

Veg out on *vegan* diet



After bingeing on beefburgers and bratwurst during a Berlin mini-break, *Emily Bridgewater* tried the 22-day vegan challenge. Here's how she got on...

After an over-indulgent weekend eating lots of what I fancied including plenty of meat, I made the decision to get healthy. When it came to how to do it, I wanted a new challenge. So, for three weeks I was to give up meat, fish, dairy and eggs. Madness, you cry! This is what happened.

Pre-diet

I have a healthy and varied diet with plenty of fresh fruit, vegetables, lean meat and fish.

I avoid processed foods but I over-indulge in dairy and crave cheesy pizzas, milky coffees and creamy salad dressings.

I am not overweight but I do carry a few extra pounds around my middle, which I'd like to blitz before bikini time.

So when I read that Beyonce and Jay-Z taking on the vegan challenge and dropping 70 pounds between them, I decided to give it a shot.

If it's good enough for the Carters, it's good enough for me.

Here goes...



Day one

The first day's over and it has been easier than I expected. I've still managed to have porridge for breakfast but have substituted cow's milk for soya. It tastes a bit different but not unpleasant.

Preparation is key and I spend the evening making batches of bean chilli and vegetable stews. It's a good opportunity to learn some new recipes, I guess.

Day three

It's off to Holland & Barrett, where I stock up on nut-roasts, nuts and seeds as well as staples such as soya milk and yogurt.

I avoid the meat substitute items. I'd rather stick with natural goods, besides they look revolting. Tofurkey? No thanks.

Post-diet

Well, I haven't lost 70 pounds, or even 35. But my clothes feel looser and the texture of my skin has improved. I've also felt less bloated.

I haven't missed meat or fish, although my craving for a

cheesy pizza blow-out has really gone through the roof and I admit, I have succumbed but only once.

I found eating out tricky as very few places cater for vegans and, when I did find something suitable, it was bland and dull. However, I've really spiced

up my home-cooking and even my meat-loving boyfriend has enjoyed my vegan creations.

Typical day's diet

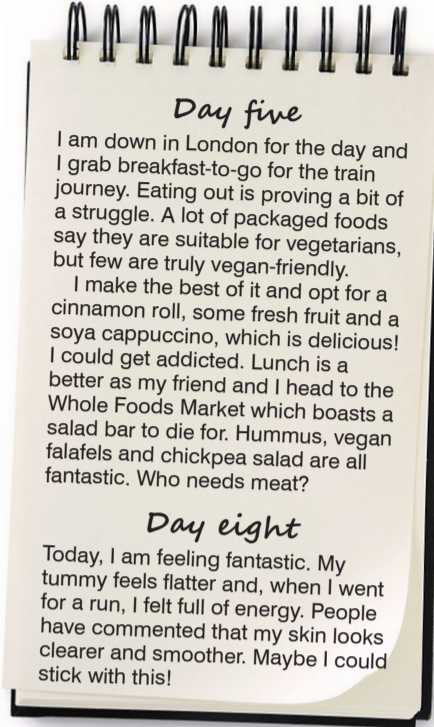
Breakfast: Porridge made with soya milk and a banana

Lunch: Slices of nut roast with

hummus and salad or falafels in wraps with harissa dressing

Dinner: Moroccan root vegetable stew served with couscous and mango chutney

Snacks: 85 per cent cocoa chocolate, soya yogurt, nuts, rice cakes, and lots of fruit and vegetables



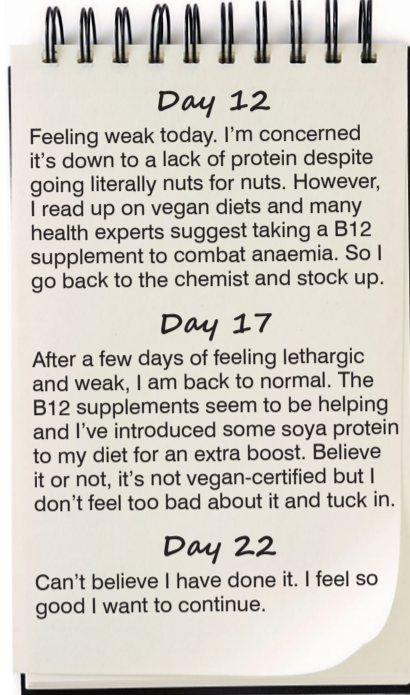
Day five

I am down in London for the day and I grab breakfast-to-go for the train journey. Eating out is proving a bit of a struggle. A lot of packaged foods say they are suitable for vegetarians, but few are truly vegan-friendly.

I make the best of it and opt for a cinnamon roll, some fresh fruit and a soya cappuccino, which is delicious! I could get addicted. Lunch is a better as my friend and I head to the Whole Foods Market which boasts a salad bar to die for. Hummus, vegan falafels and chickpea salad are all fantastic. Who needs meat?

Day eight

Today, I am feeling fantastic. My tummy feels flatter and, when I went for a run, I felt full of energy. People have commented that my skin looks clearer and smoother. Maybe I could stick with this!



Day 12

Feeling weak today. I'm concerned it's down to a lack of protein despite going literally nuts for nuts. However, I read up on vegan diets and many health experts suggest taking a B12 supplement to combat anaemia. So I go back to the chemist and stock up.

Day 17

After a few days of feeling lethargic and weak, I am back to normal. The B12 supplements seem to be helping and I've introduced some soya protein to my diet for an extra boost. Believe it or not, it's not vegan-certified but I don't feel too bad about it and tuck in.

Day 22

Can't believe I have done it. I feel so good I want to continue.

What the expert says...



Veg fest - getting your five-a-day is easy when you go vegan

Holistic nutrition therapist Elizabeth Montgomery says: "Veganism is gaining popularity. Many sceptics believe veganism is a fad diet eventually leading to nutrient deficiencies. However, scientific evidence suggests veganism is the diet that leads to optimal human health."



Pros

- Vegans are less prone to illnesses including: heart disease, colon cancer, diabetes and gout. It also helps lower cholesterol levels.
- Vegans tend to maintain a health weight.
- Healthy veganism supports the body with a full range of vitamins, minerals, phytonutrients and antioxidants.
- Veganism is cheaper than consuming meat and dairy.
- The human body is primarily alkaline and requires an alkaline plant-based diet for healthy blood and body PH.
- Vegans get protein from green vegetables, nuts and seeds. There are also protein powders from hemp, pea and rice.

Cons

- Many vegans (and meat eaters) show deficiency in Vitamin B12.
- A vegan diet can be tricky when socialising or dining in restaurants.
- It requires knowledge to eat a healthy vegan diet. Do your research.