

# Featured Medical Professional: Jeff Novick, MS, RD, LD, LN!



## **What spurred you on to choose nutrition as a career?**

I have been interested in food, fitness and health for as long as I can remember. Some of my earliest childhood memories involve helping my grandmother prepare food from scratch, and learning about wrestling from my grandfather. As a child my two favorite TV shows were Jack LaLanne and The Galloping Gourmet with Graham Kerr. When I was in grade school, I petitioned my school to let me become the first male to take Home Economics instead of Industrial Arts (or “Shop” as it was called). I wanted to learn about food and cooking, not metal and woodworking. Sports, specifically gymnastics, wrestling, and soccer were also my interests.

## **What led you to become vegan?**

In 1973, I had my first experience with vegetarianism from the book *Love Your Body* by Viktoras P. Kulvinskas. He recommended a raw food vegan diet. My neighbor and I tore up a section of my parent’s backyard to plant an organic garden, started growing sprouts, turned my father’s garage into a gym, and went on a vegan

diet. While we didn’t stay with the diet for long; this was a jumping off point for me to begin to explore ideas about vegetarianism, meditation, yoga, and other alternative approaches to health. Over the next 10 years, I explored different aspects of health, wellness, vegetarianism, fitness, philosophy, spirituality etc. Then, around 1983, the amount of credible scientific evidence supporting a vegan diet/lifestyle was building and becoming clearer. The publication of books like the McDougall Plan, helped me make the final transition.

## **Vegans are rare in the medical community. What was it like working as a vegan in that regard?**

I think it is challenging to follow a healthy lifestyle anywhere today, regardless of whether one is vegan or not.

I have been fortunate to have a very unique experience in that I have never had to work in a traditional “medical” setting. Right after graduation, I began work with The Pritikin Longevity Center, where I was Director of Nutrition for 10 years and then in 2008, I left the Pritikin

Center and began working with the McDougall Program.

However, our culture and society have been heavily meat and dairy based for a long time so, yes, 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. I don't teach a 100 percent vegan diet to people nor do I use the words vegan and/or vegetarian in any of my writings or presentations or try to push or advocate for my personal philosophy as one anyone else has to adopt. While it might be my choice, not everyone is willing to make that choice or go that far. And for me, my job as a health professional is to help people and take them as far as they want to go. And, while greatly reducing the amount of meat and dairy most 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 what gets them to have them follow the rest of the diet. I find it is a better approach to first 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 first 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.

Vegan and vegetarian are really exclusionary terms, recommending specifics about what people should avoid and not specifics about what people should include to optimize health and does not automatically equate to a healthy diet and lifestyle. To me, these are philosophies that clients are welcome to adapt and I will help them with and make sure they are as healthy as possible. So, in

the end, I am not a "vegan" advocate but a "health" advocate.

### **How do you approach nutrition?**

We have a real paradox in our world right now; we are overwhelmed with more information and research than ever before in the area of nutrition and its impact on health, yet people have never been more confused. And, according to some recent research, the amount of Americans who actually follow a healthy diet and get in enough servings of healthy plant foods is very low and has fallen in the last 20 years.

However, the basic principles of good nutrition are really simple and easy. What I try to do is help people sort through all the confusing information, understanding the difference between what is good science and what is marketing and advertising that is just trying to sound like good science, how to understand the information and apply it to their own lives. I like to teach guidelines and principles and show where I get them so people can now make informed choices and be confident in their choices. In the end, it's their lives and I am here to help them make healthier and more informed choices.

### **How do you help others make the transition to a healthy vegan diet and how do your DVDs fit into that?**

I like to help people understand the truth in all the confusing information and how to apply it to their lives. Specifically, how they can make simple changes that can have huge impacts. After all, there is nothing more motivating than seeing results, especially dramatic results. This is a powerful inspiration for anyone to continue on the path and to realize they have such control over their health.

My presentations are expressions of my entire philosophy and approach to nutrition and health and so my DVDs also reflect this. The emphasis is always on the same message and philosophy.

**You're a regular in the McDougall program. What brought you there and what does it take to give a stand-out presentation alongside all the other esteemed speakers the program features?**

I have known Dr McDougall since the mid 80's when his books first started coming out. Dr. McDougall was a real inspiration to me and I not only read all of his material, but attended conferences where he spoke. I was especially impressed with how he went back into the medical/health system to try to change it, instead of just criticizing it from the outside which helped in my decision to go back to school.

Then in 1995, as part of my senior year in undergraduate training at Indiana State University, I had to choose a "specialized" internship experience and I choose to work with the McDougall Program at St. Helena Hospital in the Napa Valley. In 2005, Dr McDougall and I met up again at the annual North American Vegetarian Society meeting and discussed again the possibility of working together in the near future. In 2006 I spoke at the McDougall Advanced Study Weekend program in Santa Rosa, California and in November of 2007, after almost 10 rewarding years with the Pritikin Program, I decided to seek other opportunities. In January of 2008 I formally joined the McDougall Program as their dietitian.

I am always humbled to share the platform with such speakers as Dr McDougall and all the other speakers who are featured at the different programs. All my presentation are on topics I am very passionate about and believe to be very

important and timely and so when I present, I just try to share my passion and excitement for what I do and the information I am presenting. I grew up as one of the shy kids and was never comfortable speaking up in class, let alone in front of the class, so it amazes me how life has proceeded and that this is what I do. I am still very nervous before every presentation. However, it is seeing the impact that my presentations have on the audience that keeps me coming back again and again, as they have become my real inspiration. There is no better feeling than knowing the work you are doing is helping people.

**I understand you just took a new position in NYC. What will you be doing and what's the first vegan restaurant you plan on going to?!**

In January I accept a position with EHE International in NYC, who is a leader in the area of Executive Health Exams to work in the area of health promotion. They are a 100 yr old company and were the first Executive Health company to focus on prevention. Together, we are developing a social media platform for their internal clients and revamping their health education to include more intensive lifestyle education and residential programs. In May we rolled out a brand new video education program where twice week, I address many of today's Hot Topics in 3-minute educational videos.

I have not had much time to explore the many vegan restaurants yet as I am only in NYC a few days a month but am looking forward to the opportunity in the upcoming months.

**What are the three most important keys to maintaining an enjoyable healthy vegan diet?**

Simple, easy and practical.

Most all my work is based on teaching these principles.

People often say to me, Jeff, this is easy for you because you have done it for so long. To which I always reply, you have it backwards, I have done it for so long because I have always kept it so simple. Also a good friend once said to me, this program (a healthy diet and lifestyle) is not to become your life, but to give your life back. By keeping it simple, easy and practical, I am able to maintain the program and a high level of health which allows me to do all the other wonderful things in life I enjoy. Which in my case, is teaching these principles to others and helping them understand how powerful they can be.

**What is your favorite dish that you make at home? (please share the recipe!)**

My basic recipes all follow the same principles.

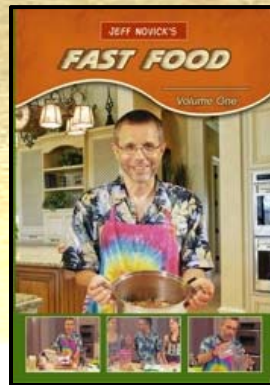
- 1 15 oz Can of Eden Foods, No Salt Added Beans
- 1 to 1.5 # Bag of Frozen Vegetables
- 1 28 oz box POMI Chopped Tomatoes
- Either Whole Wheat Pasta/Brown Rice/ Potato/or any other pasta of your choice
- Spice of choice.

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

**What exciting projects do you have coming up in the future?**

Wow! Glad you asked. 😊

I have a new DVD coming out that is called Jeff Novick's Fast Food that will show people how to



make delicious healthy food in minutes. All recipes are based on the principles of calorie density and nutrient density so they are all very filling for few calories and loaded with nutrients. All recipes can be made in under 10 minutes, need nothing more than a scissor and a can opener and the cost per day can be as low as about \$3.50.

In addition, I am working with Meals for Health, which is a 60-day intervention program where underprivileged people are taught to eat a healthy plant-based diet. I am joining with John McDougall MD, Rip Esselstyn, and many other plant-based health professionals in this ground-breaking project -- scheduled to begin in August 2010. A major university will be collecting and publishing the data for this program, and EarthSave expects to roll out Meals for Health nationally.

<http://www.earthsavetv.com/>

Lastly, I am working with Whole Foods new Health Starts Here program in several capacities. I am lecturing at two of their immersion programs where they are sending those employees with the highest health care costs through a 5 Day Immersion Program run by Rip Esselstyn or a 10 day immersion program run by John McDougall.

<http://wholefoodsmarket.com/pressroom/blog/2010/01/20/health-starts-here%E2%84%A2-launches-at-whole-foods-market%C2%AE/>

“The Total Health Immersion Program offers Team Members intensive health and wellness education programs geared toward sustaining long-term, positive lifestyle changes, including healthy eating, fitness and empowerment. There will be two

rounds of immersion programs offered annually at three different locations in the United States. Participating in the immersion program will allow Team Members, who qualify and who are ready to take charge of their own health, to receive more direct support in making positive lifestyle and dietary changes under the guidance of a medical professional, and at no cost to them.”

I feel very fortunate and extremely blessed to have so many opportunities to try and make a difference in the lives of people and the world we live in.

**Thanks Jeff!**

### **Contact Info**

You can find Jeff and his work at [www.jeffnovick.com](http://www.jeffnovick.com).

### **Bio**

*Jeff Novick is truly a unique dietitian and nutritionist. His insightful and humorous approach to nutrition and health has helped thousands worldwide make the transition to healthy living. He holds both undergraduate and graduate degrees from Indiana State University in nutrition with minors in Exercise Science.*

*Jeff serves as Vice President of Health Promotion for Executive Health Exams International and lectures for the McDougall Program in Santa Rosa, California, a residential intensive lifestyle program. In addition, he serves as an Adjunct Professor in the School of Health Sciences for Kaplan University.*

*For almost a decade, Jeff served as the Director of Nutrition at the Pritikin Center in Aventura, Florida, and as Vice President of the Board of the Directors for the National Health Association (NHA). For the*

*last two years, he also served as the Director of Health Education for the NHA.*

*Jeff has taught nutrition classes at Indiana State University, Indiana University Medical School, the University of Miami Medical School and for the Florida Academy of Family Physicians. While in Indiana, he created and taught the Nutrition Education Initiative, a preventive medicine curriculum for medical doctors, residents, and medical students. In recognition of this groundbreaking project, Indiana’s governor awarded him the Indiana State Public Health Excellence in Health Science Award, and Indiana State University awarded him the Graduate-of-the-Last-Decade Award.*

*He has been interviewed by Newsday, Parade Magazine, Men’s Health, Shape Magazine, Women’s World and has appeared on Fox News, Discovery Health, the Today Show and other media nationwide. He recently appeared in the documentary Processed People, and the movie FatBoy which won the best documentary award at the Fort Lauderdale and Queens Film Festivals.*