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NBA players explain why they are going vegan and vegetarian



SB Nation

Kristian Winfield

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As more information becomes available about the food athletes are putting in their bodies, a lifestyle trend appears to be taking the NBA by storm: veganism.

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Kyrie Irving

After forcing a trade out of Cleveland, Irving adopted a vegan diet and said his energy is up and his body feels amazing:

That's right, players are throwing out the beef and picking up the beets, putting down the chicken and picking up the chickpeas. According to most of them, the change in diet has both helped them cut weight and increased their energy levels.

Someone who identifies as **vegan** does not eat animals or animal products. That includes all meat, poultry, fish, seafood and dairy products. This is different from **vegetarians**, who also don't eat meat or fish, but will animal products.

Here's a running list of NBA players who have made the transition to vegan or vegetarian diets:

"This season I've been on more of a plant-based diet, getting away from all the animals and all that. I had to get away from that," Irving told ESPN's Chauncey Billups. "So my energy is up, my body feels amazing. Just understanding what the diet is like for me and what's beneficial for me for having the highest energy out here and being able to sustain it at a very high level."

Damian Lillard

Lillard entered the summer with the goal of shedding some weight, and according to *The Oregonian's* Mike Richman, he was able to cut 10 pounds by switching to a vegan diet.



damianlillard

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Checking in at 190 lol... strong and fast babyyyyy

He also said he wanted to play lighter to alleviate some of the pressure on his joints and his feet.

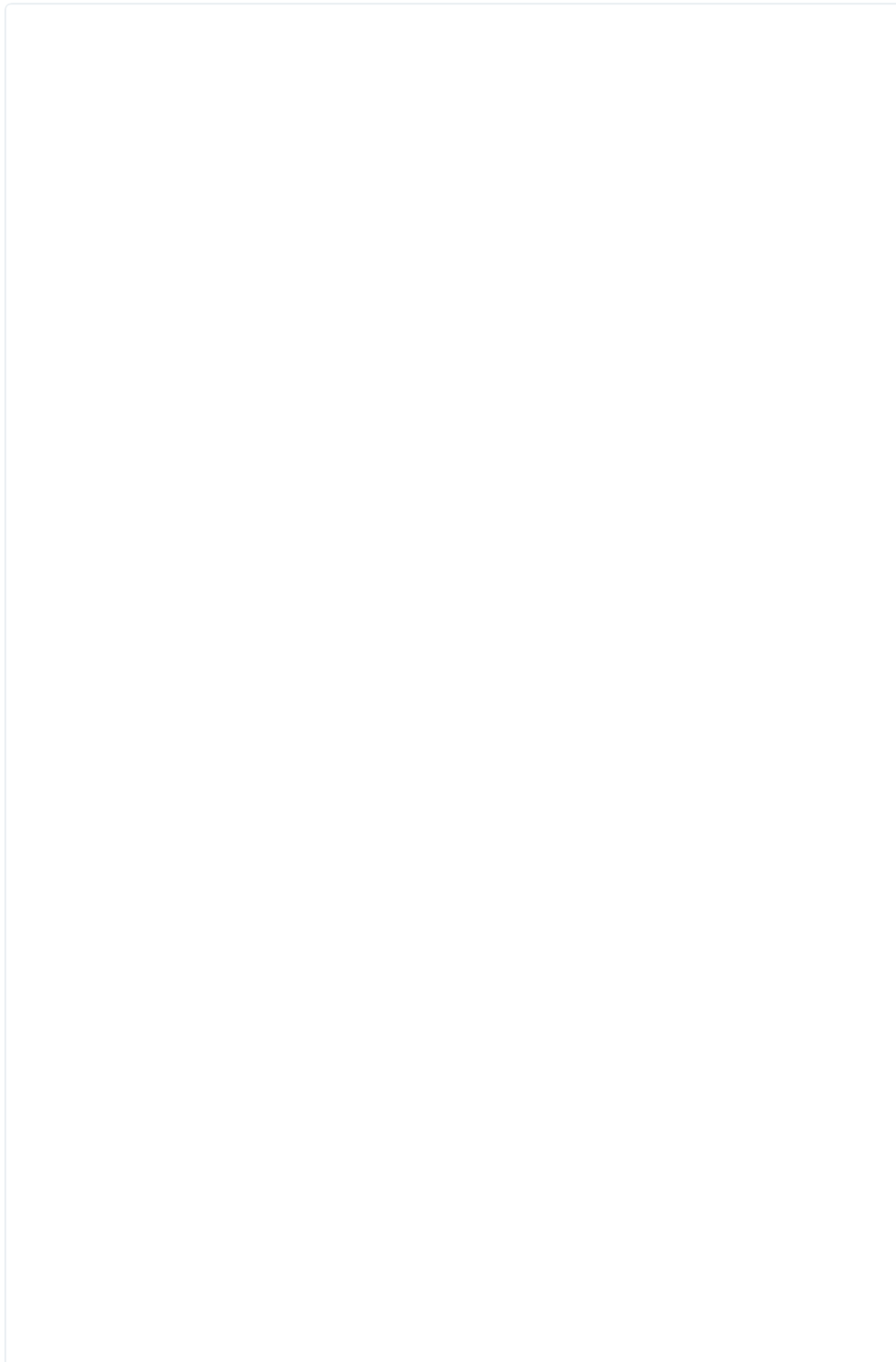
"[I've been] wanting to eat cleaner," Lillard said in an interview with OregonLive Sports' Jessica Greif and Sean Meagher. "Also I was trying to play lighter this year, be easier on my joints and on my feet. ... Getting older and you don't want to let that age sneak up on you where you

just get in the habit of eating whatever you want to eat because I know I'm gonna burn it off when it's time to play. So just creating better habits.

"I feel much better. I thought it was all hype. I thought people just said it just because it was a healthier food but I can feel it. I can definitely feel it."

Enes Kanter

Kanter appears to have lost 40 pounds this summer alone:





He credited it to putting an end to his incessant eating of Turkish food:



"Maybe in June or July, I looked in the mirror. I'm like, 'Man, I see a fat man. Look at that man, I feel fat,'" he said, according to *The Oklahoman's* Erik Horne. "Not just feel fat, just look fat, too. I needed like a bra or something. I kept eating all this Turkish food. I was like, I need to stop doing it. I need to just — the season is coming. It's a really important season for us. I need to be in shape."

Wilson Chandler

Of all the NBA's vegan players, none have been more outspoken about the lifestyle change than Chandler.

Here's a few things Chandler said about going vegan in an awesome interview with Highsnobiety:

"A few things led me to the vegan diet. I guess the first thing to say was that I had multiple injuries and surgeries. Then additional complications: stamina level, inflammation, stuff with my stomach, overall mood, how my body was feeling and working."

"The animals that we eat get their protein from plants. So we're eating the protein that they're eating from the plants."

"Eating a vegan diet has changed my everyday living. I sleep better, I wake up in a better mood, I recover faster, I'm not so inflamed, not so achey. I feel better overall, in everything that I do. I can take in more information easier. My mind is just open."

You can read the rest of his Q&A here.

Also, in an interview with *SLAM Magazine*, Chandler said he went vegan because:

"I think it was just about being health-conscious and then I was just reading a lot and I watched a few documentaries. I watched *Food, Inc.*, I watched *GMO OMG*. I kind of think I made that connection — that's what inspired me."

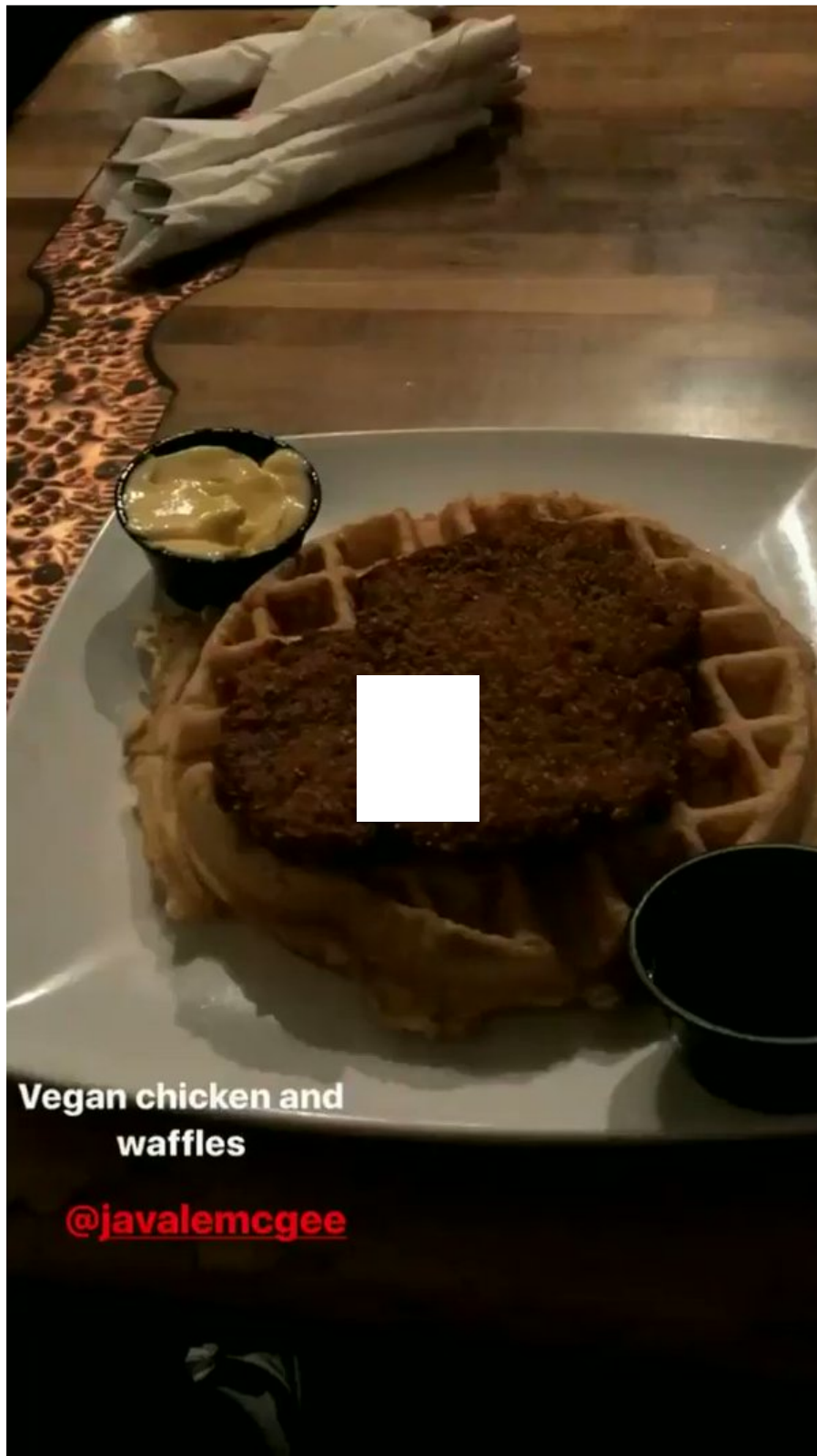
JaVale McGee

In March of 2016, McGee tweeted his interest in going vegan:



He went vegan and lost 15 pounds, according to *The San Francisco Gate*, before making the Warriors' 15-man roster as a training camp invite. He had one of the most successful seasons in his roller-coaster ride career, helping Golden State to its second NBA championship in three years.

He even got Swaggy P to give the vegan diet a test drive.



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JaVale McGee's going vegan, so Nick Young joined him for a meal.

(👤: swaggyp1 / IG)
 11:03 AM - Sep 29, 2017
 39 154

Jahlil Okafor

Okafor hasn't spoken publicly about his diet, but *The Philadelphia Inquirer's* Keith Pompey wrote about it during the summer.

He has displayed a serious commitment to his diet this offseason. Eating mostly vegan foods, he was down to 258 pounds in August. That's 20 pounds lighter than the weight at which he entered training camp last year.



Jessica Camerato

@JCameratoNBCS

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Okafor has been following a "mostly vegan" diet. No dairy, will sometimes eat fish. His uncle cooks a vegan meal for him each morning.

10:37 PM - Aug 24, 2017

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Al Jefferson

Jefferson told *The Indy Star's* Clifton Brown he lost 40 pounds since making the transition to vegetarianism last summer.

"I'm a vegetarian now," said Jefferson. "I got sick eating some home fried chicken. That's my favorite. I just gave it up. See how long I can do it. I'm not saying it's forever."

Asked if chicken was what he missed most, Jefferson smiled.

"Man, you're making my mouth water," Jefferson said. "I love chicken. Can we not talk about chicken?"

Michael Porter Jr.

Missouri's Michael Porter Jr. is considered one of the top three prospects expected to enter his name into the 2018 NBA Draft. His family has been vegetarian for more than a decade, but will make the transition to a raw vegan diet, according to *The Kansas City Star's* Aaron Reiss, to maximize his and his brother's physical abilities.

Via Reiss:

His mother thought she knew best, but she decided she needed an outside voice to convince her eldest son. She needed a “performance consultant.” She needed Graham, a doctor of chiropractic medicine who sometimes speaks in buzzy taglines. He believes in “causing health” rather than preventing illness, and he has five key words: whole, fresh, ripe, raw, organic.

“We’ve found that it helps our body recover,” 17-year-old Jontay Porter said of the diet Graham has helped implement. “We have more energy. We’re better on the court.”

Related slideshow: 2017-18 NBA season (Provided by photo services)



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LeBron James of the Cavaliers drives between Paul Zipser #16 and Lauri Markkanen #24 of the Bulls on Oct. 24 in Cleveland. Cavaliers won 119. 112.

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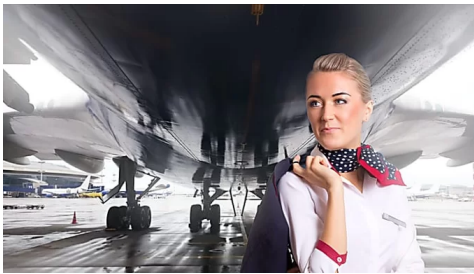
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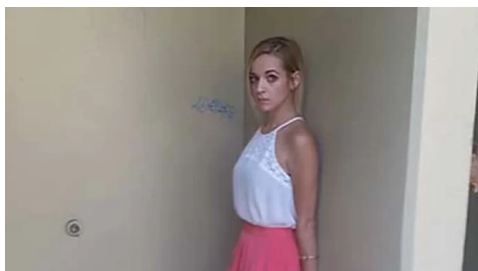
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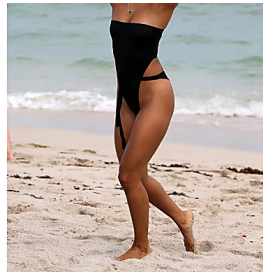
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