

Vegan as a teen

If your folks will not buy animal free substitutes, try to substitute with what you have. And since parents might interpret your food choices as an indictment on them, do not use language unfamiliar to them like “vegan” or “herbivore” or even “dairy free”. Say “mom can I have French bread for my sandwiches” instead of “can I have some vegan bread”. Read labels, many of which are available by suppliers online, and choose plant based items for the shopping list over those you used to eat-like dairy free dry cereal over milk containing cereal. Go to the store and help with shopping so you can choose what you prefer but do the research in advance so your parents are not waiting on you to read labels. Then help carry in groceries and put them away so they welcome your help at shopping and maybe will allow you to get a thing of tofu once and a while.

Breakfast

Eat dairy free cereal for breakfast without milk (i.e. dry) or oatmeal. I hated oatmeal because of its texture so as an adult I eat it so thick if I put a spoon in it the spoon sticks straight up. Try different seasonings-cinnamon, nutmeg, pumpkin pie spice, vanilla or even some pancake syrup. Always ask for lots of fresh or frozen fruit, and strawberries and blueberries can be healthy oatmeal additions or sides for dry cereal.

If you have toast use jelly instead of butter. Another option is fruit with vegan yogurt. Bisquick is vegan so make the family pancakes, waffles or biscuits with dairy free milk and applesauce instead of eggs. In fact with pancakes, ½ teaspoon baking powder per cup of Bisquick and water instead of milk will make fluffy pancakes (add 3 tablespoons of water for each egg eliminated or 3 tablespoons of applesauce so the batter is the right consistency).

MANY breads happen to be vegan like French bread, sourdough and plain white bread. Look for honey or dairy in “buttermilk” or “honey wheat” breads to avoid but most others do not contain animal products. Almost all hamburger and hot dog buns happen to be vegan, too.

Margarine tubs like Country Crock original and Blue Bonnet and several Smart Balance as well as their store generics do not contain dairy. So maybe your parents will just change their brand or agree to buying you margarine if they use butter, but clearly there would not be an increased cost for using a generic margarine!

Choose different snacks. Pick fruit over cheese crackers. Some crispy granola bars happen to be vegan, all soft bars are NOT. Some of the more expensive brands like Lara and Luna have MANY vegan options. Pretzels and popcorn might be good options where fruit is not available.

Bring leftovers to school for lunch or make mock “tuna” salad or plant based meat or veggie burgers on French or sourdough bread or bean burritos for lunch. PB&Js or plant based deli slice sandwiches are other options.

Have a “go to” canned vegetable. Yes, frozen is better for you but parents may resist you taking up a bunch of freezer room. A can of green beans before dinner helps fill you up and is full of fiber and vitamins. Always chose fruit and vegetables when you can over bread or processed food.

For dinner find a plant based meal that everyone enjoys and cook for the family at least once a week. This way your parents see what you are eating is healthy and you can positively influence their eating. If they have a benefit from your change in diet then they might be more supportive.

Ways to gain more information on veganism are with cookbooks or blogs to learn about recipes and how to cook. Documentaries are both informational and inspirational! There are books on the positive benefits of a

vegan diet on human health and sites like nutritionfacts.org and pcrm.org that are science based and cite their sources.

Living plant based means taking on additional responsibility earlier in your life over your peers-doing research on what you are eating, helping to shop, making your own meals. This will make you a stronger person, a better employee and a healthier employee.