



Al Gore's Vegan Diet: The Power of the Individual

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Fighting Big Food for Our Very Survival

"Big Food" refers to multinational food and beverage companies having huge, concentrated market power that is focused on maximizing profits, not human welfare. They sell their brands throughout the world in outlets that range from large supermarkets to gas stations and from restaurants to kiosks. The [revenues of the largest corporations](#) can exceed the annual gross domestic product (GDP) of middle-size countries. Within the food system, [power is concentrated](#) in the hands of a few corporations. In 2008, 10 corporations controlled almost 90% of the global sales of pesticides and 10 companies sold 67% of the global proprietary seed market. In 2005, the top 4 beef packing firms controlled 83.5% of the market in the US and worldwide, and 40% of all groceries were sold by only 100 retailers.

With their massive wealth, intellectual power, and profit-driven motives, these corporations are formidable forces that fight viciously against any meaningful change that might adversely affect their profits. There is not a conspiracy here; this is just business as usual, at its worst acting like Big Tobacco and Big Alcohol. The [food industry's primary obligation](#) is to drive profit by selling food, and its efforts have been largely unchallenged for almost 30 years.

Big Food Has Been on a Winning Streak for 30 Years

It has been [almost 30 years since](#) Big Food has been successfully challenged. The McGovern Report, officially known as "The Dietary Goals for the United States" (1977), and the US Surgeon General's Report on Nutrition and Health (1985), by C. Everett Koop, MD, attempted to improve the health of Americans by recommending a major increase in whole grains, vegetables, and fruits in our diet and an economy-shifting reduction in the consumption of meat and dairy products.

As is expected of all good businesses that are responsible to their shareholders and private owners, these animal-food industries fought back with a vengeance, declaring that the anti-meat and anti-dairy efforts by government, headed by a few concerned scientists, would never threaten them again. For these food giants, the battles lost by the tobacco industry, beginning with the 1964 Surgeon General's Report on Smoking and Health, served as [powerful lessons](#) about the potential consequences of letting the public's interest get in the way of financial gain. So far, any real efforts to change the way people eat have been stopped by Big Food. But industry has no defense against what individuals like Al Gore can do to change the future.

The Fight Individuals Can Win

Healthier images of Al Gore over the next few months will show how he saved himself from obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, much like those public pictures seen of Bill Clinton after he switched his diet (to vegan, then to almost vegan) in 2010. Both men provide examples of how the food on each person's plate makes an immediate and powerful statement.

Rather than improvement in his own health, Mr. Gore's motivation to give up animal foods was more likely to become consistent with his message on climate change. He can now call himself an environmentalist. Who will be the next example for our future? Russian president Vladimir Putin, actor Leonardo DiCaprio, US president Barack Obama, film producer and explorer James Cameron (too late, he's already vegan)...

Although celebrities have a large platform to speak from, every person has a voice on this matter. Food is the immediate solution to reverse climate change. (Changes in energy sources and modes of transportation will take decades to show environmental effects).



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ABC's Amy Robach discovered her breast cancer after an ["on-air mammogram"](#) on October 1st, 2013 for "Good Morning America's Pink Day." The news was announced to the world on November 11, 2013 on this national early morning TV show, and her doctors told her bluntly that this test saved her life. Her public efforts, she believes, will save many other women's lives by encouraging them to have their breasts examined. The scientific truth tells a far different story, one of great harm done, when celebrities go public about their diseases. [The facts are:](#)

- If 2000 women are screened regularly for 10 years, one will benefit from the screening, as she will avoid dying from breast cancer.
- At the same time, 10-20 healthy women will, as a consequence, become cancer patients and will be treated unnecessarily.
- Furthermore, about 200 healthy women will experience

a false alarm (resulting in anxiety and worry, often followed by further testing and treatments).

Because of these solid conclusions about the failings of mammograms, the most respected body of scientists worldwide, the [Cochrane Collaboration](#), [stopped recommending mammograms](#) in 2012.

[CNN Opinion](#) by Dr. Welch (November 20, 2013)

Editor's note: H. Gilbert Welch is a professor of medicine at the Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy and Clinical Practice and a co-author of "Overdiagnosed: Making People Sick in the Pursuit of Health."

(Welch to CNN) -- I don't want to write this.

As part of breast cancer awareness month, a 40-year-old anchor [had her first mammogram on morning television](#). And last week the anchor, Amy Robach, [underwent a double mastectomy](#) after announcing she had cancer, and saying -- in front of 5 million viewers -- that "[having a mammogram saved my life](#)."

And I feel the obligation to point out that other possibilities are more likely.

To understand why, you need to know how doctors now think about cancer: in terms of turtles, rabbits and birds. The goal is not to let any of the animals escape the barnyard pen to become deadly. But the turtles aren't going anywhere anyway. They are the indolent, nonlethal cancers. The rabbits are ready to hop out at any time. They are the potentially lethal cancers, cancers that might be stopped by early detection and treatment. Then there are the birds. Quite simply, they are already gone. They are the most aggressive cancers, the ones that have already spread by the time they are detectable, the ones that are beyond cure.

Before I go through the other possibilities, let me be clear about something: I know Robach has been through an emotionally gut-wrenching month. I know she is worried about her children. I know her parents are worried about her. And I truly hope the mammogram served a purpose -- that it saved her life.

It is understandable that any woman with a screening-detected cancer would want to believe this. But all women contemplating mammography should understand the other possibilities.

One possibility is that it could not save a life, that the woman will ultimately die from her disease. Thankfully this possibility is the least likely. Yet in every trial of screening, some women die from breast cancer despite its being detected early. It's not the mammogram's fault, it's the bird's fault. The birds are the reason why the rate at which women present with metastatic breast cancer in the United States remains unchanged, despite [three decades of widespread screening mammography](#).

Another possibility is that early detection was unnecessary -- that she could have done just as well had her cancer progressed to the point she noticed a breast lump. Doctors are getting pretty good at dealing with rabbits. While the news media tends to focus on screening, the bigger story in breast cancer is the [dramatic improvement in treatment](#) over the last 20 years. Ironically, the better we are at treating breast cancer - the less important it is to screen for it.

The final possibility is that she was overdiagnosed -- diagnosed with a cancer that may not have been destined to ever bother her. Cancer biologists now recognize that small collections of abnormal cells may meet the pathological criteria for cancer, yet never progress to affect the patient. In other words, her cancer may have been a turtle: it may not have been going anywhere anyway. While doctors used to debate whether turtles really existed in breast cancer, now the debate is about how many turtles exist.

Even the program that promotes screening mammography in the United Kingdom [now acknowledges](#) that women are three times more likely to be overdiagnosed than they are to have their "life saved."

Some researchers [think](#) the overdiagnosed to lives-saved ratio is closer to 10 to 1.

Others might argue it's considerably less. Overdiagnosis is notoriously difficult to quantify. But [most agree](#) overdiagnosis is more common than having your life saved.

That nuance is lost in the powerful survivor stories that appear regularly in the media. Of course, everyone wants to interpret them as evidence of the benefit of mammograms. Unfortunately, the more likely interpretation is that they represent evidence of harm: unnecessary surgery, chemotherapy and/or radiation.

Why is this important? Video images of individuals purported to be helped exaggerate the benefit of mammography, while hiding its harms. They impede efforts to balance the process, such as screening less frequently or starting later in life. And they give more weight to the idea that the way to deal with cancer is to find more of it.

Why don't I want to write this? Because no one wants to dispute the interpretation of a well-meaning cancer patient who is trying to help people. And no one wants to make a difficult situation any harder. But news stories about health -- particularly on television -- are too driven by powerful personal anecdotes. The public deserves more nuance.

Dr. Welch was the keynote speaker for the February 2012 McDougall Advanced Study Weekend. He is a general internist at the White River Junction VA and a professor of Medicine at the Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy and Clinical Research. He is the author of two national best selling books, *Should I Be Tested for Cancer? Maybe not and here's why* (UC Press 2004) and *Overdiagnosed: Making people sick in the pursuit of health* (Beacon Press 2011). He has also authored many articles on mammography in leading medical journal, including the [New England Journal of Medicine](#) and to the [Journal of the National Cancer Institute](#).

Featured Recipes

Prune Puree

By Mary McDougall

So many people have written to me about not being able to purchase a good fat replacer, or even if they can find one, it can be very expensive. I used Wonderslim Fat Replacer for years (and you will see references to it in many of my recipes). When they stopped making that product, I switched to Sunsweet Lighter Bake and used that as the fat replacer in many of my recipes. Both of these products are very similar, basically made from dried plums and water. I discovered it is so easy to just make your own fat replacer at home that you will never go out looking for a product you can buy again.

Preparation Time: 10 minutes

Servings: makes about 3 ½ cups

2 cups dried pitted plums (prunes)

warm water

In a glass 4 cup measuring container, add 2 cups of dried plums/prunes, up to the 2 cup line. Do not remove them. Add warm water up to the 4 cup line. Let rest for 3-5 minutes. Place the water containing the plums/prunes into a high speed blender or a food processor. (If you do not have a large food processor, this will have to be done in batches.) Process until the mixture is the consistency of applesauce. Cover and refrigerate until ready to use.

Hints: This will keep in the refrigerator for about 2 weeks, but I like to freeze it in smaller amounts that I know I am going to use in future recipes, maybe ½ cup amounts. It will keep for at least a year in the freezer, just remember to thaw in plenty of time to use in your recipe. I use this in brownies, pancakes, muffins, etc., wherever you need a good substitute for fat in baked goods.

Slow Cooker Chili

By Heather McDougall

We serve this chili over either baked potatoes or steamed brown rice.

Preparation Time: 20 minutes

Cooking Time: 8 hours

Serves: 6 - 8

2 cups dried chili beans
1 red onion, chopped
6 cloves garlic, chopped
1 packet Simply Organic Vegetarian Chili Seasoning, or chili seasonings of your choice
1 15-ounce can fire roasted tomatoes
4 cups vegetable stock
2 cups water
1 cup fresh or frozen corn

Combine all ingredients, except corn, into the slow cooker. Cook on high for 8 hours. Add the corn during the last 15 minutes of cooking. Serve with toppings of your choice.

Mexican Rice Soup

By Heather McDougall

To toast the rice, put the rice in a preheated pan on medium-high heat. Stir constantly until rice is light to dark brown in color, about 5 minutes.

Preparation Time: 15 minutes

Cooking Time: 30 minutes

Servings: 6

1 medium onion, chopped
4 cloves garlic, minced
6 cups vegetable stock
1 15-ounce can kidney beans
1 15-ounce can black beans
1 15-ounce can pinto beans
1 15-ounce can fire-roasted tomatoes
1 tablespoon chili powder
1 cup long grain rice, toasted
Salt to taste

Toppings:

Chopped tomato

Sliced scallions

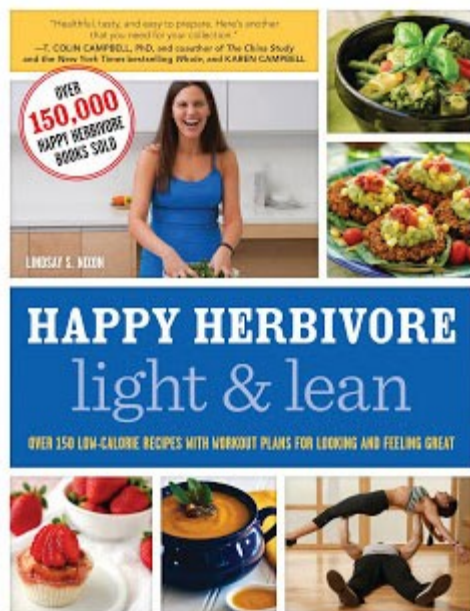
Salsa Baked Tortilla Chips

Saute onion, garlic, and 1 tablespoon vegetable stock or water in a large saucepan over medium-high heat for 7 minutes. Add the rest of the ingredients, reduce heat to low and simmer for 25-30 minutes. Serve with toppings of your choice, or the ones listed above.

Chopping Onions (without crying)

By Mary and Heather McDougall

Recently we heard about a way to chop onions without crying. We were rather skeptical at first, but since we have tried so many different methods, with no success, including a few really strange ones, we decided to give it a try. So for the past 4 weeks Heather and I have been chopping onions by only breathing through our noses. Don't talk or open your mouth at all. And to our great surprise it works! The true test was when I was chopping all of the onions to go into our holiday stuffing. I use a food processor to chop them because there are so many. And for the past 40 years I have had tears running down my face during the whole process. Not this year though, not one tear!! I was so surprised, and thrilled, that I just had to share it with all of you. We'd love to hear what you do to stop from crying when chopping. What methods do you use? We'll share a few of the best ones on Facebook.



The following recipes are by Lindsay Nixon from her New Cookbook, *Happy Herbivore Light and Lean*.

As with any Happy Herbivore cookbook, *Happy Herbivore Light & Lean* contains flavorful, plant-based recipes that take 30 minutes or less to prepare with health promoting ingredients and no oils, processed foods or artificial sweeteners.



Deviled Eggs

Makes 12

Soy-free, Gluten-free, Fat-free, Quick, Budget

Ann Esselstyn taught me how to make these incredible faux deviled eggs. Her recipe was simple: hummus, Dijon mustard, green onions, and paprika. I added a little black salt to give the deviled eggs a little more egg flavor and added some additional seasonings my mother used in her deviled eggs recipe as well. I swear I could eat two dozen of these eggs all by myself!

6 small red potatoes

¼ c hummus (plain)
 1 tsp Dijon mustard
 ¼ tsp garlic powder
 ¼ tsp onion powder
 pinch black salt
 hot sauce (optional)
 paprika or smoked paprika (garnish)

Boil potatoes until fork-tender, then let cool completely. Meanwhile, mix hummus, Dijon, garlic powder, and onion powder together, plus a pinch of black salt, stirring to combine. (Add hot sauce here if you prefer a spicy deviled egg.) Taste, adding more Dijon or black salt to taste, then set aside. Once potatoes cool, slice in half long-ways and use a little spoon or melon baller to scoop out a small circle of the potato flesh (this is your "egg"). Spoon hummus mixture into the hole and garnish with paprika.

Chef's Note: Black salt is also called *kala namak*. Not to be confused with Hawaiian black lava salt.

Lentil Joes

Makes 6

Gluten-free, Fat-free, Quick, Budget, Pantry

Sloppy joes—or, as my family calls them, "wimpies"—were one of my favorite childhood foods before I became a vegetarian. I've never had much success mimicking my mom's recipe (vegan or not—I swear she's holding back a secret ingredient!), so I decided to take a totally new approach and use lentils. It's not Mom's meatloaf—er, sloppy joes—but this recipe is deliciously different, quite filling, and very easy to make!

For years my lunchbox revolved around a sandwich. Although I've become more creative with my lunches over the past few plant based years, I still love going back to the classic sandwich with two sides option.

vegetable broth
 1 onion, diced
 2 garlic cloves, minced
 1 green bell pepper, seeded and diced
 ½ c tomato sauce
 2 tbsp ketchup
 1 tbsp prepared yellow mustard
 1 tbsp Dijon mustard
 1 tbsp low-sodium soy sauce or gluten-free tamari
 1 tsp Vegan Worcestershire Sauce (optional)
 2 ½ c cooked lentils
 ¼ tsp ground cumin
 1-2 tbsp brown sugar hot sauce or cayenne pepper
 smoked paprika

Line a large skillet with a thin layer of vegetable broth and saute onion, garlic, and bell peppers until onion is translucent, bell peppers have softened and turned a mellow green, and most of the broth has evaporated. Add remaining ingredients (hot sauce or cayenne as desired, plus a few dashes of smoked paprika) and stir to combine. Warm, stirring occasionally, over low, and then serve.



Meatloaf Bites

Makes 8

Gluten-free, Quick, Budget

One afternoon I grabbed what I thought was corn from the freezer but later realized it was mixed vegetables. Once they thawed on the counter I knew they weren't going back in, so I looked for a new, inventive way to use them. A can of kidney beans started calling, and before I knew it I had a vegetable-filled meatloaf in the oven. Since this meatloaf is baked in a muffin tin (great for serving sizes and portion control), I call it meatloaf "bites" and, yes, leftovers are great as a burger!

- 1 15-oz can kidney beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 tbsp onion powder
- 1 tbsp garlic powder
- 1 tbsp Italian seasoning
- 1 tbsp chili powder (add another 1 tsp if you like it spicy)
- 3 tbsp ketchup
- 2 tbsp mustard
- 1 tbsp Vegan Worcestershire Sauce (recipe in full cookbook)
- 1 c frozen mixed vegetables, thawed
- 6 tbsp instant oats

Preheat oven to 350°F. Line a muffin tin with paper liners or use nonstick. Mash beans in a bowl with fork or potato masher until well mashed. Add remaining ingredients, except oats, and stir to combine. Stir in oats. Spoon into muffin tin and pack down. Bake for 20 minutes until crisp on the outside and fairly firm to the touch (firms a bit as it cools). Serve with ketchup, Quick Gravy (pg. 188), etc.



Microwave Peach Cobbler

Single serving

Soy-free, Quick, Budget, Single serving

After the success of the Mug Cake in *Everyday Happy Herbivore* I wondered if I could make a pie or cobbler in a mug in my microwave. Still working on the pie, but this cobbler rocks!

- 1 peach, sliced (about 1 ½ cups)
- 1 tbsp white whole-wheat flour
- 2 tbsp instant oats
- 1 tbsp rolled oats (optional)
- 1-2 tbsp brown sugar
- ground cinnamon
- ground nutmeg
- 1-2 tbsp nondairy milk (more with fresh peaches; frozen peaches are juicier)
- 1-2 tbsp vanilla vegan yogurt

Place peaches in your mug and set aside for a few seconds to thaw peaches if they're frozen. In a small bowl, whisk flour, instant oats, rolled oats (if you want a slightly oat-y cobbler), brown sugar, and a



few dashes of ground cinnamon (about 1/8 tsp), and a light dash or two ground nutmeg, until combined.

Then stir in nondairy milk. Place the oat mixture on top of the peaches and microwave 1-2 minutes, until the oat topping has cooked and looks a little like oatmeal. Top with yogurt and serve.

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Dr. McDougall's Health and Medical Center
P.O. Box 14039, Santa Rosa, CA 95402
<http://www.drmcDougall.com>

