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## DIG INTO PLANT BASED MEALS

The just released International Food Information Center (IFIC) Food & Health survey found COVID-19 has transformed the way we shop, eat, and think about food. This will not come as any surprise to many who find their food and exercise routines disrupted by the pandemic. Survey findings - 60% report cooking at home more, 32% are snacking more, 30% are washing fresh produce more often, and 27% are thinking about food more than usual.

Supermarket shortages on meat and poultry opened the door for interest in plant based meals. The annual survey, which began in 2005, supports this. When they examined consumption patterns of specific foods they found 28% eating more protein from plant sources, 24% eating more plant-based dairy and 17% eating more plant-based meat alternatives than in 2019.

Plant based meals built around vegetables, beans and grains tend to be less costly than meals built around animal protein. This is partly because of the expenses like animal feed, transportation, and processing.

A position paper published by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics concludes that a plant-based, vegetarian dietary pattern is completely healthful and nutritionally adequate for people throughout all stages of life. It has health advantages like lowering blood cholesterol and blood pressure levels and lowering the risk of heart disease, hypertension, and type 2 diabetes.

Regardless of your reason, try these delicious recipes to dig into plant based meals.

### MEDITERRANEAN LENTILS

1 tablespoon olive oil  
1 tablespoon chopped garlic  
1/2 cup chopped onion  
1/2 cup chopped celery  
1 teaspoon rubbed rosemary  
1 cup lentils  
1 cup marinara sauce  
2 cups water  
1 bay leaf

## **MEDITERRANEAN LENTILS (continued)**

Sauté garlic in olive oil for 1 minute. Add onion, celery, and rosemary and cook for 5 minutes. Add lentils and cook for 5 minutes, constantly stirring. Add marinara sauce, water, and bay leaf. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat to a simmer and cook for 30 minutes or until lentils are tender. Serve with brown rice.

## **WALNUT, QUINOA & SPINACH STUFFED RED PEPPERS**

4 red bell peppers  
1/2 cup quinoa  
1 cup water  
1 cup chopped walnuts  
2 cups chopped baby spinach  
1/4 cup crumbled feta cheese

Preheat oven to 400°F. Slice 1/2-inch from the top of each bell pepper; reserve tops. Remove seeds and inner membranes from peppers; place cut side up in 9-inch square baking dish. Cook quinoa in 1 cup water as package label directs; transfer to a medium bowl. Stir 1 cup walnuts into the cooked quinoa. Stir spinach into quinoa mixture; divide evenly into each pepper. Sprinkle feta cheese over peppers; cover with the pepper tops. Bake for 35 minutes or until peppers are tender. Prep time: 10 minutes; Bake time: 40 minutes; Makes 4 servings.

## **NEW ENGLAND MAPLE BAKED BEANS**

2 (12 ounces) cans vegetarian baked beans  
1/3 cup chopped onion  
1/2 cup maple syrup  
1/4 cup catsup  
1 tablespoon prepared mustard  
1/4 cup shredded white cheddar cheese (optional)

Preheat oven to 350°F. Mix all ingredients together, except cheese, and pour into greased casserole dish. Bake uncovered for 30 minutes or longer. Sprinkle cheese on top for the last 10 minutes of baking. Serve warm.

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