



LESSON 12: "HEALTH AS A PRIORITY"

In this lesson, I want to talk to you about the importance of putting your health first and how to actually do that. I know that not everyone can afford spending a lot of money on organic, healthy food and that is absolutely OK. There are many ways of making it work on a budget (see the lesson “plant-based on a budget” for tips and tricks) and a healthy, plant-based diet doesn’t necessarily have to be more expensive. So, with this lesson, my goal is not to tell you that you should spend more money on food and your health, but rather to look at a few things from a different point of view. Much of what we deem acceptable on the one hand or outrageous on the other is the result of what society has taught us.

If only society valued health as much as smart phones

If you tell a group of people that you just spent a significant amount of money on organic food, chances are at least a few if not all of them will judge you (with their words, their looks or maybe just their thoughts). I used to be one of them. Before going vegan or even remotely caring about my health, I was a broke college student with a student loan to pay off and three jobs to help make ends meet. My diet basically consisted of 50% frozen lasagna or frozen pizza (the kind that’s less \$2 for an entire meal) and the other 50% were more processed food with the occasional appearance of a vegetable drowned in cream and salt. Whenever people told me to spend more on food, I took it as an insult.

Let’s take a moment to think about this. Don’t you think it’s odd that investing in your health and quality produce is so frowned upon? But walk into a room with a \$700 iPhone, expensive shoes, handbags etc. and no one will blink an eye. Our entire system is built to keep people healthy enough to survive and at the same time sick enough to need medical care. Being in perfect health or dead is simply not profitable. How many people do you know who are currently dealing with an illness and/or are on medication? I recently saw a phrase that summed it up quite perfectly: *“If an apple a day keeps the doctor away, why would your doctor tell you to eat an apple?”*

Health care is an industry, a multi-billion if not multi-trillion dollar industry. Don’t get me wrong, I have huge respect for doctors and anyone working in the medical field and I’m not saying that you should choose alternative healing methods over modern medicine, all I’m advising you to do is to question the information you’ve been given and to think critically so that you can find the right balance for you. That also means that you should question what I tell you. But when you do your research, go one step further. You can find studies to support practically any claim nowadays. In that case, ask questions like *“Who funded this study?”*, *“Whose interest does it serve?”*, *“What were the conditions under which the study was conducted?”*. Many of the studies claiming we need dairy and meat to thrive or even just survive were actually funded by the meat and dairy industries themselves.

Healthy food isn't too expensive, unhealthy food is too cheap.

Did you know that the meat, dairy and egg industries are HEAVILY subsidized by governments worldwide? When I see a steak on sale for \$2, I cringe. It just doesn't add up. Think about the food and water it takes to grow an animal, the slaughterhouse and transportation costs, the profit margins for the farmer, the butcher, the supermarket, the packaging and everything else involved in turning an innocent animal into that steak. It does not add up. So how can it be so cheap (not saying that all meat is this cheap, but giving discounted meat as an example)? 1 - By keeping production costs as low as possible, which means factory farms. 2 - By getting government subsidies. Without subsidies, BigMacs and steaks would easily cost 5, 10 or sometimes even more times what they cost now.

So, if you're on a budget and reading things like "*You should invest in your health!*" upsets you, you're right, you should be upset, because it's pointing at the wrong culprit. It is not your fault that the wrong foods are being subsidized, yet somehow you're now being asked to pay the price for this. You shouldn't just be upset, you should be outraged. A lot more needs to happen on a political level to fix this. My guess is, it'll take decades of educating people and having informed people in high places trying to change the system from the inside (it's already happening, senator Cory Booker, for instance, is vegan and trying his best to challenge the system, but it'll take more people and more time). In the meantime, what you can do is learn the tools to make it work even in an unfair system. Luckily, even with the way things are now, some organic plant-based sources of protein like legumes are still cheaper than most conventional meat. Know that when I tell you to prioritize health, I'm on your side. I want you to succeed and I'll do my best to help you with it.

Here are a few tips on how to do that:

View it as an investment in your future and wellbeing

Again, I don't mean that you have to spend a fortune on food. Some of you told me that you spent more than expected on the first week's shopping list and I'd like you to keep in mind that many of these items can be used well beyond that one week or even the entire Reset. This is a completely new way of living and eating for many of you and unfortunately that may come at a slightly higher price in the beginning (but not necessarily so!). Please don't think that that means you'll always be paying more eating this way. As we move from one week to the next, you'll be learning how to adjust shopping lists according to your geographical location and season, how to get into a routine and much more. The first month I started eating fresh, healthy plant-based foods, I didn't think to compare prices or plan ahead and thought "Wow. I guess I won't be able to afford living this way...", but I was determined to make it work and learned how to. Now I spend a lot less than I used to when I still ate meat

and dairy. Also think of all the money you'll be saving in the future. Prevention and good health are the best form of health care.

Rethink your priorities

Making health a priority also means looking at all other things you're currently spending money on. While spending more than \$2-3 on a frozen pizza would have seemed outrageous to me years ago, I had no problem spending money on clothes and gadgets whenever I had it. If you rethink the way you're spending money now, there might be more ways to save money elsewhere. Making your own beauty products is one of them. Instead of spending a lot on a body scrub, for instance, you can simply mix olive oil and sea salt and get a much cheaper and more natural version.

Become the expert - Knowledge is power

At the end of the day, no one is going to care about your wellbeing and health more than you. Become your own advisor, your own support system. You don't need a fancy degree or even money to do this. So much information is readily available to you. Become as passionate about this as if your life depended on it (because it kind of does). You'll see that the more you learn about how our system and your body work, the more fascinating it'll become. If that seems overwhelming at this point, don't worry, it's a process and the Vegan Reset is here to help you with it.