

My story of how and why I arrived at the food choices that I am currently eating

By David Savage

Like most Americans, I grew up eating the Standard American Diet (S.A.D.), which included a lot of meat, dairy, eggs, and fish.

I don't know how this is possible or whether it's true, but my memory is that when I was in grade school I drank two gallons of milk a day. I especially liked the taste of cows' liver, chopped chickens' liver, and meatloaf. I ate a lot of sweets, as a result of which I got lots of cavities in my teeth.

I have read that a person's behavioral changes frequently occur because that's what their peers are doing and they are influenced by that. That's certainly true in my case. In 1968 some of the people I knew were not eating meat. I didn't then, and still don't, know their reasons for that, but it influenced me and I stopped eating land animals. I remember eating "Ankh Burgers," a burger made only from seven grains. I've searched for it online, but have not found any references to it. An ankh is the ancient Egyptian symbol for the key of life.

In 1972 I met a brother and sister who were vegetarians. They looked so healthy! That started my interest in researching the effects of the foods I eat on my health.

Around that time I read the book *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silent_Spring), in which she described the adverse effects of the use of synthetic pesticides on human health, wildlife, and the environment. The title of the book describes one possible effect that the widespread use of synthetic pesticides could result in the extinction of birds so that in spring we would no longer hear their chirping and would instead have a "silent spring."

As a result of reading that book I started buying organic foods at Home Rule Natural Foods on Columbia Rd. in the Adams-Morgan neighborhood near where I was living in Washington, D.C. Here's a link to an article from the Washington Post about that store: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1984/02/02/who-rules/c37a6e55-581e-44a4-b100-93f08f294b0f/>

Sometime in the 1990s I read about the adverse health effects of eating dairy and as a result I stopped eating dairy.

I don't know or remember when or why I stopped eating eggs and foods with eggs in them.

At the time I somewhat jokingly called myself a "fishetarian" because I didn't know the word "pescetarian."

I enjoyed the taste of various fishes. I liked flounder and tuna salad. I particularly liked to eat sardines in a tin and crab cakes. I thought sardines in particular were a "brain food" and we needed to eat fish to be healthy.

My story of how and why I arrived at the food choices that I am currently eating

By David Savage

In February, 2001 I was eating a sardine and suddenly realized that the fish was once a living being, an individual who wanted to live. For that reason I stopped eating sardines and all aquatic beings.

So it took me 28 years from when I met those two vegetarians until I started eating only plants in February, 2001.

From then on for the next 12 years until 2013 I exclusively ate plants, but mostly processed plant foods. In particular I ate a lot of frozen all-plant products from the brand Amy's including dinners, pizzas, vegetable pot pie, and breakfast burritos.

Because I had liked the taste of crab cakes I started eating Sophie's Kitchen brand "crab cakes" made from plants. From that I learned that it was the seasonings that made the tastes I liked, not the crabs.

I tried eating various processed burgers made from plants, Tofutti brand "Better than sour cream," various ice creams made from plants, "cheeses" made from plants like Follow Your Heart brand, soy milks, and other processed foods made from plants. I ate the mayonnaises brands Nayonaise and later Vegenaise made from plants with no eggs or dairy.

In 2012 I read about the Mediterranean diet which included the supposed health benefits of eating olive oil. I had only eaten olive oil and other processed vegetable oils in salad dressings and other processed foods.

I started buying large bottles of extra virgin olive oil and pouring it over lots of foods that I ate, just like I did with ketchup.

After a year of eating so much olive oil I had gained ten lbs. and weighed 185 lbs. My waist size had grown to 42 inches, and my cholesterol, triglycerides, and blood pressure were "elevated," and I was diagnosed as "pre-diabetic.

I had been reading articles for two years that said people with a waist size larger than 40 inches are more likely to get Alzheimer's, and I was very concerned about that, but didn't know what to do about it.

In mid-2013 at a dinner and book club discussion of the Veg Society of DC at the Sunflower vegetarian restaurant at Seven Corners. Maybe six years ago the restaurant changed ownership and the menu was changed to include standard American fare with meats, fishes, dairy, and eggs.

At the dinner I mentioned learning about the supposed benefits of eating olive oil. Someone across the table from me said eating processed vegetable oils was unhealthy. He suggested I read an article by Dr. Joel Fuhrman, M.D. about that. That night I read the article and immediately threw out the large bottle of extra virgin olive oil that I had

My story of how and why I arrived at the food choices that I am currently eating

By David Savage

bought a few days prior and was largely not used. The next morning I threw out my jar of Vegemise.

Even before 2001 I was also taking nutritional supplements because I thought I need to take them to be healthy. Until 2013 I was taking more supplements all the time. Every time I read an article about the supposed benefits of a supplement I bought it. I was spending a lot of money every month on supplements and taking lots of them.

I had been looking for a vegan doctor for four years and couldn't find one. Around the same time someone who I didn't know posted a comment on Facebook that they had been obese and diabetic and their vegan doctor helped them lose weight and reverse their diabetes. I excitedly asked who the doctor was and she told me, and that's how I found my current M.D.

He advised me (1) to stop eating processed foods and eat whole plant foods, and (2) to stop taking all those nutritional supplements and take only Vitamin B-12 and Vitamin D. His reasons were that processed foods contain a lot of sugar, oil, and salt, and that nutritional supplements are called "supplements" because I should be getting my nutrition from foods, and not trying to get it primarily from supplements.

Stopping eating all those processed foods was difficult because I didn't really know how to cook. And I, or rather my taste buds, felt deprived of the tastes that I previously craved and enjoyed. Stopping taking all those supplements was a much more difficult behavior change, because I strongly believed that I needed to take them to be healthy.

Despite the difficulty due to my belief that I needed them to be healthy, I stopped taking all those supplements except for Vitamin B-12, and Vitamin D-3 derived from plants (not from fish oil).

Over the next year and a half my cholesterol, triglycerides, and blood pressure came down to normal and I lost 40 lbs., down to 145. The last thing to change was my waist size, which went from 42 inches to 36.

Around 2006 I started reading books and watching movies and videos about nutrition, eating plants, and veganism. Even after following the advice my new doctor starting in 2013 I still had many doubts and questions about whether I was getting adequate nutrition. For example, was I getting enough protein, calcium, iron, zinc, lycopene, Omega-3s? Were soy products good or bad? What about coconut?

It took some years, but after talking with my doctor, reading many books, and watching movies and many videos by medical professionals, eventually I became convinced that it is possible to not only get adequate nutrition from eating only plants, but indeed, as my experience proved to me, to greatly improve my health.

My story of how and why I arrived at the food choices that I am currently eating **By David Savage**

I used to eat a lot of frozen foods that I heated in the microwave because I didn't know how to cook. Over time I started eating fewer frozen and processed foods and more whole plants. I still eat frozen foods—and foods in cans and jars, but now I also eat many more fresh foods, and the variety of foods I now eat is much greater than a decade ago.

In the past when I read food labels it was only to see whether they contained any “animal products” and whether they were organic. Now I read food labels to see whether the product is vegan, organic, contains any processed vegetable oil, and how much sugar, sodium, protein, fat, and fiber it contains. I only buy foods that are vegan, organic, contain no processed vegetable oil, are low in sodium, sugar, and fat, and high in fiber.

Besides learning about the effects of my food choices on my own health, I also started learning about the many adverse effects of animal agriculture on the animals, particularly in Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs), commonly known as “factory farms,” which are not farms at all but rather factories in which other species are treated not as the living sentient individuals that they are, each with their own personality, preferences, likes and dislikes, parents, children, friends, and a range of emotions, who have a self-interest in living a free and happy life, but rather as profit-making machines that are enslaved, mutilated, tortured, and killed well before their natural lifespan.

The meat, dairy, egg, and fishing industries, particularly in CAFOs and slaughterhouses, are among the most dangerous occupations, in which employees incur injuries, mutilations, death, and suffer mental, emotional, psychological, and spiritual abuse, which they then frequently take out on their spouses and children. These employees are mainly immigrants, people of color, and low income.

<https://www.google.com/search?q=slaughter+house+employee+demographics>

The people who live in communities near CAFOs, who are mainly people of color, experience many adverse health effects and diseases from the large lagoons of animal urine and feces surrounding the CAFO buildings due to “pollution damage to the air, land and water. Over 168 gases are emitted from CAFO waste, including hazardous chemicals such as ammonia, hydrogen sulfide, and methane.”

<https://www.google.com/search?q=demographics+of+people+living+near+CAFOs>

The devastating effects of animal agriculture on the environment as well as human health through land, water, and air pollution are well documented in articles, books, movies, videos, and other media.

Rainforests and other forests are destroyed, along with the extinction of animal and plant species and the displacement of indigenous peoples who live there, to grow food--mainly soy and corn--that is fed to animals instead of humans. The animals are mostly exported to wealthier countries, resulting in food inequality and scarcity in the countries

My story of how and why I arrived at the food choices that I am currently eating **By David Savage**

that host animal agriculture. Animal agriculture is resource intensive and unsustainable in any form, and threatens the world food supply, while the human population is increasing.

“Livestock make up 62% of the world's mammal biomass; humans account for 34%; and wild mammals are just 4%.”

(<https://www.google.com/search?q=number+of+humans+vs+farm+animals>)

Forests are decimated and converted to pasture land for grazing animals that are eaten by humans. The emissions of carbon dioxide, methane, and other “greenhouse gases” from animal agriculture are the largest source of the rapid and accelerating dramatic increases in global warming and climate change that we are currently experiencing.

The use of natural resources for animal agriculture results in scarcity of food, land, and water for humans. In sum, animal agriculture, which is totally unnecessary for human health and has only adverse effects on human health, threatens the survival of the human species.

Movies about the effects of animal agriculture on the environment:

Cowspiracy: The Sustainability Secret

<https://www.cowspiracy.com/>

Eating Our Way to Extinction

<https://www.eating2extinction.com/>

Seaspiracy

<https://www.seaspiracy.org/>

Breaking Boundaries: The Science of Our Planet

<https://www.netflix.com/title/81336476>

In 2006 or 2007 when I started learning about all the other aspects of veganism besides just food, I learned the original definition of the word “vegan” coined by Donald Watson in the U.K. in 1944 for the Vegan Society:

“Veganism is a philosophy and way of living which seeks to exclude—as far as is possible and practicable—all forms of exploitation of, and cruelty to, animals for food, clothing or any other purpose; and by extension, promotes the development and use of animal-free alternatives for the benefit of animals, humans and the environment. In dietary terms it denotes the practice of dispensing with all products derived wholly or partly from animals.”

<https://www.vegansociety.com/go-vegan/definition-veganism>

My story of how and why I arrived at the food choices that I am currently eating **By David Savage**

I was confronted at a swing dance by another dancer who said “I bet your belt and shoes are leather.” They were. I replaced them with several vegan belts and vegan dance shoes and street shoes.

There are many materials for clothes and other consumer products that are cruelty-free replacements for “leather,” which is the skin of cows or pigs or goats, who are commonly skinned alive. Vegan “leather” is made from cork, mushroom, apples, cactus, grapes, hemp, cotton, pineapple, paper, coconut, and other plants.

I had been reading and hearing about the benefits of intermittent fasting, also called time-limited eating and time-restricted eating, in which you eat only during an eight hour period each day.

In January, 2023 I heard Dr. Michael Klaper, who I greatly respect and trust, say that he doesn’t eat after 7:00 p.m. I started doing that. Before that I would eat until 11:00 p.m. and then go to bed. I didn’t want to go to bed hungry. The first night I stopped eating at 7:00 and went to bed at 11:00, I went to bed hungry. I lost two lbs. overnight.

I was resolved to continue not eating after 7:00 or 7:30 p.m. After the first night it wasn’t a problem. Now I’m usually not hungry after that unless I’ve been playing cornet or swing dancing for two or three hours. But if I’m hungry I just ignore it and the feeling goes away.

After about a month of not eating after 7:00 p.m. I had lost a total of 8 or 10 lbs. My weight is very stable now at 138 lbs. My mind feels clearer and more focused, and I have more physical energy during the day. Lately sometimes I’m not even hungry after 6:00 or 6:30 p.m. I no longer have food cravings and my life is not ruled by food or my taste buds.

I continue to learn about nutrition and modify what I eat based on what I learn. I’m slowly eating more fresh vegetables and fruits instead of frozen ones, although I continue to eat those also. In general I aim to eat organic whole plant foods with no added sugar, oil, or salt.

My main source of information about what specific foods to eat and for getting answers when I have questions about specific foods or health is Dr. Michael Greger, M.D.’s website <https://nutritionfacts.org/>. His staff reviews about 30,000 articles about nutrition each year from medical journals and selects about 3,000 of them for Dr. Greger to read and summarize in the free short daily videos on the website.

I have also learned and made changes to what I eat from reading two of Dr. Greger’s books (<https://nutritionfacts.org/books/>), *How Not to Die*, which means how not to die prematurely from the top 15 diseases caused by eating land and water animals, dairy, and eggs, and *How Not to Age*. *How Not to Die* includes over 2,400 references to nutrition studies; *How Not to Age* is based on 8,360 references. You can search those

My story of how and why I arrived at the food choices that I am currently eating
By David Savage

references and read the studies online at <https://nutritionfacts.org/book/how-not-to-age/citations/>.

I continue to learn about the ethical and nutrition aspects of veganism by reading books (63 so far since 2006), watching videos of talks, watching movies, and attending live presentations.

As I have learned, the effects and consequences of the foods I choose to eat are much broader than just affecting my own health.

David Savage, 2/2/2024