



Is Flexitarianism the Weight-Loss Tool for You?

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I've read all about the bonuses of [being a vegetarian](#). In addition to the obvious [benefits for the animals](#) involved, eating less meat is associated with lower rates of [cancer](#), [heart disease](#), [obesity](#), and other diseases and conditions. But not everyone can give up all flesh all the time. For me, it's sushi—can't live without it. My boyfriend, though a longtime fan of *Charlotte's Web* star Wilbur the pig, still says bacon is his *viande noire*. As I noted earlier this year, however, [being a flexitarian](#) is an option for those of us who would like to [move closer to a vegetarian diet](#) without adhering to it absolutely. The question is how to do it, particularly if you're new to a plant-based diet.

Dawn Jackson Blatner, a Chicago-based nutritionist, has written an entire book, *The Flexitarian Diet*, on the subject. Her goal: to help assuage the fear that eating less meat means being consigned to alternating meals of tofu and raw sprouts with veggie burgers from the freezer section. Instead, she encourages us to think about the sources of plant protein that are already in the cupboard and fridge—black beans, garbanzo beans, lentils, nuts, and eggs, to name a few. Those—as well as, yes, soy products like tofu and tempeh—should take up about a quarter of your plate in a typical meal. Fruits and veggies should be about half, and whole grains should make up the other quarter. None of that is terribly exotic. "Most people have flexitarian tendencies already," says Blatner.

To begin with, she suggests planning two meatless days a week, then progressing to five or more days if you're comfortable with the idea. Most of the recipes she includes in the book are built around ingredients handily bought at the supermarket. (For the few exceptions—mostly specialty foods like agave nectar and quinoa—one can tap Amazon.com, she says.) And many recipes include easy substitutions for the days you're hankering for meat: A recipe for cilantro-peanut stir-fry, for example, can include tofu, chicken breast, or lean steak strips. An orzo stir-fry can utilize fish or black beans.

Blatner's book promotes flexitarianism as a way to control weight. If you follow her meal plan, you're likely to lose some poundage, given that the menus add up to about 1,500 calories a day. Any meal plan that jacks up the veggies to 50 percent of your daily intake and controls calories is likely to be good for your waistline; [as I wrote last week](#), eating more foods that are less energy-dense (those fruits and veggies) and fewer that are energy-rich is associated with weight loss.

Flexitarianism also sounds a lot like the [ancient eating patterns](#), including the Mediterranean diet, that I wrote about in the spring: All emphasize whole grains, plenty of fruits and vegetables, "good" fats like those in nuts and olive oil, and protein from plants and fish rather than terrestrial animals. My own diet philosophy is less about calorie-counting than about portion control and following those general healthy eating principles 90 percent of the time (plus plenty of exercise, which Blatner also writes about). But if you need a little more meal-by-meal guidance, *The Flexitarian Diet* is a great resource.

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