Announcer:

The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Emily Yeap:

People’s growing preference for sustainable, healthier foods is causing a huge growth in the plant-based food market.

In 2021, Bloomberg Intelligence produced a report called “[Plant-Based Foods Poised for Explosive Growth](https://www.bloomberg.com/professional/bi-research/?dyn=plant-based-food).” It valued the plant-based food market at $29.4 billion in 2020 and predicted that number will exceed $162 billion within the next decade. I’m Emily Yeap.

Joining me today to shed more light about plant-based diets is registered dietitian [Natalie Allen](https://search.missouristate.edu/people/natalieallen). She’s also clinical assistant professor in the [Department of Public Health and Sports Medicine](https://phsm.missouristate.edu/) at Missouri State University.

Natalie Allen:

Plant-based diet is a general term. There's subcategories of a plant-based diet, but generally, it’s eating a vegetarian way. Some people will choose to be completely plant-based, which would be more of a vegan pathway, where they don’t eat any animal products at all, including honey or dairy or anything like that. Other people may say, “I’m plant-based,”meaning they’re not going to eat meat products.

Emily Yeap:

This type of diet offers some key benefits.

Natalie Allen:

Done the right way, plant-based diets can be very healthy. There’s a couple of things that we know plant-based diets help with health wise. One of them is cardiovascular health. Heart disease is the number one killer in America, and so, doing things that can help your heart is beneficial. Eating a plant-based diet has been proven to be good for your heart.

It also can be useful in people who maybe have an inflammatory process going on in their body and they want to reduce inflammation. Foods that are on a plant-based diet typically, like tofu or soy beans, can help decrease inflammation. So, auto-immune disorders, people who have a history of high blood pressure, strokes, might benefit from the plant-based diet.

There’s also evidence to show that people who eat plant-based have a lower risk for certain types of cancers. And part of that is because foods that are plant-based have more fiber, and by eating more fiber, we know that you reduce your risk, for example, of colon cancer.

Emily Yeap:

What's important to keep in mind when following a plant-based diet?

Natalie Allen:

Most definitely with a plant-based diet, you have to plan and look at what you’re eating. This is not a ticket to eat all junk food or a lot of starchy carbohydrates that don’t have nutrition. I always tell people I talk to, “If you’re going to follow a plant-based diet, you need to like beans and legumes, you need to like vegetables and fruits.” Those are the base. When you are eliminating food groups, that’s okay, but how are you going to get that nutrition in the plant-based situation. So, for example, protein. We need protein in our diet. You can get protein in other ways, but you’re going to have to eat things like tempeh, or tofu, or edamame. Or maybe you want to be plant-based but you'll also eat dairy foods, and if you do that, that dairy is a good source of the protein. Also, on a plant-based diet, a lot of people for the protein eat nuts, and peanut butter, or nut butters. Those have a lot of nutrition and nutrients you might typically find in a meat source.

The other thing is vitamin B12. It's typically in animal products. So, when you’re eliminating animal products, you need to probably either supplement with B12 or look at ways to get it in the diet in other ways. Honestly though, it’s not super easy to get B12 without animal products. You can, but it’s a little bit of an effort.

The other thing if you’re going to be plant-based that we need to look at is in children that are growing. How are they going to get the nutrients they need for growth? So, iron, calcium, the B12 and the protein. If they’re going to eat products like eggs and milk in addition to the plant-based products, that’s probably a pretty well-balanced diet. If those are going to be eliminated as well, then we’re going to have to look at, potentially, supplementing, or just really being on top of your game. Looking, every meal, “Do I have a plant-based protein in here?” For example, if you’re eating a salad, add beans to it, add chickpeas. Make your snacks have protein in them. So, your snack might be a big spoonful of almond butter on an apple. Those are ways that you could add protein and make sure you’re still getting that for your plant-based needs.

Generally, plant-based diets are very nutritious. The bottom line is, look at: Are you getting color? Are you eating fruits and veggies? And are you getting protein sources?

Emily Yeap:

For those interested in trying out this diet, Allen has this advice.

Natalie Allen:

Start small. You might want to say, “Okay, on Mondays we’re going to have meatless Mondays in our house, and that night we are going to eat a dinner that is a vegetarian or plant-based dinner, and then experiment. Try quinoa, try roasting different beans different ways, try some of the meat alternative products that are out there on the market. Get your recipe repertoire built up. Then you can move on to doing it maybe every dinner. Then, once you feel comfortable, dive in all the way and go for it.

Emily Yeap:

That was registered dietitian Natalie Allen from Missouri State. I’m Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

Announcer:

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