: What's wrong with meat?

Dawn: I call it a neutral food. There is nothing wrong with it, it just isn't loaded with disease preventing plant compounds that you find in foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, nuts, and seeds.

Diet Detective: What makes it so difficult for people to lose weight and keep it off?

Dawn: Our environment. We live in an environment of excessive high-calorie, processed foods and we rely on modern technology which keeps us sedentary. It is possible to lose weight, but it takes extra effort to choose the right portions of healthy foods and build physical activity into our daily routine in the current environment.

Diet Detective: Where did you learn to cook?

Dawn: A lot of trial and error. I read cookbooks, visit recipe websites, subscribe to food magazines, watch cooking shows, and try new healthy

restaurant items to get inspiration. Then I take that inspiration into my kitchen and experiment. It can take many tries before I get to the perfect version of a dish. I try all my recipes out on my husband, family, friends, patients, and cooking class participants.

Diet Detective: What are a few of your favorite recipes from the book? Can you share?

Dawn:

Breakfast: Sunflower Raisin Oatmeal

1 cup water
1/2 cup rolled oats
1 Tablespoon sunflower seed butter
2 Tablespoons raisins

Bring water and oatmeal to boil. Simmer & stir for 5 minutes. Stir in sunflower seed butter. Top with raisins.

310 calories, 10g fat, 1g saturated fat, 0mg cholesterol, 11mg sodium, 48g carbohydrates, 5g fiber, 10g protein

Lunch: Avocado & Black Bean Wraps

3/4 cup canned black beans, rinsed, drained and smashed with fork
1/4 avocado, chopped
1/4 cup salsa
1/2 teaspoon cumin
1 lime, juiced
2 small (6") whole grain tortillas

Mix smashed beans, avocado, salsa, cumin and lime juice. Wrap in tortillas.

409 calories, 9g fat, 1g saturated fat, 0mg cholesterol, 437mg sodium, 70g carbohydrates, 19g fiber, 18g protein

Dinner: Curried Quinoa Salad

1/2 cup water
1/4 cup dry quinoa
1/2 teaspoon curry
1/2 cup shredded carrots
2 Tablespoons dried cranberries
3 green onions, chopped
1 cup canned garbanzo beans, rinsed and drained

Boil water, add quinoa and curry. Simmer covered for 15 minutes. Mix together carrots, cranberries, green onion and beans. Serve carrot mixture on top of quinoa.

510 calories, 7g fat, 1g saturated fat, 0mg cholesterol, 70mg sodium, 95g carbohydrates, 19g fiber, 22 g protein

Diet Detective: What do you consider the world's most perfect food?

Dawn: No one food has all of the nutrition you need to be healthy so this question is very difficult to answer but I will say, apples. They are low in calories, naturally sweet, a good source of water and fiber so they can keep us feeling full, and they have a great crunch.

They taste fantastic chopped in oatmeal for breakfast, they are very portable for easy snacking-on-the-go, they taste great chopped in a salad with walnuts for lunch or dinner, and can be transformed into satisfying desserts such as baked apples and apple crisps. Not to mention how fabulous they taste with peanut butter!

Diet Detective: What's your favorite healthy ingredient?

Dawn: I would have to pick...beans. They are just so darn versatile from dips, sauces, and spreads to stir-fries, pasta, and burritos. I even can make delicious brownies with black beans!

Diet Detective: What's in your refrigerator and pantry right now?

Dawn: I always keep lots of fresh produce at eye level in my fridge so right now I have eggplant, avocado, zucchini, blueberries, baby spinach, mixed greens, apples, carrots, cucumber, bell peppers, mushrooms, and lemons/limes. I also have flaxseed oil, unsweetened vanilla almond milk, natural peanut, sunflower seed butter, tofu, fresh basil, ginger, and chives.

In my freezer I love to have frozen unsweetened fruits and veggies since they are already cut, cleaned, and ready to be thrown into a snack or meal. I have several brands/flavors of veggie burgers and I store my nuts in the freezer. I also keep frozen meals for when I don't feel like cooking they make a great quick meal when paired with extra fruits/veggies.

My pantry has plenty of canned beans, whole grain pasta, oatmeal, potatoes, quinoa, low-sodium soups, herbs/spices, whole grain brown rice, whole grain tortillas/pitas, popcorn, and healthy oils such as walnut oil, olive oil, and sesame oil.

Diet Detective: Which historical figure can you relate to most?

Dawn: Lucille Ball. She was an entrepreneur, quirky, and passionate for her field.

Diet Detective: What's your favorite "junk food?"

Dawn: Pizza and Red Velvet Cupcakes.

Diet Detective: If you weren't a nutritionist what would you be?

Dawn: There is no other career for me. I was born to be a dietitian. I do think it would be fun to own a restaurant featuring (of course) delicious healthy food!

Diet Detective: What was your worst summer job?

Dawn: College cafeteria dishroom - sorting silverware. That didn't last long! My favorite summer job was managing a bagel shop in college - I met my three best friends at that job.

Diet Detective: What's your motto?

Dawn: Be good to the body you have and it will be good to you.

Diet Detective: As a child you wanted to be:

Dawn: A teacher...and in fact that's what I've become...a teacher with a focus on food & nutrition.

Thank you!!!!

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