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## ACTION SHEET: TALKING TO YOUR FRIENDS

Transitioning to WFPB

When first transitioning to a whole food, plant-based (WFPB) diet, you may find yourself needing to explain these new eating habits to friends. Talking to friends about changes in diet and lifestyle may seem challenging, especially when you are passionate about sharing the many benefits or when you see that your friends are struggling with food-borne illness. When discussing WFPB with friends, consider these suggestions and tips.

### **Recognize that when your friends find out you have transitioned to eating whole food, plant-based (WFPB) it may trigger many emotions:**

- Curiosity: They may be excited to hear about your discoveries and eager to learn more.
- Lack/Failure: They may feel they are being judged and found to be lacking. This could be connected to feeling like they lack the willpower/knowledge/commitment to embark on similar steps to take care of themselves.
- Separation: A feeling that you are strange (vegans have historically been associated with a negative image as the weird person in the corner).
- Skepticism: They may question the health benefits and think you are not eating the right foods. This may be manifested by their questioning: e.g., where do you get your protein, calcium, iron, etc. Refer to PPC's FAQ section, and *Info Sheet: Where Do You Get Your Protein?* for common myths and answers to debunk them.
- Defensive: Food is associated with identity for many people and they may feel they are under attack when hearing about alternative choices about what to eat.
- Resistance: They may be resistant to hearing about any change due to many factors. For example, myths about a plant-based diet being too expensive, restrictive, impractical, etc.

### **Here are some things worth keeping in mind:**

- Food choices are very personal and influenced by cultural and traditional beliefs.
- Many people have years of self-hate connected to eating - particularly women.
- Some people may not have a good support system and may fear being judged by their families and friends if and when they decide to make a change.
- People may claim that they are perfectly healthy and have no need to change their diet.

### **Timing:**

- It is probably not the best time to discuss the negative health impacts of the standard American diet (aka SAD) when your companions are eating meat.



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- Remember that everyone must take their own path, their own journey, and change at their own pace. In order to make a lasting change, it must be something they choose to do.
- Just because someone isn't interested or is vehemently opposed to it when they first learn, people change. They may not be at a place in their lives where they can actually hear and consider what you are saying at first.
- Recognize, respect and embrace the importance of meeting people wherever they are on their journey.

## Factors to Consider:

- They don't understand that their taste buds will change. That they aren't tasting the food but instead are tasting the salt, sugar and fat.
- They don't understand the science.
- They may have some understanding of the science, but other factors are discouraging them from change.
- They may not have had much success making changes to their eating habits in the past.
- They may have heard and believe the myths about plant-based eating.
- They may be resistant to change generally (not just about food) and are not open to discussion.

## Strategies for Different Reactions:

- Many advise: wait patiently and be a role model. When people see the changes in you they will want to make similar changes.
- Avoid fat shaming. Instead, approach this as something where we are all victims of the multi-billion dollar marketing efforts of the meat, fish, poultry, and egg industries and also Big Pharma.
- Some people may use transition foods as a tool to help them get over the hump, such as vegan cheeses, vegan meats and non-dairy ice cream, most of which are highly processed and unhealthy. Remind them of the science, that these items are treats and may be unhealthy, while expressing understanding that they can be helpful in making the transition.
- If you live with or near the person who is interested in changing, consider offering to prepare some or all of their meals for them (if your time allows). Make extra food when cooking and freeze for later delivery.
- Invite them to join a Pod: <http://plantpurecommunities.org/find-a-pod/>
- Position your change and the possibility of your friend's change as trend setting. Highlight the growing number of young people and the millions of people waking up to the science. People know that something is wrong with our current food system.
- Recognize that many people are unfamiliar with the wide range of plant-based foods - they may never have heard of them or eaten them. They may believe there's nothing to eat except bird food, iceberg lettuce, and rubbery canned string beans.



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- Arm yourself with some interesting and relevant facts. Refer to the *Info Sheet: Interesting and Relevant Facts* for information about current trends and fun facts about plant-based diets.
- You may need different strategies for the person who teases, or the person who attacks.

## Books and other resources on this subject:

- *Living Among Meat Eaters* - In this book, Carol J. Adams offers real-life advice that vegetarians can use to defuse any situation in which their dietary choices may be under attack. She suggests viewing meat eaters as blocked vegetarians. Always insightful, this practical guide is full of self-tests, strategies, meditations on vegetarianism, and tips for dining out and entertaining at home when meat eaters are on the invite list.
- Colleen Patrick-Goudreau's *Food for Thought* podcast and her book *The 30-Day Vegan Challenge* offer practical strategies for communicating compassionately and authentically. Refer to this playlist for some of the podcasts focused on communication strategies: <https://soundcloud.com/colleen-patrick-goudreau/sets/communication-strategies-and>
- *Beyond Belief* - A guide to improving relationships and communication for vegans, vegetarians, and meat eaters. This book, published in late 2017, was written by Melanie Joy, PhD.
- *Toward Rational, Authentic Food Choices* - A TED Talk by Melanie Joy on the topic of Carnism - why we believe it is okay to eat some animals and not others: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0VrZPBskpg>

\*The issues listed above are experienced by most people who have made dietary changes and discussed these changes with friends. PPC plans to create a series of Action Sheets with this focus - talking WFPB to your (parents, children, doctor, etc.) - and we welcome your stories and suggestions.

*We welcome your suggestions and ideas! Please send them to [info@plantpurecommunities.org](mailto:info@plantpurecommunities.org). This material may not be used out of context. Please refer to PPC's terms and conditions for more information. Updated November 2017*