

**ADA Vegetarian Update**  
**Meet Our Members: Jeff Novick, MS, RD**  
By: Amanda L. Sager, Capt, USAF, BSC, RD  
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**Q: Jeff, how did you become interested in plant-based nutrition?**

A: In 1973 I turned 15 and had my first experience with vegetarianism based on the book *Love Your Body* by Viktoras P. Kulvinskis. He recommended a raw food vegan diet. My neighbor and I turned a section of my parent's backyard into an organic garden, started growing sprouts, turned my father's garage into a gym, and went on a vegan diet. We didn't stay with the diet for long, but this was a jumping off point for me to explore ideas about vegetarianism, meditation, yoga, and other alternative approaches to health. Over the next ten years, I explored different aspects of health, wellness, vegetarianism, fitness, philosophy and spirituality.

My father and grandfather were butchers, and my ideas about vegetarianism were a shock for my parents. They had concerns about my health, and they wanted some proof of safety. At that time "real evidence" on the safety and benefits of a vegan diet was lacking. Around 1983, the amount of credible scientific evidence supporting a plant-based diet/lifestyle was building and becoming clearer. The publication of books like those by McDougall and Pritikin and the work of Dr. Ornish and others helped me make the final transition.

**Q: Please tell us about your training background, and the nutrition-related jobs that you've held including your current job(s).**

A: My interests in food and nutrition first led me to culinary school in 1981 where I received a degree in Culinary Arts and Food Service Management from the State University of New York. Over the next few years, I worked in many types of restaurants around the country including as a pastry chef in a gourmet French restaurant in Grand Junction, Colorado, and as the chef of a natural foods restaurant in Syosset, New York.

In 1985, I left the restaurant industry and went to work for Kraft Foods. During this same time, I was studying about nutrition and vegetarianism on my own and trying to spread the message about healthy eating. I wrote

letters to editors of the local papers and articles for the local co-op. I started teaching adult education classes and taught at the local community university program. I was also running an organic food co-op out of my house, counseling clients, and taking several distance learning courses to further my education.

I realized that while my career with Kraft was financially successful for me, I was not happy. I was in personal conflict working for a company that sold the same products that were in my opinion, causing most of America's health and weight problems. The enjoyment and self-satisfaction I received from helping others to change their diets made me realize my real passion. I decided to go back to school for a formal education in nutrition. In 1995, I received my BS in Dietetics with a minor in Exercise Science from Indiana State University and in 1998 I received my MS in Nutrition and a minor in Exercise Science.

During my graduate program, I created and taught the Nutrition Education Initiative, a plant-based preventive medicine curriculum for medical doctors, residents, and medical students. As part of the curriculum, we served vegan meals at all the lectures. The program eventually became part of the hospital food service options so doctors could order these meals for their patients. In recognition of this project, Indiana's governor awarded me the Indiana State Public Health Excellence in Health Science Award, and Indiana State University awarded me the Graduate-of-the-Last-Decade Award.

After graduating, I went to work for the Pritikin Longevity Center in South Florida as their Director of Nutrition and held that position for 10 years. It was an incredible experience where I got to see the almost miraculous results of fully immersing patients with cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, the metabolic syndrome, arthritis, obesity, and other conditions, into a total lifestyle change program. In addition, I served on the Pritikin Center Science Advisory Board and was involved with their research.

In 2007, I left Pritikin to work for myself. Since then I have held concurrent positions as the registered dietitian for the McDougall program in Northern California, an on-line instructor for Kaplan University, and the Director of Health Education for the National Health Association (NHA). In addition, I released 4 DVDs.

I started consulting with Whole Foods in 2009 on their new Health Starts Here program. I am lecturing at two of their immersion programs for employees with the highest health care costs. In addition, I am helping them develop the curriculum and educational materials for their new Wellness Clubs, which will put wellness clinics in their stores starting this year.

I am currently the Vice President of Health Promotion for EHE Internationals, a leader in executive health programs.

**Q: You have had many admirable partnerships, including your work with Dr. McDougall and VegSource. How did you build your work and network with such pioneers?**

A: I guess just being in the right place at the right time. :)

Actually, it all goes back to the early '80s when I used to go to lectures and conferences and would communicate with many of the speakers. They were all huge inspirations for me to go back to school and we stayed in contact as my professional career developed.

I am very passionate about my work. I just try to share my passion and excitement for what I do in all that I do. With the shared visions we all have, maybe it is just contagious.

**Q: You have a series of DVDs on healthy eating and cooking. Do you have any other projects in the works you'd like readers to know about?**

A: I just released my 5th DVD, which is called Jeff Novick's Fast Food that will show people how to make low-cost, delicious healthy food in minutes. All recipes are based on the principles of calorie density and nutrient density and can be made in less than ten minutes. They have less than five ingredients and need nothing more than scissors and a can opener.

I also work with EarthSave's Meals for Health project. It is a 60-day intervention program where underprivileged people will be taught to eat a healthy plant-based diet. It is scheduled to begin March 2011.

**Q: What do you like to do outside of work?**

A: My work, by choice, is much of my life—I really love what I do. I get such great joy out of helping people and being able to make a real difference in their lives. Many of my clients have become close friends.

I love to spend time at home and in nature with my girlfriend. We live in south Florida and love the beach and the sun. We enjoy local cultural events, visiting with family and traveling to small towns.

**Q: What is one of your favorite vegan/vegetarian meals?**

A: My meals are very simple and are usually one of my #ve basic recipes that I feature in my cooking DVD. My basic recipes all follow the same principles:

1 15 oz can of Eden Foods®, no salt added beans  
1 to 1.5 pound bag of frozen vegetables  
1 28 oz box POMI chopped tomatoes  
Either brown rice/ potato/yam/whole wheat pasta  
Spice of choice

By varying the vegetables, the beans, the starch and the spice, I can make a variety of different dishes and have enough left over for another meal (or two) later in the day or week.

My truly favorite meal both at home and out is simply a plate of either steamed brown rice/sweet potato or baked potato, some beans, and some fresh steamed veggies with maybe a little fresh salsa or tahini sauce.

**Q: Do you aim to follow any particular ratio of raw to cooked foods?**

A: No.

**Q: What is your opinion of the raw food diet?**

A: That is where I got my start in the '70s and then again for several years in the early '80s. Studies have clearly shown the potential benefit of including some raw foods in our diets. However, I do not see how this translates to a 100% raw food diet or to some arbitrary percentage of raw foods in ones diet. There is really little if any real science or evidence for most of what the raw food movement claims and for their theories.

To really prove its value, what the raw food movement has to do is not prove itself as being better than the typical American diet, which is not hard to do, but to prove it is better in measurable outcomes than a plant-based, whole foods, vegan diet that is not 80% or more raw. From my experience as a raw foodist and working with the raw food community, I do not expect us to see these better outcomes.

**Q: What advice would you give to dietitians who would like to work in the area of vegetarian nutrition?**

A: I think it is challenging to follow a healthy lifestyle anywhere today, regardless of whether one is vegan or not. Our culture and society have been heavily meat- and dairy-based for a long time. The concepts of healthy eating and the issue that meat and dairy, if consumed at all, should make up a very small part of the diet can be especially challenging. Therefore, I don't teach a 100% vegan diet nor do I use the words vegan or vegetarian in any of my writings or presentations. I do not try to advocate for my personal philosophy as one anyone else has to adopt. My job as a health professional is to help people and take them as far as they want to go. While greatly reducing the amount of meat and dairy people consume is critical to getting healthy, I am not sure that completely eliminating it is always necessary. For some people, allowing them to keep a small amount of these products in their diet, if they so choose, may be the key to having them follow the rest of the diet. I and it is a better approach to work with people on what they need to include more of, rather than focusing on what they need to take away or have less of. The #rst thing most people need to do is to learn how to include more fresh fruit, vegetables and unrefined, unprocessed carbohydrates in their diet. If they do that, they will have less room for the unhealthy foods.

In addition, vegan and vegetarian are really exclusionary terms, recommending speci#cs about what people should avoid and not specifics about what people should include to optimize health. These diets do not automatically equate to a healthy diet and lifestyle. These are philosophies that clients are welcome to adapt and I will help them make sure they are as healthy as possible. In the end, I am not a “vegan” advocate but a “health” advocate.

Jeff Novick, MS, RD, LD, LN is a lecturer and author