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GOT MY SCORE; NOW WHAT?

By Dr. Kerry Graff

Are you surprised at how you scored? I sure was when I first took the survey! I thought I was eating a healthy diet but scored only at the *Better Than Most* level--not even 1leaf! If you didn't score very well, take heart. You have a lot of company.

Unless you are in the top 1% that scored at the 4Leaf level, you have what I call “improvement” opportunities. If you're already a *4Leaf-er*, you may want to stop reading this book right now and pass it along to someone who really needs it. Just kidding! Please continue reading so that you can fully explain to your friends and family how eating 4Leaf can help them--and our planet.

The 4Leaf scoring system is based on the ultra-simple concept of “plus” points for eating whole plants and “minus” points for just about everything else.

Take a look at your responses to questions 1 to 3 on the survey. If you did not score at least 12 points on each of these questions by eating three or more servings in each

category, you will improve your health by increasing these types of foods in your diet. You will not only get more of the nutrients that help your body function, you will also naturally eat less of the foods that contribute to chronic disease.

Now take a look at your responses on questions 5 through 12. Where did you lose points? Cut back on, or better yet, eliminate those animal-based or highly processed foods (the oil, cream, milk, yogurt, cheese, eggs, meat, white flour and fish). Don't worry; you'll still be getting plenty of protein and calcium. More on that later.

Take breakfast for example. Let's say you usually eat an egg, ham and cheese sandwich on an English muffin. You just lost points for dairy, meat, egg and white flour. You didn't even get one positive point because 0% of the calories from your breakfast came from whole plant foods.

What if you ate oatmeal with fruit and a little almond milk instead? Over 90% of your calories would come from whole plant foods. (The almond milk isn't a whole plant, but it is plant-based and you won't use that much.)

Now think about lunch and dinner. What happens when you swap out your tuna fish on white bread and potato chips for a bowl of vegetable soup with beans or rice? Get the picture? When you swap out negative points for positive ones, you improve your score (and your health) fast!

What about that omega-3 question? Okay, I admit that it is sort of a trick question. If your answer was anything other than "Yes," you're probably thinking you need to consume a little fish or fish oil in order to get enough of this nutrient. You don't.

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Here's the scoop. It is actually the ratio of omega-3 to omega-6 that is important. A diet with lots of animal-based and processed foods contains huge amounts of inflammation-causing omega-6 compared to small amounts of inflammation-calming omega-3.

With the ratio out of whack, we get sick. The ratio of omega-3 to omega-6 in plant-based foods is perfect without needing to add a thing. So if you are eating only plants, you don't need to specifically add any omega-3s by eating flax, hemp, or chia seeds or walnuts. That said, I love a few walnuts on my oatmeal in the morning. Yum!

A word on plant-based meat and cheese substitutes. I don't mean to unjustly criticize the latest generation of those plant-based analogues for meat, dairy, eggs and mayo; they do serve a purpose for some people, especially in the early stages. I just know that, for your health, a variety of whole, plant-based foods, still in nature's package, are your best bet.

Bottom Line. Embrace and nurture your healthy eating adventure. Find great recipes and learn to prepare some of the most delicious meals that you will ever eat. Avoid the temptation to establish your new routine around the processed plant-based substitutes for meats and cheeses. Trust me, you will come to LOVE the taste of fruits, vegetables and grains and you will also love how you look and feel!

So, should moving to this new diet-style be a gradual process or should you take the plunge and go all the way from the start? That's the question that I address in the next chapter.