

THE BENEFITS OF WHOLE FOOD PLANT BASED NUTRITION

Welcome to this short course about whole food plant based nutrition. We hope you've had the chance to see each of our reasons for finding this way of eating so impactful. Our short videos can be viewed here: [Annette's Story](#) and [Graham's Story](#).

Having experienced a breadth of positive results, we're keen to outline why this way of eating might have such potent benefits for human health. Focussing on human health in no way diminishes the vital importance of moving towards a more plant based world for the health of the planet and for animal welfare, which in turn can link back to human health when we consider the devastating effects of zoonotic diseases which, as we now know, can lead to global pandemics.



Section 1 - Where We're Going Wrong

An examination of the benefits of whole food plant based nutrition would be incomplete without an overview of where western, and increasingly other societies are now and why our current food environment is making us sick.

What Do We Know About Food And Our Health?

We're gaining increasing understanding of the link between food and human health. Thanks to a growing number of studies, we now know that food and physiology goes beyond the more obvious issue of body weight. We know that what we eat can impact positively or negatively on a seemingly diverse range of conditions eg heart disease, Alzheimer's, autoimmune conditions, digestive disorders, diabetes, immunity, some cancers and hormone dependent conditions (such as endometriosis), some allergies, and fatigue, to name just a few.

What is your experience? Are there any conditions we could add to this list that you believe are affected by diet? Contact us and let us know!

One of the most pressing issues facing us today is the high incidence of obesity and this is affecting virtually all populations across the world. It is considered a disease of modern living. The following graphic shows just how prevalent it is:

- 13% of adults in the world are obese.
- 39% of adults in the world are overweight.
- One-in-five children and adolescents, globally, are overweight.
- 8% of global deaths were attributed to obesity in 2017.

Source: Hannah Ritchie (2017) - "Obesity" OurWorldInData.org.

These figures are from 2017. Have they improved or worsened since then? We cannot fail to have noticed the references to obesity, heart disease and diabetes as being some of the comorbidities contributing significantly to unfavourable Covid 19 outcomes. We know we have a problem. We know we need to do something, we've known this for some time. How have we responded in recent decades?



Big Promises and Little Return

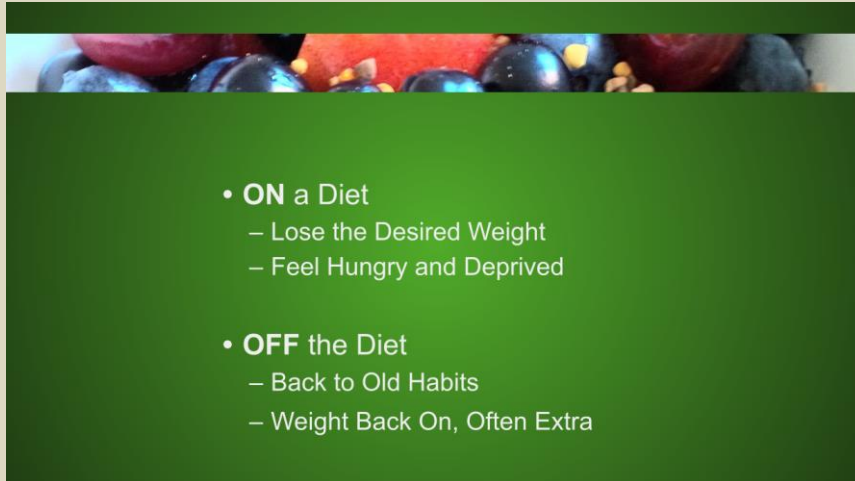
Fad diets
Supplements
Miracle cures

- We have spent billions on these things, but as we speak, the numbers of overweight and obese people continue to rise.

Have you tried dieting? How effective was it? Let us know your experience.

We are, in fact, the first society to go on diets ... and the first to keep gaining weight! Commercially available weight loss diets are rarely sustainable. More often than not they end up being no more than a temporary measure, a step from A to B at which point previous eating patterns are resumed either immediately or gradually. Thus, dieting may enable you to lose some or even all of the weight you were hoping to lose, but because you feel miserable, deprived, hungry or even unwell, you eventually revert back to old habits, eating the same types and quantity of food as before, and you end up putting the weight back on, even more so. Why is this?

This constant cycle of losing weight, regaining weight, and losing weight again through dieting is often termed 'yo-yo dieting'. It's thought that when we drastically reduce our calorie intake as on a crash diet, our body's metabolic rate decreases accordingly. If we stop the diet and increase our calorie intake, it ends up being more than our body requires for our now lower metabolic rate, and so the excess calories become stored as fat.



What drives our food choices?

There are multiple influences at play in respect of our food choices:

- Culture, upbringing and the foods that feel like familiar old friends exert a powerful but invisible force all by themselves. Who wants to feel that they're turning their back on their tribe? Might social exclusion follow?
- There's also the issue of knowledge; did you learn about nutrition at school? And what about doctors? If they aren't talking about food in relation to our health, then why would we even think of changing our often long-held habits? Why do they *not* talk to us about food? Could it be that their extensive training doesn't include nutrition?
- The media is fickle, giving us conflicting information sometimes within a matter of weeks, and don't we tend to favour the version that permits us to continue with the old familiar habits?
- Convenience. We've become used to the notion that food should be accessible whenever we want it and this expectation has been created by a food industry that is only too willing to save us time and keep us from slaving in the kitchen.
- But perhaps the biggest driver of our food choices comes from that very same food industry. Modern day food producers, and especially the big players who have substantial budgets at their disposal for product development and marketing, have made a science of creating exactly the right taste, texture and 'mouthfeel' which characterise the highly processed foods that consumers find difficult to resist. This is

often termed the 'bliss point' which is usually achieved through adding salt, sugar or fat or a combination of these, such that our palates become accustomed to these tastes and we crave more. Add to this the impact of multichannel and ubiquitous advertising and it becomes an irresistible proposition for many.

Section 2 - What can we do?

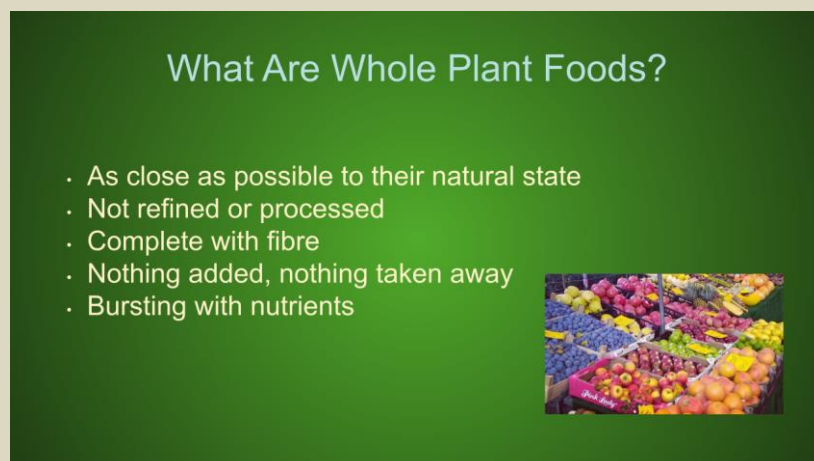
What are whole plant foods, and why might they be the answer?

The phrase 'whole plant foods' sounds clear and obvious, but after decades of food industry foods do we even truly know what they are? How often do we hear of children who struggle to identify a carrot or some other common fruit or vegetable, let alone eat it? Our definition of wholefoods is food that is as close to its natural state as possible so these are fruits, vegetables, wholegrains, beans, nuts and seeds. Inevitably, some of these will require some degree of processing, shelling or cooking in order to be edible, but they may still class as wholefoods depending on the nature of the process they have undergone.

*So, what is so special about **whole** plant foods?*

- Firstly, because they're **unprocessed**, they haven't been altered or if they have, it's a necessary process to make them edible, for example, porridge wouldn't be the same if the oats hadn't been steamed and rolled into what we consider to be porridge oats.
- But the oats are still '**complete**'; nothing has been added or removed from them, so whatever the food has to offer will still be there, and there are no new substances which might compromise the food. Let us explain what we mean by this:
- **Nothing has been taken away**: all the nutrients in the food are still there (although some will naturally deplete with time, this is why fresh fruits and vegetables have a relatively short 'shelf life'.)
- 'Nothing has been taken away' also means that the **fibre** is still there and this is immensely important. We're learning more and more about the vital importance of fibre in maintaining health and even in contributing significantly to disease reversal. Processing often removes fibre, whole plant foods include fibre.

- **Nothing has been added.** Most processed foods are 'enhanced' by adding extra salt, sugar or fat; remember, the manufacturer wants you to love the taste of their food and come back for more! Some are even 'enhanced', not for you, but for the manufacturer and the sales chain. The purpose of this is to extend shelf life, but this may mean that there are additions to the food that are not recognisable as food. Have you ever seen ingredient labels that include words you've never seen before?
- Whole foods are **bursting with nutrients!** The fresher the food, the higher the nutrient content, but it needs to be in a close-to-natural state for this to be the case. Many processing methods inevitably lead to the loss of nutrients, whether they're removed, compromised by additives such as preservatives or diminished, eg by heating such as pasteurisation.



For an in-depth account of what whole foods are and why we place the emphasis squarely on plant foods, please see our [blog post](#) on why we consider them to be so vital.

What more is there to know?

Once the kitchen is full of whole foods, it's time to bring them together for best effect. One of the pitfalls of eating a plant based diet is not eating enough. Yes, that's right, many people do not eat enough because there's a tendency to consider a meal to be a certain size based on one's old diet. Fresh whole plant foods are nutrient dense but not calorie dense, making them a really good choice for anyone trying to lose weight and not go hungry in the process! And the reasons why? They're right here below:

Calorie Density

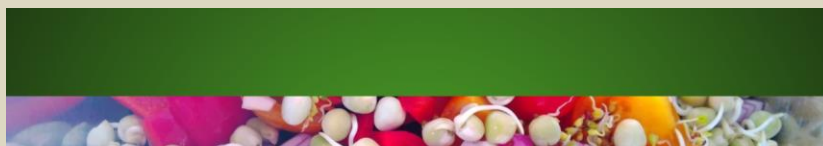
High Water Content

High Fibre Content

- These foods “fill you up” so you feel full and satisfied without too many calories that lead to weight gain.

Which are the foods with a **high water content**? All fruits and all vegetables in their raw natural state as well as vegetables cooked in water or, better still, by steaming. Other cooking methods tend to remove water. Grains cooked in water will also have a **high water content** and the same applies somewhat to beans.

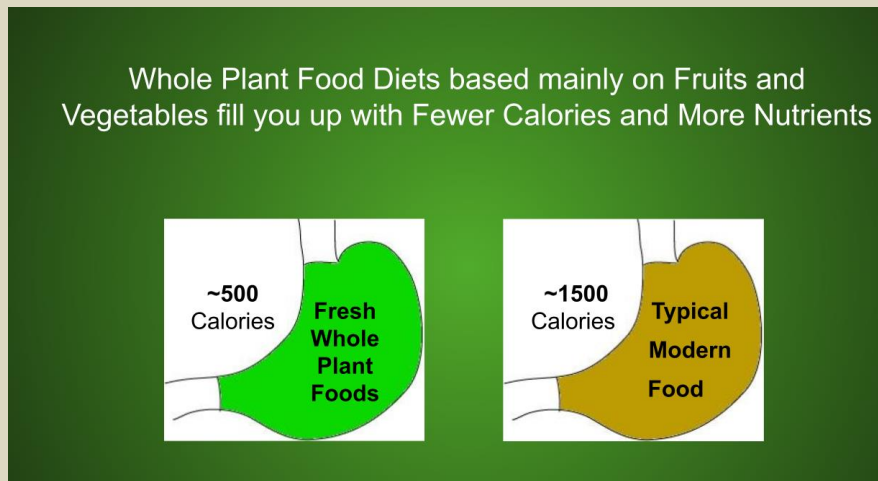
All of these foods without exception are also high in **fibre** meaning that it's much easier to achieve the high **fibre** intake which is closer to that of our whole-food-eating ancestors. In populations where this has been the norm, even in recent times, this same approach to eating has led to a higher than usual proportion of healthy centenarians. We encourage you to take a look at the varied diets of the so-called Blue Zones. Their diets are varied, but they consist of mainly whole foods, the majority of which are plants. They eat enough to be satiated but don't put on weight.



- Various studies have shown that when people eat foods low in calorie density they can eat as much as they want and still achieve their optimal body weight.
- Fresh fruits and vegetables keep you full and satisfied with just the right amount of calories.

Why does this work?

It's because the volume of food, which includes water and fibre triggers the stomach to send a signal to the brain that it, the stomach, is full. Processed and animal derived foods typically contain less water and little to no fibre, but are usually high or very high in calories.

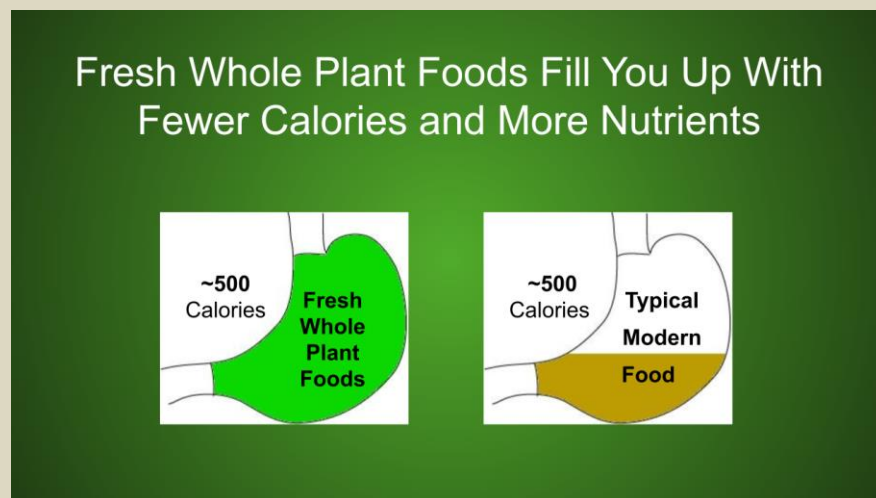


The above illustrates two different ways of achieving a full stomach :

- 1) with whole plant foods, where the emphasis is on fresh fruits and vegetables.
- 2) with a high proportion of processed and animal derived foods

In each case the stomach is full, but the calorie intake varies significantly, with the modern diet being much more calorific. At the same time, it's important to point out that anyone wishing to put weight *on* can still do this very successfully on a whole food plant based diet, and one way to do this is to include a few more nuts and seeds in the diet as they contain much less water than, say, vegetables. The same is true of dried fruit. Modest amounts of these will add calories without the high water content of fresh fruits and vegetables. But all of these foods have one thing in common, they contain the all-important fibre that we referred to earlier. Fibre is indispensable and we're confident that it will be formally recognised as such before long.

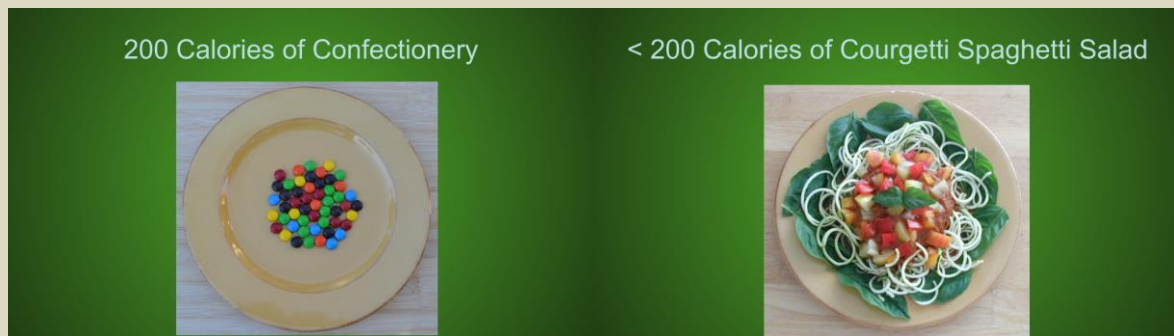
There's another way of looking at the issue of calories and fullness. The diagram above represents two full stomachs, but what does it look like if, instead, the calorie intake is the same? Let's take a look:



This time we have the same quantity of calories, but the person eating the modern diet will not get the signal from the stomach that it is full, because it isn't! And from this point, there are two likely undesirable possibilities:

- 1) The person eating the modern diet still feels hungry and therefore continues to eat more food which, as we saw above, leads to a higher calorie intake. This is a good time to stress again that high calorie intake may not mean high nutrient intake; a typical modern diet is not very nutrient dense which means that over time, this person has a lot to lose. The only gain is likely to be more body weight.
- 2) Of course the person eating the modern diet can exert willpower and stop eating before their stomach is full. This, understandably, feels like deprivation. *And* this approach can only be sustained with willpower which is infinitely more demanding than short bursts of willpower, maybe determination is a better term, to make change happen.

The determination we referred to above is less of a hurdle than it may seem, especially if you enjoy eating plenty of food. The low-calorie high-nutrient density approach makes it possible, and appropriate, to eat much more food. Let's see what this might look like:



Which of these ticks ALL of the following?:

- Is more satisfying (ie you feel full)
- Has more vitamins
- Contains more minerals
- Has phytonutrients such as antioxidants
- Contains **fibre**

We're clearly emphasising fibre, and we've certainly alluded to it being more than just a "bulking" agent, but this is a good opportunity to say a little more about this valuable nutrient.

Fibre

In addition to "bulking up" food and decreasing calorie density, the fibre in whole plant foods has many other beneficial properties:

- Blood Sugar Regulation
- Lowers Cholesterol by Removing Excess
- Removes excess oestrogen
- Keeps Everything Moving
- Cuts the Risk of Colon Cancer
- Certain Types of Fibre are Food For Probiotics

It's worth repeating that these and other benefits of fibre (the list above is not exhaustive) can only be obtained from plant foods, specifically whole plant foods. The processing and refining of foods removes some, or almost all of the fibre. Meat, dairy products, eggs and fish

contain no fibre which is one of the many reasons why reducing or eliminating these can be so beneficial.

What else do plants have to offer?

We've already made a passing reference to phytonutrients, but what are they? Phyto means plant, and phytonutrients are chemicals or substances that occur naturally in plants and are often beneficial for us. You may have heard of lycopene and beta carotene, but there are lots more, many of them antioxidants which are known to have cancer protective properties. Chlorophyll is another antioxidant, it gives plants their green colour.

Phytonutrients

- Whole plant foods are very high in phytonutrients eg:
 - Lycopene
 - Beta carotene
 - Antioxidants
 - Chlorophyll
 - Many others as well



There are many more phytonutrients with many other amazing attributes, but it's frequently the antioxidants that make the headlines. Antioxidants counteract the damaging effects of free radicals which are known to contribute to the ageing process in many ways. Antioxidants are particularly abundant in fresh fruits and vegetables, and they're not the only star qualities of these foods ...

Plant foods, especially fruits and vegetables, play another role in the human body. This relates to the abundance of particular minerals found in these foods and whose inclusion in the diet performs a vital role in maintaining the appropriate pH balance of the blood within the narrow range of 7.35 to 7.45.

The standard western diet, particularly one high in animal derived foods, tends to be acid forming meaning the body must work hard, and use every opportunity at its disposal, to maintain the narrow pH balance referred to above. Unless this is off-set such as by the inclusion of alkaline forming foods (see below), this may lead to mineral deficiencies.

The balance is generally easier to maintain on a whole food plant based diet as some of the foods eg some nuts, seeds, grains and beans tend more towards acidity, whilst in general, fruits and vegetables are more alkaline.



Section 3 - What Have We Learned So Far?

As your diet starts to include more whole plant foods, especially if these comprise a good amount of fresh fruits and vegetables, you will most likely notice a number of benefits including more energy, and a greater overall sense of wellbeing. You will be giving your body more of the nutrients it needs to create optimal health and less of the things that interfere with health. Additionally, people eating in this way usually find that their weight normalises over time without feeling hungry or deprived. But perhaps most important of all: there's a strong chance that by eating a whole food plant-predominant or fully plant based diet, we can reduce our risk of developing degenerative diseases, sadly many of which have contributed significantly to the devastation of Covid 19.

Increase whole plant foods in your diet for.....

- More energy
- Greater overall well-being
- An abundance of nutrients
- Avoidance of many harmful substances
- Weight normalization over time
- Avoidance of hunger or deprivation
- Reduced risk of degenerative disease

This is not a 'diet' in the commercial sense of the word, hence our frequent reference to "a way of eating". A shift to a Whole Food Plant Based way of eating represents a potentially significant change to health, typically physical *and* mental health. And these food choices tread much more lightly on the environment in which we live and from where we source the food that sustains us. Ethically, we need no longer agonise over the impact of our food choices on planetary health and animal welfare.

But is it hard to achieve?

It's much less challenging than is often assumed. Once our tastes have been altered by industrial foods, we are indeed in their thrall, but this is reversible with a little time and determination. This then leads to a change in our taste buds and, as we're starting to discover, changes also to our microbiome which strongly influences our food choices. It seems that the gut bugs that best support our health need the fibre contained in fruits, vegetables, beans, grains, nuts and seeds for their own survival. Once these bugs are sufficient in number and the unhelpful ones are crowded out, they clamour for foods that are best suited to us and them. We then get to enjoy the sweetness of fruits and the various tastes of vegetables in ways that we didn't before. This food becomes delicious!

This is not just another diet, but a healthy and delicious way of eating that you can maintain for a lifetime!



It's also worth adding that creating more simple recipes fits well with this way of eating which means they're often quick to prepare. Here are some of the various whole plant food dishes we've created in recent years; some of them took time to prepare, but the fresh food dishes were mostly ready in 15 or 20 minutes.

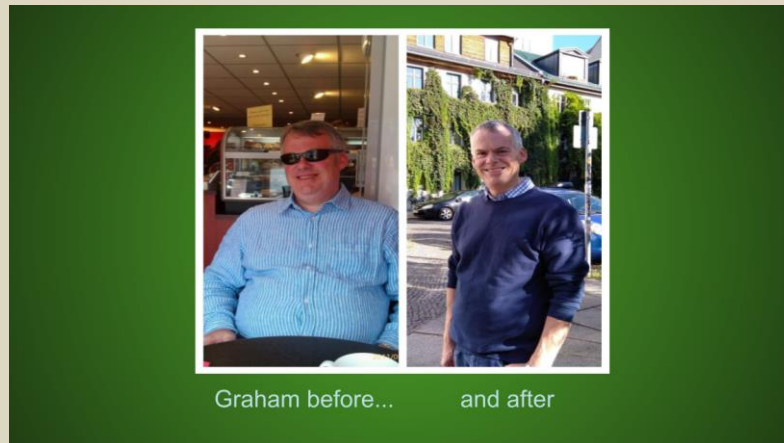


Section 4 - Results and Final Comments

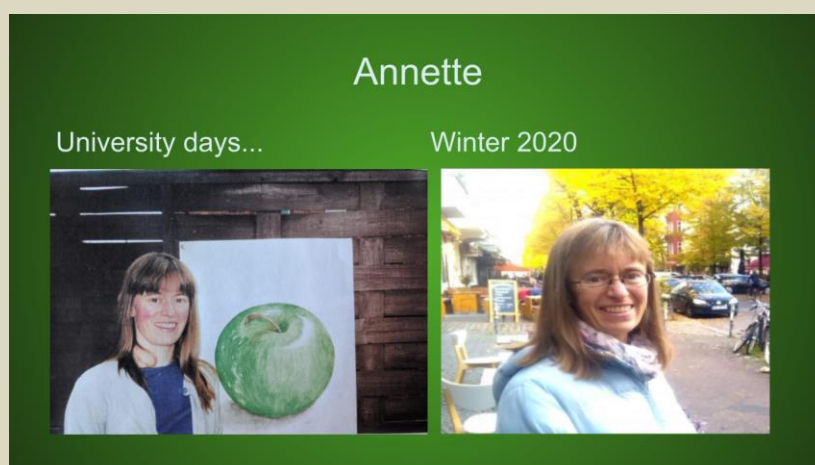
We, Graham and Annette know from personal experience that a wholefood plant based way of eating can lead to what we tend to refer to as remarkable transformations, but is it actually a simple case of giving the body what it needs to create the best conditions for health? We know that our bodies are constantly seeking to keep us well, so perhaps when we give them plenty of natural food to assist them in their efforts, they are able to do just that? Maybe they even reverse the health challenges that have been caused or made possible by the

unhelpful foods we've eaten before?

Graham's pictures tell their own story, although they are unable to show some of the other highly important factors such as lowered blood pressure and cholesterol.



Endometriosis, on the other hand, is one of many invisible illnesses, but what is happening in the body long before a diagnosis of this illness? And how long before? We know that it's a hormone-related disease, and that inflammation is a key component along with a poor nutrient profile. Was Annette's blotchy skin and lank hair a sign of what was to come?



Our wish for you in writing this short course is that you too discover the joy and positive results of a whole food plant based diet, or that in reading this, you're motivated to continue on this path if you're already eating this way.

If you're interested in transitioning to a more plant strong or plant based diet, do take a look at some of our simple recipes which are accessible via the [Conversation](#) page of our website. For a different approach you could download the [21 Day Kickstart](#) app from the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine. With this, you can either do the 21 day program as recommended or you can simply get inspired by the colourful whole food recipes.

Anyone seeking to maintain the motivation and inspiration to continue along a plant based path, wherever you find yourself currently, can keep up to date with our [blog](#) posts which offer recipes, informed comment on food and health-related issues and inspiring stories from other people who have chosen a plant based or vegan way of life. Additionally, we have provided a list of plant based health resources that we consider to be of immense value. These are all accessible via the [Conversation](#) page of our website which is also the place to go for ways to interact with us and others. As members, you will be informed about any new content on this page.

We wish you good health and that you discover, or maintain, an affinity with natural, life-sustaining food.

Annette & Graham Henry

Disclaimer: The information contained in this course is for educational and information purposes only and is not intended to be used as medical advice and should not be used to diagnose or treat any medical condition. Any type of dietary change or nutritional therapy should always be undertaken with the supervision of a qualified healthcare practitioner.