

A
Deeper
Look
by Delisa Renideo

Some Unexpected Benefits of Changing Our Diets

Anytime someone switches from the Standard American Diet to a healthy, plant-based diet, certain benefits can be expected: lowered cholesterol and blood pressure, weight loss, (if needed), more energy, and fewer colds and flu, just to name a few. These are terrific benefits to be sure, and I, like many others, celebrate these health benefits.

But I've been thinking about some of the other, more unexpected, benefits I've experienced, and other people have mentioned as well. Maybe you've experienced some of these, yourself.

I feel so much more empowered than I did years ago. I know that I'm taking the best possible steps to ensure health, so I don't live in fear, wondering when my number is going to come up. Good health and poor health are not the result of random chance. Knowing that my choices are the largest determinant in my health feels very empowering.

A slightly more subtle benefit is a tremendous sense of trust in my body. I know my body was designed with incredible, built-in mechanisms to assure my health, if only I give it the environment it needs for these mechanisms to work well. Our immune system is an amazing work of art. What we call "symptoms" are actually our bodies fighting off unfriendly invaders and healing ourselves. For example, coughing is a way for our body to remove something it wants to get rid of.



Rather than taking cough medicine, we might better celebrate that our body is functioning to protect and heal us.

Taking this a step further takes us into the power of our minds to heal.

We've all heard about the placebo effect: When we expect something to help us, it often does. Science has shown that the expectation that a drug will help us is often more powerful than the action of the drug itself! (Surprising that we haven't taken that information and looked for more ways to leverage the power of our minds.) Anyway, after learning to have this trust in my own body, and feeling empowered by the knowledge that I'm giving my body the best environment for it to do its amazing work, this leads me to have a high expectation that my body can and will heal itself. That belief, in and of itself, greatly increases the likelihood that my body will, indeed, heal itself! So basically, we're adding the power of the placebo effect to the already powerful benefits of our healthy diet and lifestyle.

Research has shown us for some time that stress is a risk factor for many diseases, in addition

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to simply causing us to feel. . . well . . . stressed! I think one of the biggest stressors we can ever have is living out of alignment with our own values and beliefs. You know how you go over and over something in your mind when you think you've done something you wish you hadn't? Maybe you've said something in haste that hurt someone's feelings. Or

you borrowed something from someone, and while using it, you accidentally broke it. Or maybe in your job, you've felt you had to keep your mouth shut about something you saw going on that seemed wrong to you. We've all experienced some form of this type of thing in our lives. And in my mind, this leads to a great deal of stress. To protect ourselves from this stress, we often create a rationalization to justify what we did.

So where I'm going with this is -- after switching to a plant-based diet, most of us find that we feel happier about not causing other creatures to suffer or die for us. Humans are not intrinsically cruel, so we don't like to cause other people or animals to suffer. Since the Standard American Diet includes a lot of animal products, there is suffering built-in to this sort of diet. Even though most of this suffering happens well beyond our own perceptions,

it is still real, and at some level we know it, although we rarely think about it or allow ourselves to even admit it. But after shifting to a plant-based diet, we can drop our defenses and allow ourselves to feel our kinship with the other animals, and acknowledge that we don't want them to suffer for us. By living in alignment with our true values, we feel much more peaceful inside and less stressed.

I'm sure there are other unexpected benefits of shifting to a plant-based diet, but even contemplating those I've mentioned here, along with the expected benefits, I feel like one of the most blessed people I know. And by the way, even feeling gratitude causes our stress to go down, our immune system to get stronger, and our minds to think more clearly, so we find ourselves on a continuing upward spiral of blessing. How could it get any better than that!

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