

EVEN Interview with

Orestes Gutierrez, D.O.

Dr. Orestes Gutierrez, D.O. is a vegan, live foodist and competitive runner. He is Navy trained and completed his Family Medicine Residency at the Mayo Clinic. He has a special interest in longevity, nutrition and sports medicine. He is a Native Spanish speaker and has his medical practice at the Springfield Family Physicians in Springfield Oregon.



EVEN: How did veganism become part of your life?

Orestes: In college, my friend invited me to yoga class. Afterward, we went to lunch at a local health food store. He invited me to try a vegetarian meat called seitan, which I had never heard of. The meal tasted wonderful, however, his question of how I felt and if I felt “lighter” was perplexing. I decided to try veganism for one week to test whether it would make a difference. I was a pre-med student studying biology and philosophy, and was aware of the health benefits and ethical and spiritual reasons. After my 1 week experiment with veganism I truly felt better overall and I did feel “lighter”. I have continued this diet till this day.

EVEN: Who was an influential person in your life earlier on that led you to veganism?

Orestes: Through the SEMA Institute of Yoga and Dr. Muata Ashby and the Yoga Research Foundation in Miami I was inspired to commit to veganism for a lifetime. Also, Dr. Gabriel Cousens, and his book *Conscious Eating* was a tremendous influence in pursuing a live food diet. Another classic book that paved the way for me was John Robbins book *A Diet for A New America*.

EVEN: What advice would you give to a vegan advocate wanting to become more of an activist?

Orestes: Lead by example; don't preach. Let your lifestyle motivate people and influence your friends and family. Or in the ineffable words of a vegetarian grand master "You must be the change you wish to see in the world." - *Mahatma Gandhi*

EVEN: What do you think makes veganism hard for people?

Orestes: I would say the biggest detriment is peer pressure and ethnic culture. I have had lots of peer pressure from coworkers, friends, and family but you have to remain unwavering in your belief. Use humor as your ally, and tell people that anything that has eyes to look back at you like fish and chicken is considered meat!

EVEN: What, in your opinion, is the most misunderstood idea about veganism?

Orestes: That veganism is followed mostly for religious, ethical or moral reasons. I think that one of the most compelling reasons to be a vegan is for health reasons. There is an abundance of medical literature that proves that a plant based diet reduces your risk of heart disease, cancer, and many other chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity.

EVEN: What one thing from your thinking in childhood do you wish you could change?

Orestes: It's funny because I am Cuban and grew up eating a lot of red meat and pork and my family was shocked that I became a vegan in college. I wouldn't really change much since a lot of my dietary choices were cultural growing up. However, I am very happy that I found veganism as a teenager in college. I am grateful that 15 years later I have continued on the path.

EVEN: If you were to mentor a younger person today, what guidance might you offer? What encouraging words might you share with a newbie?

Orestes: I would say transition from a flesh based diet to a plant based diet slowly. First avoid all red meat and continue eating fish and chicken. Then after several months wean off of all flesh and eat 100% plant based diet. Lifelong changes don't occur over night. Surround yourself with like-minded people until your dietary choice have become a habit. And after a while veganism will become a part of your character and it would be unfathomable for you to eat anything that stares back at you again!

EVEN: Do you have a favorite vegan meal or food you can tell us about that really makes veganism work for you?

Orestes: My favorite would have to be an ayurvedic dish that my wife Pam makes that is called kitchari. It is awesome and vegan with mung dahl and basmati rice. There are many variations on this dish, and my favorite is good for all body types and all seasons, prepared with cumin, coriander and cardamom. My favorite toppings are coconut and lime juice.

A bonus of living in Oregon is the ease of being a locavore. We participate in the CSA Good Food Easy, and my wife always has "grab and go" fruits ready. Another "fast food" option that I enjoy on the run is Organic Raw Food Bars and Larabars.

EVEN: What one thing makes veganism worthwhile for you?

Orestes: Knowing that my body is so strong and healthy with a plant based diet. And also, seeing how strong and healthy my 3 kids are on a plant based diet and how much they appreciate nature and love animals. They love to study parasites that one can potentially contract from eating meat. Some can be deadly like the pork and beef tapeworm. Also, there are parasites in chicken, fish and crab that like to invade a human host and have cool names like diphyllbothrium latum. I think it is worthwhile to not eat a hamburger and avoid contracting Mad Cows Disease, a deadly encephalopathy. My 3 kids are the biggest vegan advocates!

EVEN: Any opinion or insight on the future of veganism in today's world?

Orestes: If Americans would adopt a vegan diet they would put me out of business and I would not have any patients to see. In other words, a flesh based diet is the foundation for chronic disease!



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Watch Dr. G. run!

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