

## Six Months Vegan: Six Lessons Learned

[Saskia Starritt](#) shares her tips and tricks after venturing into the increasingly popular world of veganism

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Image: Wikipedia

In early April of this year I decided to adopt a vegan diet. It was a spur of the moment decision made during my weekly shop, done more so out of curiosity than any other reason. In all honesty, I wasn't far from obtaining a vegan diet, considering I've been a vegetarian for 6 and a half years, and last year realised I was lactose intolerant, so have been since avoiding milk, cheese, and yoghurt. Nevertheless, I still indulged in chocolate most days and never checked the back of products to see if they contained milk or milk powders, whilst eggs were a staple to my diet. Although the swap may not have been as extreme for me as for others, it still presented challenges.

Veganism isn't easy, but it also is no where near as difficult as I expected. I rarely feel restricted in my diet, and when I do it tends to be when I am eating out, as it still sometimes feels awkward having to ask friends and family to accommodate to my diet. Six months later and I am still keen to continue eating a vegan diet (I am hesitant to refer to myself as a vegan until I hit that one year mark), but there are a few key things I've realised;

### **Online menus are there to be read**

Over the last 6 months I must have scoured every restaurant menu in my lo-cal area. It is unbelievably dis-appointing turn-ing up for a meal with friends to have zero options available other than a portion of chips or some lettuce. If someone asks you out for food, make sure to do a quick run over of the menu to

see what's available, and to check that you'd even be willing to spend money on the vegan food they do have. If there's nothing for you, then don't be afraid to ask to go to a different restaurant that has more available options for you. It isn't being demanding, and increasingly more restaurants, both chains and local, are including vegan options on their menus. I've found it easier than being expected to compromise with meat-loving friends when eating out.

### **Vegan Cheese is a risky game**

I would say that vegan cheese is the most infamous of the 'alternatives'. Most cheese eaters cringe at the idea of dairy-free cheese, and I am the first to admit that they are somewhat justified in this response. Some vegan cheese is outright awful, with the most overpowering, artificial taste and rubbery texture. However, on my hunt for an accept-able toastie filling, I have found some really good options which fulfil my need for cheese. Whilst vegan cheese does take time to get used to, I am a huge fan of Violife's Original Block and Sainsbury's Cheddar with Caramelised Onion, as well as Sheese's coconut-based Mozzarella for pasta bakes.

### **Vegenaise is your friend**

Cutting mayonnaise out of my diet was absolutely heart-breaking. I am an absolute mayonnaise fiend and I treat it as an essential accompaniment to a concerning number of my meals; apparently mayo and crisp sandwiches aren't as popular and be-loved as I once thought. I was initially very disappointed by the overwhelmingly vinegary taste that some 'free from' mayos have. However, I found a solution; Follow Your Heart's Vegenaise is an excel-lent alternative. It has a great consistency and tastes just as good as any normal mayonnaise options, if not better! Over the summer, even my meat-eating family were inclined to opt for Vegenaise, agreeing that it was a perfect replica of its eggy-counterpart. Vegenaise has proven itself to be an essential item on my fridge shelf.



Image by mhaller1979

### **Listen to your body**

Swapping to a vegan diet can be an extreme transition for some people, and with it there can come some extreme side effects. A lot of the time, these are positive; I personally felt a huge increase in energy when I first adopted a vegan diet, most likely because I started eating much more veg. Go with what feels right, but at the same time, be aware of what doesn't. There have been times where I've relied too heavily on carbs and felt sluggish, whilst there have been weeks where vegetables have been the focus of my meals and so I haven't had nearly enough calories. Make sure to monitor how you're responding to dietary

changes; prioritise your wellbeing when trying to maintain a vegan diet, and there's no shame in admitting a certain diet isn't quite right for you.

### **Dark not dairy-free**

As someone who's weekly shop was guaranteed to include a Snickers or Crunchie multi-pack, the prospect of cutting out chocolate seemed impossible. I have tried quite a lot of vegan chocolates and different supermarket brand dairy-free bars, but I've often found that they lack flavour. A lot of them end up tasting more like cheap calendar chocolate than anything else. Instead of these disappointing tastes, I have found my-self favouring small amounts of dark chocolate, in particular Cadbury's Bourneville (my taste pallet isn't quite sophisticated enough for anything too dark).

### **Utilise Instagram**

The vegan community on Instagram is incredible. There are countless pages that share recipes as well as foods that are unexpectedly vegan friendly, the latter of which I have found really useful when trying to avoid spending ridiculous amounts in the 'free from' aisle. Sometimes all you need to see is an aesthetically pleasing porridge bowl to inspire you to get in the kitchen, and the encouraging nature of the community is nothing but a positive influence.



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