

Veggie Tales

A guy walks into a doctor's office with a zucchini in his ear, a stalk of celery on his head, and a carrot in his nose. He says to doctor "Doc, I haven't been feeling so well." The doctor looks him up and down and says, "Well, for one thing, it appears that you're not eating right."

I'm sitting at the table eating an absolutely amazing sub from Casapulla's Italian Deli in Rehoboth Beach. It's packed with Italian meat and cheese and peppers and spices and who knows what other wonderful things. My eyes are rolling back into my head like a shark during feeding frenzy. The Tee-Vee is on and it's displaying heads, and the heads are talking to me. One is that of former president Bill Clinton. He's being asked questions about some charity he's involved with. Last time I took note of Bill Clinton, he had just had quadruple bypass surgery and some stents put in. He looked...well, he looked like a guy who had just quadruple bypass surgery and some stents put in, *i.e.*, terrible. But there he was, and he looked great.

I really can't believe how good this sub is. And the bread is fresh baked. It's just amazing.

At some point the newsreader said "Mr. President, you look terrific, what's up with that?" or something along those

lines. President Clinton explained that after his heart issues, his daughter gave him the wagging finger and said that she wanted her children to know their grandfather and they wouldn't unless he changed his evil ways with respect to eating. Put down the Big Mac and back away slowly. He said he did some research and discovered that the only diet that seemed to have any impact on heart disease was a plant-based diet. So he's been eating primarily a plant-based diet ever since. He said he's lost about 30 pounds and the doctors tell him that his heart issues have improved dramatically. But he said that most of all he just felt great. He said that he hasn't had so much energy since high school.

The sub is gone. Sad face. But wait! There are little bits of meat and cheese and oil that have collected on the wrapper! Mmmm, delicious!

Well, I got to thinking about this no-meat thing. I've always eaten meat. I've never even considered not doing so. But I believe it was Dean Wormer who said "Being fat and tired is no way to go through life, son." I wonder if I could do this, and I wonder if I did, whether I would have more energy and lose some weight. So I consulted the Google. It seems that President Clinton has a shake every morning made of almond milk (no dairy on this diet), fruit, and protein powder. He has a salad for lunch, and for dinner, veggies and some rice or other grain. About twice a month

he will have fish, and about twice a month he will have an omelet. So this is not really vegan, but close. I figured what the heck? I'll give it a try. I wonder if I can last two days?

<pages falling from a calendar while harp music plays>

More than four weeks later, I'm finding this remarkably easy. Of all the flash-in-the-pan fad diets I've tried and failed, none has been as easy as this. And I'm finding that a lot of those weird-looking meatless foods that I normally pay no attention to are actually delicious. For example, in the past if I were to go downstairs to the Roundhouse feeding troughs and decide to have a salad, I might start with a small base of lettuce, just enough to cover the bottom of the container, pile it high with a mountain of chicken, bacon, cheese, eggs, and cover it all with Ranch dressing. Now that's a salad, right? Since that would be frowned upon in the vegan community, I have to look at those other things that I used to consider "in the way" - things like edamame, corn and black beans in a dressing of some kind, or the tomatoes and cucumbers in some kind of vinaigrette, or peppers, beans, sunflower seeds. And it turns out that olive oil and vinegar as a dressing is actually better than the heavy mayo-based stuff. Go figure. You know that end of the freezer section in the grocery store with all the creepy hippie-food in it? Well, I tried the Amy's meatless, organic, gluten-free, blah, blah, blah enchila-

das and it turns out they're wonderful. Costco and Trader Joe's have plenty of really good meatless things, things I never even looked at before, because, you know, meatless. And the restaurants I've gone to, even sports bars, have all had delicious meatless things that I would never have even considered, but I now find that they are just as good as, and often better than whatever meat-packed thing I would have otherwise chosen.

And the upshot is that yes, I seem to have a lot more energy and less fatigue than I did before. A lot more. I don't know if I'd go so far as to say it's like I'm in high school again (involuntary shudder of disgust), but it's quite noticeable. I'm actually doing things after work other than falling onto the couch. I don't know whether I seem to have more energy because I'm not eating meat, or because I'm probably eating fewer calories, or because of the placebo effect. But I don't really care. As for weight loss, I'm losing a little weight, but not a lot. That's probably because of my complete loss of will-power at night, and the fact that things like potato chips exist. But if I watch the junk food and stay with the plant-based diet, in the course of a year or so, I might lose my title as The Amazing, Colossal Managing Attorney.

Concern trolls are concerned that I'm not getting complete proteins. "Complete proteins" means protein containing all 9 of the essential amino acids that our bodies must have but cannot make. We have to get these from our food. Meat contains all 9, but the plant-based proteins (except soy) do not. Happily, the amino acids missing from one

plant-based protein are readily available in another. That's why the traditional foods in all cultures combine proteins resulting in the consumption of all 9 amino acids. Rice alone does not, nor do beans alone. But rice and beans together provide all 9 essential amino acids, as does falafel and hummus, even peanut butter and bread. So, it's not that difficult to get all you need from a plant-based diet.

How many vegetarians does it take to eat a hamburger? One if nobody's looking.

Am I going to do this forever? Probably not. If I'm someplace where pulled pork or brisket is being served, it's a pretty safe bet that I'll be eating pulled pork or brisket because, yum. And there will be a piece of turkey on my plate on Thanksgiving. But the rest of the time, I see no reason to eat meat.

Should you do this? I have no idea. It's worked for me, but your mileage may vary. I remember when the low-carb fad swept through the Office a decade or so ago, some people loved it. They said they never felt so good and found it easy to do. Others said they hated it and found it impossible. I know quite a few people who don't eat meat and they all seem pretty healthy to me. And I know even more who don't eat red meat, and they all seem very fit, perhaps not so coincidentally. So if you are concerned about heart health, or if you love animals and not just because they are delicious, you might want to give it a try. Can't hurt, and you might like it.

The real test is going to come next time I'm in Rehoboth Beach and come within a mile of Casapulla's. The pull is strong...very strong.

One afternoon, a wealthy lawyer was riding in the back of his limousine when he saw two pathetic-looking men by the side of the road, eating grass. He ordered his driver to stop and got out to investigate. He asked the men, "Why are you eating grass?"

"We don't have no money for food," the first man replied.

"Then you must come with me to my house," insisted the lawyer.

"But, sir, I got a wife and three kids here," said the man.

"Bring them along!" replied the lawyer.

The second man exclaimed, "I got a wife and six kids!"

"Bring them as well!" the lawyer proclaimed as he headed back to his limo.

They all climbed into the car, and once underway, one of the men expresses, "Sir, you are too kind. Thank you for taking all of us with you."

The lawyer replied, "I'm most happy to do it. You'll love my place. The grass is almost a foot tall." TM

