

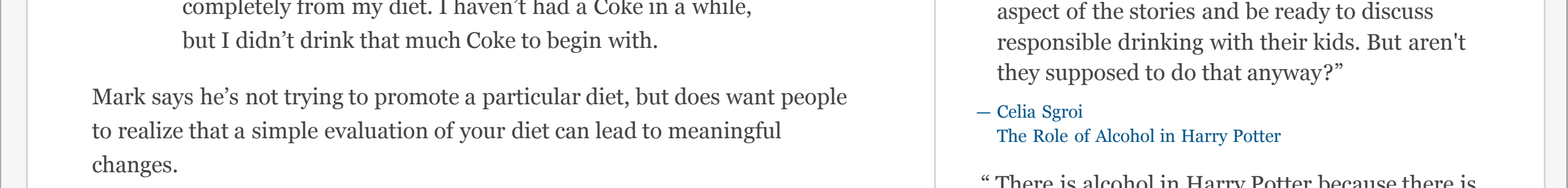
Health

Well

Tara Parker-Pope on Health | February 27, 2009, 10:26 AM

Vegan Before Dinnertime

By TARA PARKER-POPE



Mark Bittman. (Suzy Allman for The New York Times)

Many people struggle to improve their eating habits. The Times food writer Mark Bittman, appearing this week on WNYC radio, told listeners about an unusual strategy that has worked for him.

All day long, he eats a vegan diet. But after about 6 p.m., anything goes.

In his newest book, "Food Matters: A Guide to Conscious Eating With More Than 75 Recipes," Mark explains how increasing fruit and vegetable consumption and reducing dependence on processed foods will lead to better health not only for your body, but also for the planet. He explained his "vegan before dinnertime" strategy recently on the Leonard Lopate show:

My arrangement with myself is that from the time I wake up until dinner I eat only fruits, vegetables, whole grains and legumes. I don't even eat white bread during the day. And then starting at dinner, I do. I have one meal a day when I do pretty much what I want, which is normally quite indulgent.

Mark made the changes after developing high cholesterol, borderline high blood sugar, bad knees and sleep apnea, and realizing he was about 35 pounds overweight. A doctor suggested he adopt a vegan diet, which means no animal products. But for a food writer, Mark said, becoming a full-time vegan was both unrealistic and undesirable. Instead, he came up with a compromise:

I decided to do this sort of "vegan till 6" plan. I didn't have huge thoughts or plans about it. I just thought it was worth a try. Within three or four months, I lost 35 pounds, my blood sugar was normal, cholesterol levels were again normal ... and my sleep apnea indeed went away. All these good things happened, and it wasn't as if I was suffering so I stayed with it.... I have not eliminated anything completely from my diet. I haven't had a Coke in a while, but I didn't drink that much Coke to begin with.

Mark says he's not trying to promote a particular diet, but does want people to realize that a simple evaluation of your diet can lead to meaningful changes.

I want to make things as simple as possible. This is consistent with everything I've ever done. I'm the guy who says, "Don't sweat it." I'm trying to once again say, "Let's figure out how to do this cleanly and easily." I would just encourage everyone to examine the portion in their own diet between processed foods and animal food and junk food on the one hand and plants on the other. To the extent the first group is much heavier than the second group, I say make some adaptations to change that.

To hear more from Mark, click [here](#) to listen to the complete 35-minute interview. And be sure to check out his popular food blog, [Bitten](#).

E-mail This | Print | Share | Sign in to Recommend

What's On Your Plate, [bittman](#)

Related Posts

FROM WELL: What Can You Make With Canned Beans? | Mark Bittman: Running Low on Protein | Cooking on the Run With Mark Bittman | The 10-Ingredient Shopping Trip | Running in Your Daughter's Footsteps

Previous post: Comparing the Costs of Medical Treatments | Next post: Answers to Your Prostate Cancer Questions

From 1 to 25 of 129 Comments

1 2 3 ... 6 Next »

1. February 27, 2009 10:40 am | Certainly worth a try. | Link | - jack

2. February 27, 2009 10:41 am | I just finished this book. I am a HUGE fan of Mark Bittman, but I'm a little disappointed in his book. It's nothing that hasn't already been written by Marion Nestle or Michael Pollan. Perhaps this would be a good beginners guide, but I expected something a little more in depth. | Link | - Jesse

3. February 27, 2009 10:50 am | Groan...oh how I wish it could be so simple. I'm happy for Mark, but none of these kinds of approaches (I eat mostly fruits and veg's before dinner, anyway) ever made any difference for me. And when I have tried these simple eating habit makeovers, in the past, I sometimes gained weight. And that one "indulgent dinner." Not a good plan for me. Been there and done that. | Link | - Wesley

4. February 27, 2009 11:12 am | The irony in all this is that he wouldn't be so hungry and prone to overeating at dinner if he consumed some lean protein - say, a chicken breast - earlier in the day. | Link | - Matt

5. February 27, 2009 11:12 am | As a vegan, it is very encouraging to see a well-known gourmand and food writer vow for the clear and undeniable benefits of a plant-based diet. Not so fringe-y anymore! | Link | - YAS

6. February 27, 2009 11:23 am | Working out should not be thrown by the way side. Also "Vegans" are all about not hurting anything that has a face, not just eating plants. Maybe calling the diet a "plant based one" till six doesn't sound catchy, but if you look up Vegan in the dictionary, that means you don't wear leather, don't use animal products and so on. Not only because it healthy to eat vegetables but because it does not enslave animals. I am not personally of this belief, I just know a few Vegans and have heard this many times. This sounds like a great idea, but how about for athletes? I dont have 3 hours a day to cook, and i work out almost every day. My girlfriend was vegan for 9 months, and even though she cooked the vegan meals I needed more energy, at least 5000 cal/day. Any tips on healthy but high calorie diets? | Link | - Aleksandr

7. February 27, 2009 11:26 am | You could combine the Bittman plan of being vegan until 6 pm with the Al Sharpdort diet -- don't eat anything after 6pm. http://jeffreygoldberg.theatlantic.com/archives/2009/02/di | Link | - peep

8. February 27, 2009 11:26 am | My brothers and I, who were raised on a dairy farm, became Vegans 2 years ago. My brother and his wife lost weight (16 lbs) initially but I didn't. The most astounding result is that my brother, who had been diagnosed with prostate cancer, saw his psa score drop from 7 to 4 during the first year as a vegan and a recent biopsy, a year after the original one, showed the cancer is gone. The China Study, which was our original inspiration to become Vegans, documents the lack of cancers in rural Chinese who eat only plant foods. | Link | - Sue McCauley

9. February 27, 2009 11:27 am | Matt, of Reply #4: where does he say that he is "hungry and prone to overeating at dinner"? He just says that he's "quite indulgent", which is a totally different thing. When I became a vegan I immediately noticed that I was never hungry the way I was when I ate more widely. I have tons of lean protein at lunch, usually in the form of beans or legumes, and I don't overeat at dinner at all. No chickens involved. | Link | - vegan

10. February 27, 2009 11:28 am | I don't understand what is so hard about eating in a healthy manner all of the time. Angelica's kitchen has incredibly good vegan dishes. I eat cheese here and there, but it is really quite easy to eat well on a pretty vegan diet in NYC. jim | Link | - jim

11. February 27, 2009 11:30 am | This seems like a great approach for Mark, and in general it seems clear that less animal products and less processed food is the way to go for health, but for those of us who are athletic, it's so important to get protein into the body early in the day. Especially for exercising in the morning when you can have the most impact jump-starting your metabolism, I depend on eggs, kefir (sour yogurt), and occasionally meat. I actually try to eat the heavier stuff in my diet earlier in the day and lighten up on the evening meal. | Link | - Amanda Dora

12. February 27, 2009 11:30 am | @Matt - Where does he say that he's "hungry and prone to overeating at dinner"? It actually sounds to me as if he's very satisfied. I have been vegetarian of various stripes, including vegan, for many years, and a well-thought-out veg diet will not you feeling hungry. Grains and legumes are actually very satisfying and will carry you through for a long time. Maybe 10 years ago I went back to eating meat for reasons too numerous and complicated to go into here, but in the last couple of years I've put on weight for the 1st time in my life. A couple of months ago I decided to go back to a diet much like Mark is advocating - mostly grains/beans/veg, but a few times a week I indulge in meat. I feel great!! I've taken off most of the weight, have more energy, have not had as much as a sniffle all winter, have recovered almost completely from a slipped disc, and much more. This is a common-sense approach to good health that also benefits the environment and your wallet. | Link | - Steve

13. February 27, 2009 11:31 am | Mark Bittman is pushing in a good direction here. Having been vegan for many years the personal advantages are many. The only cravings I experienced in missing meat were indirect - it had become a self-delivery vehicle for me and that was side-stepped via some evening pretzels. A good general health write-up can be found at drmedougall.com/stars/peter_rogers_md.html Finally, Bittman deserves praises galore for writing articles on the sustainability connection. Keep up the good work. | Link | - Ted Christopher

14. February 27, 2009 11:31 am | Matt, I don't think he said anywhere in this article that he was or is over-eating at dinner. I think the point is more that he has changed _what_ he eats, not how much of it. Go veg! | Link | - bigmix

15. February 27, 2009 11:33 am | If my doctor suggested that, I'd have a good laugh. Best of luck, Mr. Bittman! | Link | - john

16. February 27, 2009 11:36 am | This is similar to a "raw until 6pm" approach where you eat fruits and raw veggies (salads, etc) for breakfast and lunch and then eat a larger diet. I think it's a great idea for people who want to improve their health/weight/life but cannot commit to an intense lifestyle change. | Link | - Tiffany

17. February 27, 2009 11:37 am | Why make food a big deal? Why not consider healthy, whole foods (which Mark eats) an indulgence rather than a deprivation? Eat as much as you can, but just keep it whole and unprocessed. I generally like Mike's philosophy, would just like a little attitude tweak. Look to y blog, MindfulEats.com for tips! | Link | - Jean Tsai

18. February 27, 2009 11:39 am | I'm a big fan of all things Bittman - have been for years, but this way of eating did not produce any weight loss for either myself or my husband. I won't argue that it's not a healthier way of eating (we did not do the anything goes at dinner), but the thing is we can not eat that many carbs, even complex carbs in the day. Mark, you must have some metabolism! | Link | - kate

19. February 27, 2009 11:41 am | I suspect Mark's diet plan has been successful not so much due to what he doesn't before 6 pm, but rather what he DOES eat during the day: fruits, veggies, whole grains and legumes. These are foods that fill you up for relatively few calories, as long as the fat levels are relatively low, while the fiber can keep you feeling satisfied for a long time, leading to snacking between meals. and, to Matt: don't discount vegan sources of protein. They require a bit more thought, but you can get plenty of protein from the right grains and legumes. (Although I personally am an unrepentant carnivore. I just eat lots of brown rice and kale with my steak!) | Link | - Ash

20. February 27, 2009 11:41 am | I have rarely heard of a dietary recommendation involving eating after 6 pm. Regardless, to each their own. My most exciting research has been reading "Eat to Live" by Dr. Joel Fuhrman. It is a very convincing argument to stay away from all meat, dairy, fats and processed foods. | Link | - johnny w.

21. February 27, 2009 11:41 am | Not to worry, Matt (#4)! Mr. Bittman can get all the protein he wants during the day, in the form of tofu, nuts, soy milk, beans, oatmeal, etc. I don't think that his "vegan before 6" diet makes him insatiable at dinnertime; I suspect he's probably well-fed (after all, he's kept this up for some time now) and just eats what he wants at dinnertime because he truly enjoys it. There's no indication here that he gorges himself at dinner after having starved himself all day. It's a misconception that vegans and vegetarians can't get enough protein. I've been vegetarian for 13 years, I never go hungry, and I have energy to spare, trust me! | Link | - hlg, nyc

22. February 27, 2009 11:42 am | hm, not a bad idea. But I'm wondering if it wouldn't be more beneficial to have your one non vegan meal be breakfast or lunch. Isn't it counterproductive to eat heavy/rich foods late in the evening? Plus, if you have a big indulgent lunch,like wesley said, a simple salad for dinner would totally suffice. This is actually the European way and we all know how much healthier they are than us fat Americans :) I may try this though. Especially since a Chipotle is opening right next door to my office next week (gasp) | Link | - Andrea

23. February 27, 2009 11:43 am | oops, it was Matt, not Wesley, who mentioned the overindulging. My mistake :) | Link | - Andrea

24. February 27, 2009 11:44 am | Lets not forget one of the most important factors of a healthy lifestyle: exercise. Just getting off your butt for 30 min a day can do as much as cutting out calorico-dense processed foods, and enhances the benefits of any dietary improvement. | Link | - Chiropractic student

25. February 27, 2009 11:46 am | Matt @4 - There are plenty of good, non-animal foods to eat that would keep you feeling full 'til dinner. Beans! Nuts! Vegetables sauted in olive oil with whole-grain pasta! I've been putting a whopping spoonful of peanut butter in my oatmeal every morning. Really sticks to your ribs, and keeps me from eating candy at work. If vegan food meant only raw apples, carrot sticks, and cold salad (i.e. foods that make you hungry), it would be a sad girl. It's winter in the midwest, for pete's sake. | Link | - Ariel

1 2 3 ... 6 Next »

Add your comments...

Your Name | Required

Your E-mail | Required, will not be published

Your Comment | Comments are moderated and generally will be posted if they are on-topic and not abusive. For more information, please see our [Comments FAQ](#)

Submit

Ads by Google | what's this?

Jessie et Laurent | Sustainence, Tailored and Delivered to your Door | www.jessieetlaurent.com

Conscious Organic Cuisine | Enjoy Beth's Cooking in your Marin County Home, Classes, Catering | bakercooks.com

Healthy Meals Delivered | Better Ingredients, Better Meals Order Today For 20% Off. Code: NEW | www.EvolutionCatering.com

PATIENT VOICES: The Voices of Cystic Fibrosis | CONFRONTING CANCER: Dana Jennings

WHAT'S ON YOUR PLATE: Obama's Kitchen | ANIMALS AND HEALTH: Dogs Sniffing Out Health Problems

SPECIAL SECTION: Decoding Your Health | SPECIAL SECTION: Simple Steps: A Good Health Guide

SPECIAL SECTION: A Guided Tour of Your Body | About Well

Archive | Select Month

Tag List | KIDS, MARATHON, NUTRITION, DOCTORS, CHEN, EXERCISE, CANCER, JENNINGS, TEENS, WEIGHT, PROSTATE CANCER, BREAST CANCER, HOLIDAY FOOD, PREGNANCY, BRAIN

IN SCIENCE TIMES: Unlocking the Secrets of Gray Hair

EATING WELL: Recipes for Health

What We're Talking About | Aging Well, Cancer, Family Matters, House Calls, Medicine Cabinet

Movies Update E-Mail | Sign up for the latest movie news and reviews, sent every Friday.

Times Health Guide | Comprehensive reference and special reports about diseases, conditions, tests, injuries and surgeries.

Alzheimer's Disease, Sleep Apnea, Prostate Cancer, Headache, Tension, Cholesterol, Back Pain

Weight Control, Rheumatoid Arthritis, Osteoarthritis, Diabetes, Type 2, Breast Cancer, Heart Attack

Also in Travel | Hitchhiking with Ben Bachelard, 36 hours on Martha's Vineyard

Feeds | Well RSS