Why am I VEGAN?

I was one of those weird kids (apparently) who didn't like meat and just refused to eat it. I didn't like the taste and the thought of eating animals felt wrong.

My poor mum didn't know what to do, especially when I developed a milk intolerance when I was seven. Back then there weren't the fantastic vegan options there are now, but we made do with what was around.

I was still labelled a fussy eater and I suppose I was, as I was eating quite a limited diet. But as soon I could get in the kitchen as a teenager, I started cooking for myself, experimenting and discovering food that I loved to eat.

I've been cooking ever since, and I love how varied and exciting a plant-based diet can be. If like many people today, you're considering a vegan lifestyle, then it's important to stay healthy and eat well, so this book is packed with nutritional advice and delicious recipes that are good for you!

Remember, nobody's perfect and you don't need to be completely vegan to make a change, but if you're thinking about it, why not start by trying out some of my easy vegan favourites? Good luck!

Nikki x



You don't need to become completely vegan overnight! But if you are thinking about, it you might need a bit of help, and some of the tasty recipes in this book...

PART ONE

Why be VEGAN?

WHAT IS VEGANISM?

When I first started eating and cooking vegan food, I was pretty unusual. Although there were lots of high-profile vegetarians out there, veganism and plant-based eating wasn't such a big thing. In recent years, however, more and more people are becoming vegan or talking about it – so what's it all about?

Veganism is a lifestyle that doesn't use anything that comes from an animal. This means not eating any kind of meat, but also eggs, milk and any other dairy products. All vegan food is 'plant-based', meaning it comes only from plants. Vegans also stay away from clothes, cosmetics and household products made from animals.

It can sound a bit daunting! How do you know what's in the food you eat? Do you have to exist on lentils? What about when you're eating with family or friends? Is it okay to wear leather shoes? And what happens if you slip up and 'accidentally' eat a Big Mac?

Well, despite what you might have heard, veganism is not about eating alone, denying yourself tasty food, or judging others for their lifestyle. It's about doing the best you can for your wellbeing, animal welfare and the planet. For you, it might mean giving up meat and dairy entirely, or it might be about cutting back on meat a bit or using oat milk in your coffee. It's okay to be a bit vegan!

Remember – in today's world, it's unlikely that you're ever going to be '100% vegan'. In our everyday life, many household products and everyday objects have been made with animal products. But every little helps! Vegans are challenging companies to act more ethically all the time. And you can make a difference just eating more plant-based meals and sticking to cruelty-free products. The more people go plant-based, the more companies will decide to make products aimed at them.

You don't have to go it alone, either. These days, there are more vegan options in supermarkets, restaurants and cafés than ever before. And it's only going to get better. Why not get your family involved? Even making a little change – say, having a meat-free family meal once a week – can make a big difference. And you get to try food that's bursting with flavour, like the recipes in this book.

So don't worry if you've never cooked a meal before, or you're still wearing those old leather shoes: being vegan is a fabulous journey, not a destination. And the more you change, the more the world will change with you. Being vegan – or even just making your diet a bit more plant-based – has never been easier or more fun!

INGREDIENTS
Makes 8

For the pancakes
100g plain flour
½ tsp cinnamon
1 tsp baking powder
1 small ripe banana
200ml almond milk or plant-based of choice
1-2 tsp maple syrup
Oil for frying if needed

For the caramelised bananas
2 ripe bananas
2 tbsp vegetable oil or coconut oil

Other topping ideas
Plant-based yoghurt
Peanut butter
Berry compôte
Chopped nuts

Sweet morning banana pancakes

You don't need eggs to make deliciously fluffy pancakes – these ones are all about the bananas. There are bananas inside to give sweetness, and it's topped with amazing gooey caramelised bananas too – delicious!

TO MAKE THE PANCAKES

1. Add the flour, cinnamon, baking powder, almond milk, banana, and maple syrup to a bowl and mix thoroughly to form a thick batter.
2. Spoon a dessert spoon of the mixture into a non-stick pan. Add as many more as you can fit in the pan without them touching. Fry for 1-2 minutes until little bubbles form on the top.
3. Carefully flip the pancakes and then cook for another minute or so, until the pancakes are cooked through and slightly golden.
4. Repeat with all the mixture and set aside on a plate.

TO MAKE THE CARAMELISED BANANAS

1. Chop the top end off the banana. Carefully slice through the middle lengthwise. Peel the bananas.
2. Add the oil to a pan and bring it to a medium heat.
3. Add the banana slices and fry in the oil on one side until they're browned, then flip over to caramelise the other side.
4. Add to the pancakes and serve.



Niki's tip

Simmer some raspberries with a tbsp of maple syrup to make a topping.

Harissa falafel burger

My falafel burgers are easy to make and so tasty! The burgers tick all the boxes – crispy and lightly spiced falafels, layered with creamy mayonnaise, crispy salad, hummus, tomatoes and gherkins (optional – but I love them!). They're great in a burger bun, but also brilliant in a pita or served with crispy potatoes.

INGREDIENTS
Makes 4

For the falafel burgers
400g can chickpeas, rinsed and drained
1 small red onion
1 tsp garlic powder
1 tsp smoked paprika
1 tsp ground cumin
½ -1 tsp harissa paste
Pinch of salt
Twist of pepper
2 tbsp plain flour
2 tbsp vegetable oil
4 buns of choice

Toppings
4 tbsp vegan mayonnaise
Handful of salad leaves
3 slices gherkin per burger
4 tbsp hummus – shop-bought or according to the recipe on page 59
2 tomatoes, sliced

TO MAKE THE BURGERS

1. Chop up the onion roughly then add along with all the remaining ingredients to a food processor. Blitz to a chunky paste.
2. Heat a large frying pan to medium and add a little oil. Scoop out and form the burger mixture into a ball, then flatten to a burger patty shape in your hand.
3. Pop in the pan and fry until golden brown on both sides – about 4-5 minutes on each side.

TO SERVE

Layer the mayonnaise then salad onto the base of the bun, top with the falafel burger then add sliced tomatoes and gerkins. Spread hummus inside the top half of the bun. Squeeze the two halves together and take a bite!

Niki's tip

Other delicious burger toppings include vegan cheese, tzatziki, chillis and onion rings.

