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Cover Page Footnote

Abrams, H. L., & Aramark (February 17, 2004). What can the diet of gorillas tell us about a healthy diet for humans?. The Weston A. Price Foundation. <https://www.westonaprice.org/health-topics/vegetarianism-and-plant-foods/what-can-the-diet-of-gorillas-tell-us-about-a-healthy-diet-for-humans/#gsc.tab=0>

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Where Do Gorillas Get Their Protein? Plant-Based Diet for a Healthier Lifestyle

Where do gorillas get their protein? This is a question that got former gym mates of mine, Sharon and her spouse, Scott, to think about their diet. Gorillas mainly consume plant species, but some subspecies consume seeds, termites, caterpillars, ants, snails, and grubs. (SeaWorld.org) Sharon is no stranger to plant-based foods. Her grandfather, Fred, owned a restaurant in Maine and was a chef. Sharon was only eleven when her father died, so she spent a lot of time in the restaurant with her grandfather. Initially, she filled the salt and pepper shakers, bussed tables, washed dishes, and eventually became a waitress. Sharon learned the business aspect of running a restaurant while working with her grandfather. As Fred aged, he developed Parkinson's disease and died of heart disease at age 75 – the leading cause of death in both men and women. Sharon's mother has a history of diabetes, hypertension, and obesity; understandably, this raised Sharon's concerns of her own medical future.

Sharon studied journalism in college, but managed hotels after graduating, where she learned about restaurant operations. In 2013, Sharon opened a restaurant in Maine. The menu consisted of foods from Mexico to the Mayan region, offering a large plant-based selection due to the chef being vegan; patrons enjoyed the variety. Sharon sold the business in 2020. Having an interest in healthy cooking, "The Game Changers" documentary on Netflix peaked Sharon's interest on what changes she and Scott could make to be healthy as well as strong. The documentary discussed plant-based eating, protein, and strength, especially of athletes. Gorillas stick to a mainly vegetarian diet, feeding on stems, bamboo shoots, and fruits. Western lowland gorillas, however, also have an appetite for termites and ants, and break open termite nests to eat the larvae (World Wildlife Fund, n.d.). So what can the diet of gorillas tell us about what constitutes a healthy diet for humans? Little, if anything. Humans are omnivores and need animal protein as well as plant foods to maintain sound health. According to their book *Your Body is Your Best Doctor*, H. Leon Abrams Jr. and Dr. Melvin E. Page recommend to "eat a variety of fresh animal protein and fats, a wide variety of fresh vegetables, fruits and nuts and whole grain breads and cereals," to achieve optimal health (Abrams & Page, 2004). After watching "The Game Changers," Sharon and Scott were motivated to change their eating habits. They cleaned out their refrigerator and pantry, meal planned for a week, and headed to Whole Foods with grocery list in hand. This is where their plant-based journey began. It just so happened Sharon and Scott had lab work done five days (6/19/2023) before watching the documentary that inspired them to make changes.

Sharon commented, "There was nothing negative about the documentary, so many positives to a plant-based lifestyle!" Sharon had always enjoyed cooking but thought it would be fun to learn to cook differently. Although Sharon did not have any concerning lab work, she was concerned about her family history. When looking at Sharon and Scott, they both look fit; they generally were eating healthy and were going to the gym regularly.

Scott's decision to try plant based foods was based on his health. His cholesterol had been elevated since 2011, despite looking physically fit. His father has heart disease and elevated

prostate markers. Scott’s goal was to gain muscle and stay healthy. According to physicians Julia Clem and Brandon Barthel, lifestyle and diet, such as the Mediterranean and less often recommended plant-based diets, have had a significant improvement on chronic diseases such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and hypertension. (Clem & Barthel, 2021).

A physician friend of Sharon and Scott’s, Ihan, was skeptical about their lifestyle change, but remained interested in monitoring their progress through lab work and body measurements. He knew Sharon had a goal to compete in an upcoming body builder competition, which she had done in the past. He did not think either Sharon or Scott would be able to gain the muscle they wanted since they would be adding carbohydrates to their diet. Sharon’s trainer did not want to take her as a client as she felt Sharon would not be able to build the muscle to compete. Game Changers called attention to several high level athletes that performed well on a plant-based diet. Sharon and Scott were also successful.

After pursuing plant-based nutrition, Sharon’s lab results were not as dramatic as Scott’s, being normal to begin with, but still notable. Since this lifestyle change, she has lost a total of 16.9 inches of her body composition! After seven weeks, Sharon felt she was twenty five with so much energy. Sharon declared, “no more brain fog, depression, I am happy!”

After two weeks eating plant-based meals, Scott’s cholesterol decreased by 54 points (26%), LDL by 54 points (41%), and his risk ratio were within normal limits. Scott had lost a total of 12.2 inches of his body composition. Ihan was surprised with the results. Despite initially being unsure if he would give up meat and cheese, Scott was feeling stronger stating, “the foods Sharon has prepared have been good, interesting, and fun to try.”

Scott’s Lipid Tests:

Date	5/18/11	1/17/12	3/25/14	11/11/21	6/14/23	8/5/23	9/5/23	9/11/23
Total Cholesterol	209	172	201	219	207	153	160	150
LDL	144	116	129	141	132	78	86	76
HDL	65	56	52	60	60	61	38	58
Triglycerides	N/A	60	75	85	63	49	75	78
TC/HDL Risk Ratio	3.2	3.1	3.9	3.7	3.5	2.5	2.8	2.6
Non-HDL Cholesterol	144	116	149	159	147	92	102	92
TG/TDL-C	N/A	1.07	1.44	1.4	1.10	0.8	1.29	1.34

Sharon's Lipid Tests:

Date	6/14/23	8/5/23	9/5/23	9/11/23
Total Cholesterol	196	192	N/A	183
LDL	107	102	N/A	106
HDL	72	70	N/A	59
Triglycerides	83	108	N/A	90
TC/HDL Risk Ratio	2.7	2.7	N/A	3.1
Non-HDL Cholesterol	N/A	N/A	N/A	124
TG/TDL-C	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Sharon and Scott initially were going to try plant-based foods for three months, but they have been so happy with how they feel and their lab results, that they have made this plant-based journey a lifestyle change.

Sharon is so passionate about plant-based foods that she recently achieved certification as an Integrative Nutrition Health Coach. She has been using the *Blue Zones Kitchen Cookbook, 100 Recipes to Live to 100*, by Dan Buettner, published in December of 2019, to create delicious meals that she shares on her YouTube cooking channel. Sharon is also developing a website and blog to share what she has learned with others who would like to get started on this journey. Sharon's long term goal is to share her knowledge with the school systems so children can learn early on about healthy eating.

Here are two of Sharon's favorite recipes:

INSTANT POT VEGAN CHILI

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 medium yellow onion
- 4 Beyond meat beef patties
- 2 medium sweet potatoes *peeled and ½ inch diced*
- 2 medium red bell peppers diced
- 4 cloves garlic minced
- 1 tablespoon chili powder
- 1 teaspoon chipotle chili powder
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1- 15 ounce can fire roasted tomatoes
- 1- 15 ounce can tomato sauce
- 1 ½ cups vegetable broth
- 1- 15 ounce can of black beans, rinsed and drained
- 1- 15 ounce can red kidney beans, rinsed and drained

Instructions:

1. Add olive oil to Instant Pot. Turn to sauté and heat. Once hot, add Beyond meat beef patties, brown. Add onions and cook until soft, about 3 minutes. Add the sweet potatoes, bell pepper, garlic, chili powder, chipotle chili powder, cumin, and salt. Cook until garlic is fragrant, about 2 minutes.
2. Add half the vegetable broth, fire roasted tomatoes and tomato sauce, stir, scraping any bits from the bottom. Stir in remaining broth.
3. Cover and seal the Instant Pot. Set on chili/stew setting. Cook for 20 minutes.
4. Release pressure manually. Serve hot.

THE BEST VEGAN MAC AND CHEESE

- 1 ½ cups raw cashews
- 2 cups water
- 3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- ½ cup nutritional yeast
- ¼ teaspoon turmeric
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 ½ teaspoons salt
- 7 ounce bag shredded vegan cheddar cheese
- 12 ounces elbow pasta (I use red lentil pasta)

Optional breadcrumb topping:

- 1 ½ cups panko breadcrumbs
- 4 tablespoons vegan butter, melted
- ¼ teaspoon smoked paprika

Instructions:

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees and lightly grease 9 x 13 casserole dish.
2. Soak the cashews - Soften your cashews by covering them in boiling water for 5 minutes.
3. Cook pasta according to package directions.
4. Drain the soaked cashews and discard the water. Add the cashews, 2 cups water, lemon juice, nutritional yeast, turmeric, garlic powder, salt and bag of shredded cheese to a high powered blender. Blend until very smooth.
5. Make the breadcrumb topping by mixing the breadcrumbs, melted vegan butter and smoked paprika together until crumbly and moist.
6. Add the drained pasta to casserole dish and pour in the cheese sauce. Stir to coat. Sprinkle breadcrumb mixture on the pasta and bake uncovered for 15 minutes. Serve immediately and enjoy.

Scott and Sharon's biggest challenge has been eating out. "It's essential to be mindful of what's on the menu and how it's being prepared." Friends are hesitant to have them over for a meal since they are unsure of what to cook, but they have had friends over and are sharing their recipes and getting positive feedback. Is plant based cooking easy? Sharon states, "it can be if

you are open minded and willing to make some changes. You have to plan ahead, but that is good so you are not making poor food choices.”

By looking at Sharon and Scott, you would never think they were anything but healthy. It is good to see your doctor annually and have lab work done routinely. The American Heart Association suggests “eating a plant-based, meatless meal a few times a week to lower your cholesterol and improve your heart health. Meatless meals are better for your health, the planet and your budget. They’re a great way to help you increase your servings of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes and nuts,” (American Heart Association, n.d.). So, why not eat like the gorillas and see where it takes you? Go to www.heart.org for more information.

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