Plant-based eating: Read the labels
By Sheree Nicholson

Plant-based eating is riding a big wave right now. For example, I recently purchased a product I've been eating for years, but now it says "Plant-based" on the package. With marketers capitalizing on the trend, putting "plant-based" on the label is the new "fat-free" or "sugar-free" of days gone by.

I do get it: give the consumer a trendy label and watch sales go up. When fat-free was the rage, companies were advertising products made with sugar and chemicals as being fat-free. Sugar-free, also once popular, meant sugar was replaced with chemicals that we now know are not good for us.

A green leaf?
Last month I noticed a large grocery chain promoting its plant-based nuggets. There was a tiny green leaf on the package so, of course, if there's a tiny green leaf on the label, it's got to be healthy, right?

Intrigued, I read the ingredient list. It was a long list, most of which I couldn't pronounce. Processed foods need stabilizers and ingredients to give them shelf life and taste and to ensure that when we cook them, they hold their form. Chemicals to nourish our bodies? It's better to limit or avoid them. Keep foods simple and as close to whole as possible.

One great example is the Beyond Beef burger. This heavily marketed burger tastes similar to meat. Yet it has almost 20 ingredients in it, which would qualify it as processed food. So then, the question people should ask is this: which is better for you, meat or Beyond Beef? That's for you to decide. I would choose the plant-based option and limit my processed foods intake.

About burger ingredients
The point is, read the label. No burger is going to taste like meat without a lot of work in a lab. Experiment with some homemade options that taste differently than beef. Or, try the beet burger at Cooper Branch as it's better quality and just very good. Don't decide to give up meat and then stock up on processed plant-based foods. Become a whole food eater and experiment with simple recipes that are full of nutrient-dense foods and minerals that your body recognizes as food.

The following recipe is fantastic and easy to make. Besides, people love it. It's from Brendan Brazier, a Canadian author, and tri-athlete who first inspired me to give plant-based eating a try.

Ingredients (for two or three burgers)
•   2 cloves garlic
•   1 cup raw almonds (Brendan recommends soaking almonds to improve their nutrition)
•   1/2 cup ground flaxseed
•   2 Tbsp balsamic vinegar (one of few alkalizing types of vinegar)
•   2 Tbsp coconut oil, hemp oil, or EFA oil blend
•   Sea salt to taste

Process all ingredients in a food processor until well blended. Form into two or three patties.

Serve raw with salad or lightly grill on both sides.

Sheree's hack: Soak the almonds the night before as hard nuts require about 8 hours of soaking.