**[00:00:01] Announcer:** Welcome to *Sound Bites*, hosted by Registered Dietitian Nutritionist, Melissa Joy Dobbins. Let's delve into the science, the psychology, and the strategies behind good food and nutrition.

**[00:00:24] Melissa Joy Dobbins:** Hello, and welcome to the *Sound Bites* podcast. Today's episode is about plant-based eating. We will discuss different phrases and definitions from plant-based to plant-forward and everything in between, and clear up some confusion about some of these terms, and share some of the latest research about plant-based diets and the importance of leveraging plants in the diet beyond produce. I'm especially excited to dig into how anyone can enjoy a plant-centered lifestyle with or without meat. This episode is sponsored by the California Walnut Commission, and we thank them for their sponsorship and support of the podcast.

My guest today is Dr. Wendy Bazilian. She holds a doctorate in public health and nutrition, is a registered dietitian nutritionist, and an American College of Sports Medicine certified exercise physiologist. She is a writer, educator, food enthusiast, and an award-winning journalist who maintains a busy private practice in San Diego with individuals from CEOs, artists, actors, to professional athletes, parents, and children seeking to improve their nutrition, fitness, and health. She is the author of several books and contributed to many others, and her business and personal mantra is, eat well, move daily, be healthy.

Welcome to the show, Dr. Wendy Bazilian.

**[00:01:55] Dr. Wendy Bazilian:** Thanks, Melissa. It's so nice to be back with you again on your show. It's always such a pleasure, and you always initiate such interesting conversations that we walk down together.

**[00:02:04] Melissa:** Yes, you were on the show a few months ago, and I'm thrilled to have you back. It's always fun talking with you as well. I'm really excited about this topic because it's one of those topics where it might seem sort of basic, plant-based, we hear this term, blah, blah, blah, but there's some really interesting research and insights that you bring to this topic that I'm so excited to dig into. Also I want everybody listening to know that we are submitting this episode to the Commission on Dietetic Registration for continuing education credits for dieticians, diet technicians, and diabetes educators.

Of course, Wendy, if people are not familiar with you and haven't heard you on the podcast before, I would love for you to share more about your background and the work that you do, and specifically with regard to the topic today, how you got interested in the topic of plant-based eating. I know that's really central to a lot of the work you do.

**[00:03:02] Dr. Wendy:** Thank you. I was thinking about this, and I was thinking, well, what along my, as many of us have, windy roads, or windy paths of our lives, what were some of the initial seeds that planted into a plant-forward or plant-based diet. Oh, and I should say before we start, I am a consultant to the California Walnut Commission and being paid for my time here today to be with you as a guest. I imagine that as we traverse our conversation today, you'll see why and how I might be a good fit for this topic. I'm so invested in the science and the evidence on food, and part of that comes from, one, being good at math and science originally, and two, being a very good eater. I've always loved food, and I did Taco Tuesdays before it was even called a Taco Tuesday. I did plant-based eating because I loved the freshness of a garden. I didn't say I was eating from a rainbow, but I was effectively eating from a rainbow.

I look back at some of the early stages of how I was fueling myself, and it was inherently plant-based. When I went to camp, I was a summer camp camper, and then later a counselor all through the ranks. I would always ask for the, at the time you called it vegetarian, and it was because I wanted the plants on the plate. I didn't always eat it, but I knew it was sort of like the inside track. If you ordered that meal, you got two choices. You got the regular meal, and then you got your vegetarian meal, which would sometimes be a salad or cut vegetables or an assortment. For then, it was like I got more at camp.

In high school, I took some biology classes. I remember in science, and I made a very strong investment in eating plant-based because of some things I was learning about science already. I had no notion of going into nutrition. It was just a curiosity and interesting. Then when I did choose to go to Tufts University, which is world-renowned for nutrition science, I went exactly where I was planning to go that no one on your podcast probably will expect the answer to. I studied Spanish language and literature in Latin American studies at Tufts with a heavy emphasis, but no degrees in nutrition. I took a lot of science classes because I thought they were interesting. They were like a hobby to me.

Honest to goodness, aside from the academics and the diversity of cultures that were there up in Boston area during Tufts, Jean Maier was the president of Tufts University at the time, and he had advised a lot of administrations previous to him and ongoing on nutrition policy. For those who know about Jean Maier, it's another fascinating story we don't have time for, but what was important to me about him was that he had implemented what was said to be the first, I don't know if it's the first, but it was said to be the first salad bars in dormitory cafeterias. I was going on the eating plan, the meal plan, I guess, at college. I knew I'd have to be on that. I thought it was so amazing that there would be salad bars. Literally organically, I've been, stepping myself into this field until I finally found nutrition science to be my area of interest.

**[00:06:28] Melissa:** Formal interest.

**[00:06:30] Dr. Wendy:** Formal interest. My personal and professional passion, and not to make this whole podcast about that, but I think it's relevant to today. When I finally found the degrees I was going to pursue in nutrition and in public health, I went to Loma Linda University. I went there in part because of their focus on international and global nutrition, and in part because they were the foremost authorities, maybe the only at the time of substance, studying a plant-based diet. They were the first. They were doing the Adventist health studies. For those of you who have heard of Loma Linda, and if you haven't, you will soon, it's the only blue zone. It's one of the blue zones that where the longest livers live. The only blue zone in the United States is Loma Linda, California. The entire town is plant-based, the hospital, the grocery store, everywhere. It's plant-based to the next level, because we're going to be talking about plant-forward today. It's plant-based, no meat, but we're going to be talking about plant-forward diet and the science. Why is this interesting today? I've been hearing about it, but why is it interesting today?

**[00:07:37] Melissa:** Thank you. Very interesting and completely different information than you shared in your previous episode with your background, because there's so much to talk about and dig into. I just have to say, one of the reasons I love having you on the podcast and watching you present, you're an excellent speaker. It's because you really know the science, and you dig into the science, and you share the science in such an understandable way. Yes, that curious nature of yours that we've talked about before.

**[00:08:05] Dr. Wendy:** Thank you.

**[00:08:06] Melissa:** Love all of that. Thank you for sharing that. I guess the best place for us to start is those terms that we hear, plant- based, plant-forward. There's some other terms, I'm sure, that are being thrown around out there. Talk to me about those terms. Is there an official term? Are there official definitions? What do we need to know as we move forward with this conversation? I just think it's, I don't want to say confusing, but I don't know that everybody's on the same page. Let's put it that way.

**[00:08:36] Dr. Wendy:** Yes, I would agree with you, Melissa, on that. It can be confusing because some of us are seeking, what's the right answer here. I'm going to say that there is not a right answer, but I'll hopefully lay the landscape in a way that allows us to understand and get to know what other people are talking about when they use the terms of choice. The way that I differentiate, so the most important thing about a plant-based diet, no matter how you divvy it up, and we can throw some words out there, you already started to put them on the map for us, the most important part in what the research has shown is more plants on the plate. If we can start there, more plants on the plate, then let's start to dissect, what does that mean? Does that mean someone's a vegan, or a vegetarian, or a pescatarian?

For a stint, I was an aquatarian. I wanted to be inclusive in the ocean, a variety of formats. When we hear plant-based, I like to think of that as being the original moniker, the scientific term. That's what you will see in the science. You will see the scientists, you'll see researchers talk about a plant-based diet. That's just the term. In science, there's a lot of different terms like that where they get their term and they stick with it over time. Even in the science, you'll see individuals, the scientists, the researchers that are doing this define then what they mean by plant-based in this study.

They'll say plant-based, these individuals were participants of this, maybe they did include dairy and eggs, or they didn't include dairy or eggs, or they did include this or that. They'll even define it further. I like to think of plant-based as the science term, and we can use it, it's fine, but that's what the scientists will use. You'll see that in research. I imagine that you and I will throw it out there a time or two during today's talk, even though I'm going to advocate for plant-forward being our term of choice. I'm putting plants at the center of the plate. You'll see plant-powered as a word, but plant-forward I think is establishing almost like an order of events for thinking about nutrition on the plate. I really like plant-forward.

It doesn't matter, at the end of the day, how you slice it up and you dice it up, in as much to say, whatever term works for you, if we can get more plants on the plate, and if you are a health care provider, I know a lot of registered dietitians are listening to your show, other health care professionals, it's good to get to know what your client is talking about if they use any of these terms, any of them, including vegetarian. Vegetarian used to be considered radical fringe. Now people throw it out there and they get a little confused. What do you mean? At the end of the day, it's about the inclusive approach to getting more plants because that means more nutrition on the plate. It's not about no meat. This isn't about anti-meat. This is about pro-plants and how do we couple them together for a great nutritious diet.

**[00:11:38] Melissa:** Yes, I love that. I think that's a phrase that I've heard you use before, and I think it's really powerful. You said, at the end of the day, if you're working with a patient and they talk about plant-based or you're talking about plant-based, it's really important to figure out, well, what does that mean to them or what does that look like for them. It could be very unique to each person and getting past that, not to say label, but that just scratches the surface. Then you've got to dig down and, like you said, it's flexible and versatile. There's something for everyone in that. That's very helpful in that science and research tends to use that plant-based term, but then each one is defining what that means for that particular study. I love that.

**[00:12:18] Dr. Wendy:** Yes. I might just add, there was a major epidemiological study back in 2002 that studied, I think it was 60,000-plus women. I'm happy to find it. With the conclusion, I remember this very succinctly, that it appeared more important what was on the plate than what was not on the plate in terms of health and promotion of health moving forward. Here we're talking about inclusion, the adding of more, what should be on the plate. We know that more plants, so plant-forward approach, would be a really nice way. Since that time, that's back in 2002, there's been a lot of research, a variety of different angles looking at this and coming up with similar conclusions. Then today I'm going to present some that I think will put another hook in the whole story, which is great.

**[00:13:07] Melissa:** Very good. I know when we think about plant-based diets, we're always thinking about adding more produce, fruits, vegetables, and we know there's many benefits to that. We know that most people aren't getting enough, but we also know that there's more to plants than just produce. I'm looking forward to digging into that conversation. I guess I would just say, what can you tell us about what you're seeing about how people are just following a plant-based diet in general?

**[00:13:33] Dr. Wendy:** I think that the key is that we hear the word plants and some people think, well, some people are confused even by what do you mean plants. I think that we've had side conversations about this, some that are card carrying meat eaters and it's nothing dismissive about that comment at all, but they're saying, "Plant-based, what do you mean?" Most people get the idea that fruits and vegetables fit in that category, the produce, so to speak.

What I think some people, and we're coming along on this, sometimes forget that beans and seeds and nuts and whole grains are plants. There have been some global and cultural food guide, not pyramids per se, but food guides that they put them all in one place. They put all the plants there. On the American eye, it's shocking. Why are the whole grain sitting there with the nuts sitting there with the apples? It's much bigger than that. Statistics have shown that we are not getting enough, and we're not getting enough of those plants in general. Then we can break them into separate categories on what we're falling short on and the great opportunity of getting the variety of plants on the diet.

**[00:14:45] Melissa:** I don't know if you have any statistics, but I usually think it's something like 1 in 10 people are meeting their produce intake, but then there's also fiber and other vitamins and minerals. Again, it's not just about the produce.

**[00:15:00] Dr. Wendy:** Yes, exactly. The probably most cited research in our field about this is probably that 90% are not getting the recommended daily fruits and vegetables in their diet. If we do extend that beyond the plants, we know that nearly 50%, so half are consuming less than the recommended amounts of nuts and seed and soy. Those plant-based sources of protein, and fiber, and phytonutrients, and antioxidants, and other key nutrients in our diet, these are foods that easily fit on the plate and into our delicious diet. Then if we look at the nutrients of concern consistent with the dietary guidelines for Americans, we know that 5% of us are meeting the fiber recommendation as one big telltale. It's 5%, that's shocking to me.

**[00:15:49] Melissa:** Right.

**[00:15:50] Dr. Wendy:** Where can we find those within the produce section and beyond the produce section as well.

**[00:15:58] Melissa:** Yes, absolutely. Great opportunity for talking about plants beyond produce with the fiber. Yes, we get fiber from produce, but other places as well. Yes, we hear plant-based, and we hear plant-based proteins or plant proteins. I think it's just exciting to think about, oh yes, let's take a step back and look at all of those plants.

We've been talking, nobody would disagree that we need more fruits and vegetables. It's a great goal for everyone. If I could wave a magic wand, that would be, what I would do is just get everybody to get more produce in their diet. Again, sometimes this plant-based conversation implies that maybe we're just looking for vegetarian or vegan diets. In fact, I think it was the Produce for Better Health research that showed that about one-third of people that they surveyed think that plant-based means vegetarian or vegan. For those who do include meat and perhaps other animal proteins and want to continue to do so while they're adding more plants to their plate, how can they reap the benefits of including more plants?

**[00:17:02] Dr. Wendy:** I think that the idea is that first of all, it opens the door to something that's a lot simpler than an extreme shift in your diet overall. I love the Meatless Monday movement. I love that that happens, but that implies that you're taking things off the plate and having to come up with creative alternatives. I think it's a great way to approach a more plant-centered diet. At the same time, every meal is an opportunity to get more plants there. I think there's some really creative ways and places that you can build it into the meat, poultry, or fish-containing meals that are surprising. We've talked about this for a while, that there are ways.

I have in a new book that's almost finished writing, I have what I call the holy trinity of plant substitutes and swaps that can go into meats. They include beans and mushrooms and walnuts, which we're going to get to in a minute. It's exactly about including it even in those meals and looking at it and saying, I can eat meat, I can eat these foods, and it's not about restriction, it's about enhancement.

**[00:18:15] Melissa:** Yes, I love that. I love that approach. It's inclusive, it's flexible, it's adding more, it's not just taking away. We know that, but in actual practice, I think it makes a huge difference. I think that there's just so many opportunities there. We teased this a little bit, we're going to talk about some research. What can you tell us about the latest research supporting plant-based eating and foods that fit in as plant-based, plant-forward diet?

**[00:18:46] Dr. Wendy:** I'm excited to share, at least two studies today, but two in particular that have looked at almost what you'd like to know, but I love when statistics and science bears it out and gives us the proof and the evidence. New research that was funded by the California Walnut Commission, which, by the way, I'm going to get back to in a second because I think that the California Walnut Commission has some incredible research to share, 30 years of it, by the way. New research published in *Nutrients* that just came out recently, points to the benefits of replacing as little as 1 ounce of meat, as little as 1 ounce of meat with walnuts to statistically significantly improve. That means improve diet quality and nutrient intake.

We're not talking about, okay, shift the whole meal, let's replace the whole meal. We're replacing 1 ounce of meat and getting significant changes in this modeling study that's been done. It's also borne out in some other research that I'll share with you in a minute. This study is funded by the California Walnut Commission, independent of all the methods and research conclusions, of course, how all that always happens.

I do want to mention them because they've not only been supporting, but following the research for well over 30 years that has really painted a picture and allowed university researchers and institutions around the globe to do independent, powerful research, looking at the nutrients and the health potential of walnuts in the diet and other associated foods. They've done a lot in the field of Mediterranean diet and whatnot in a variety of areas.

This particular study looked at a huge data set from the NHANES survey, that's the National Health and Nutrition Survey, over several years. They modeled replacing half an ounce, 1 ounce, 1.5 ounces, and 2 ounces. People might be glossing over, "What does that mean, Wendy?" That means replacing 7 walnuts, 14 walnuts, 21 walnuts, and 28 walnuts, respectively per day, replacing 1, 2, 3, or 4 ounces of meat in the diet. This wasn't a true intervention. This was a modeling study looking at impact and potential impact on diet quality overall.

What they found, in replacing these different levels, was that with a partial replacement as little as an ounce, they found improved overall diet quality, increased intake of the essential fat, the plant omega-3, that ALA that we talk about, increased nutrients like fiber, magnesium, and copper, a decreased intake of cholesterol. That's no surprise there, but statistically significant because we're reducing the meat by 1 ounce a day. Keep in mind, this is what's shocking. Slightly decreased vitamin B12, which I mentioned because vitamin B12 is typically found in animal foods, but the levels that were consumed by a partial replacement were still above the recommended levels for the day. People weren't suffering deficiencies from this, but this is science, it reports what it reports.

It's a really exciting study that bears evidence to the fact that small things make a big difference. I've heard you say this many times. We say this, small steps, small changes make a big difference, and this is one good example in this study.

**[00:22:28] Melissa:** Just a quick question for listeners who may not be familiar with modeling studies. You said this is not a randomized control trial. This is epidemiology. Can you explain a little bit more? It's observational, but they're pulling data, I don't want to say it wrong, so you go ahead.

**[00:22:46] Dr. Wendy:** We'll keep it simple. I don't want the data modeling experts coming after me either, but for the purpose of today, the researchers looked at NHANES survey data, so survey information that was already available, which is typically 24-hour recalls on diet. Every study has its limitations, so it's important to mention that every study type has limitations, and every study type, if done well, contributes to the field of science in some way. The science was, it's a modeling estimation study of very carefully calculated data on taking a look at these datasets, running them through with the expertise of humans, running them through modeling and statistical analysis to come out with these findings. It's one form of study that sets a stage for the need really for more to be done and to contribute. The idea being that we want to see this in humans, in a human trial, but it's so expensive to do randomized controlled trials, and you have to have proof of concept first. This is very promising showing. There's no harm in trying this. That's the other thing, this is something you can take to your kitchen and try out to see for yourself.

**[00:24:05] Melissa:** Yes. We're going to talk about some of those specifics, but I appreciate you explaining that further just for everybody listening and myself. Sometimes it never hurts to have a little refresher. Just another quick question, we were talking about this replacing 0.5, 1 ounce, 1.5 ounces per day. Is that seven days a week or?

**[00:24:27] Dr. Wendy:** It was a per day. The research looked at on a daily basis. I don't want to make generalizations beyond that, just to how the researchers pointed out that on a, it would be on a daily basis, but I would have to get with the researchers to ask them specifically, but yes, a week has seven days. I would presume that it's on a daily basis on average. See how I did the math there?

**[00:24:51] Melissa:** Yes. The research itself looks at the daily basis.

**[00:24:54] Dr. Wendy:** Yes, daily basis.

**[00:24:56] Melissa:** I agree, when I read through this, I'm like, that is a small change and they are significant results, and exciting. Let's talk more about what is it about walnuts that contributes to this. Talk about the dietary package, if you will.

**[00:25:16] Dr. Wendy:** A few different things I like to call walnuts. I'd like to call them the groovy nut. That doesn't have to do with their nutrition per se, except that I think that they're have been cool on their own. The nutrient, I call it the matrix, and that's what increasingly in our field, we look at the matrix, the food matrix, what are the composition of nutrients that make up that food so that it looks like it smells like it tastes like it and has the nutrients like it. Increasingly we're also seeing that they work together, that that matrix has certain operating properties that has almost like its own metabolic footprint, so to speak. Metabolomics is coming at you strong, which is another field of nutrition, which is fascinating unto itself. Sorry for another day.

**[00:26:00] Melissa:** Okay. New word for me. I love it.

**[00:26:02] Dr. Wendy:** Let's talk matrix of a walnut. Why do we love walnuts nutrient-wise? We can talk flavor and all the other ways. It's an excellent source of that essential plant-based ALA or omega-3. It's the only nut among all the wonderful nuts that is an excellent source of that plant-based ALA. I mentioned that because all nuts have their unique characteristics, and then they have some overlay on where they operate, and, similar, they may have a slightly different this or that. The walnut is the one that gets all the attention for the alpha-linolenic acid because that's the one that has the excellent source.

It also has a multitude of phytochemicals antioxidants that have shown to be very high. It has a notable amount of plant protein as 4 grams per ounce. 4 grams compared to 25 grams and 3 ounces of chicken doesn't sound like a lot, but it contributes. If you look at the additive properties of plant proteins over the course of the day, in tandem with anything that you might be eating, egg, dairy, poultry, fish, meat, it really adds up. Some people are surprised to know it has a plant protein.

Walnuts are also a source of fiber, that nutrient concern that we were talking about providing 2 grams per ounce. It's also a good source of magnesium, and people are increasingly hearing about magnesium for muscle recovery, for sleep and mineral that helps with sleep with restless legs. People anecdotally and even a little science supports it for restless leg syndrome and that kind of thing, the contraction in our body as well. Those are a few standouts there. Even a number of antioxidants have been shown to have some interesting functionality in walnuts.

**[00:27:53] Melissa:** Excellent. We are going to talk more about the fun stuff, the flavor, the culinary aspects. You've got some great information there, but just before we move on to how to put this into action, just wanted to get your thoughts on how this new research contributes to the existing body of research out there. I've heard about the health benefits of walnuts for some time, but we haven't really talked about that existing body of research. I'd love to hear your thoughts on that.

**[00:28:20] Dr. Wendy:** Where I want to put this into context is for everyone, but particularly the listener who says like, "That doesn't sound that surprising," or, "Why is that new and interesting?" What's new and interesting is that the small inclusion shows significant, statistically speaking, benefits in these areas, but it's not the only study. We want to celebrate all plants. Plant forward diet is not a one food forward diet. It's all the plants. What's really interesting is that another recently published paper in BMC Central, it's a meta analysis, it looked at a lot. It looked at 37 studies looking at the partial replacement of meat with plants, a variety of plants, not just nuts or seeds or whole grains, but a variety. It was substituting the impact of swapping some of the animal based foods with some plant based foods. I use plant based there because we're talking about the science right now. Evaluated the risk on heart disease, Type 2 diabetes and all-cause mortality.

This study, this meta analysis of 37 studies found evidence suggesting that substituting one serving per day of processed meat, so less than 2 ounces of some processed meat, with one serving per day of nuts, such as walnuts, and then it looked at some other foods as well, but we're focusing right now, I'm just to give you an example, the swap of one serving per day of nuts, such as walnuts, was beneficially associated with cardiometabolic health. In other words, lowering risk of heart disease and Type 2 diabetes.

It further substantiated in a breadth of studies across them, looking at a variety of plants that showed benefit that some risk reduction in heart disease, diabetes, and all-cause mortality could be achieved by small changes again by substituting out partially some of our meat with plant foods.

**[00:30:30] Melissa:** Very good. Let's talk about how people can put this into action. I know you have some great tips. I look forward to hearing those. Also not just what we can do on our own plates and our own diets, but as health professionals, how we can help our patients and the public.

**[00:30:47] Dr. Wendy:** The best choice we can make on a daily basis for immediate return on our investment at least three times a day is putting stuff in our mouth and digesting food that has good nutrition as well as good flavor. We can talk about this today, and you might go and try it. Your listeners might go and try something or recommend it. If it doesn't taste good again and again or reap the rewards that we're seeking, we might not return to do it.

I always start there. We've got to love what we're eating, and we get at least three opportunities a day and snacks if you add it that way. I love the personality of walnuts. I want to talk about this research. How do we substitute or swap in for that 1 ounce or 2 ounces or 3 ounces on a daily basis? I mentioned before I call 'em the groovy nut. They're groovy because they've got grooves, right?

**[00:31:38] Melissa:** Right.

**[00:31:39] Dr. Wendy:** They're groovy and they've got a crunch that can be made crunchier by toasting them. We could talk about that if you want. They've got actually a softness or a meatiness that can be made even chewier by either soaking or marinating or grinding them up. There's a lot of things that we can do if you start thinking there.

Walnuts go equally well. Sweet, which may be more traditional American diet style, baked goods, and whatnot, and on salads and toppings and snack foods. They can go savory very, very well and have been used around the globe for a long time into savory food. They're groovy, they're versatile, they take on flavor, the grooves increase the surface area. I love using herbs and spices with them. How do we do this when we're trying to work this plant-forward diet approach?

The most obvious wonderful way, and then I'm going to give you lots of others, is making a taco meat that is either part meat and part ground walnuts, and all kinds of spices that make it like taco meat, a chorizo, so to speak, or a taco meat. That's probably the easiest way. You grind them together, they resemble each other. You'd be hard-pressed to have anyone reject that if they like ground meat taco meat for a bowl or a burrito or any kind of thing like that. That one is a real shoo-in for adding walnuts and substituting part of the meat isn't a ground meat.

**[00:33:12] Melissa:** It sounds easy to start.

**[00:33:13] Dr. Wendy:** Yes, easy. I've forwarded to you, and so hopefully you'll have posted in your show notes, the anatomy of a grain bowl, which is this handout that I developed that is talking about the crazy trend that is our grain bowls these days. It has a walnut chorizo recipe on this anatomy of a grain bowl, and it gives you a puzzle to put together to make your own grain bowl however you wish.

**[00:33:40] Melissa:** Oh, I love that.

**[00:33:41] Dr. Wendy:** It might have a variety of protein sources and some more plants from fruits and vegetables and herbs and spices and all kinds of good stuff on it. You'll have that. That one's one shoo-in, is where you'd find ground beef or ground turkey shop in some walnuts that's super easy. Some other places are making meatballs, are making meatloaf that you can very quickly change the recipe without anyone noticing except for good things, frankly and boost the nutrition a quarter swap, a quarter however much ground beef, and swap out a quarter to a third, to even as much as a half. If you want to go all plant-based, there are ways and recipes to go all the way to vegan, but you don't have to. You can swap in just a little and change up the recipe just a little bit there.

Do you have some favorite ways? I've got more to share there, but curious if you've done some things.

**[00:34:35] Melissa:** I'm not the culinary expert here. I will tell you that I tried a new recipe last night. It was just a pasta with some spinach and it called for chopped nuts. I tried that and I thought, "Oh, this would go great with salmon." I made some salmon to go with it. Just even something as simple as that, it's not a typical recipe, it was a new recipe that I tried. Just mixing all that with the pasta and the spinach and the nuts, and I think there was capers or something.

**[00:35:05] Dr. Wendy:** Oh, delicious.

**[00:35:06] Melissa:** Just mixing that together was simple, right?

**[00:35:09] Dr. Wendy:** Yes. Let's keep it simple. Let's think of them as they're friends to stir fry. Whether you're making a stir fry, a chicken stir fry or a beef stir fry, or you're making fajitas, I'm translating it across different cultural eating patterns here, but anything that you're going to throw into the sauté pan, you can use walnuts. They cook really well also. You can make sloppy Joe's. Is that even a thing? Maybe I should bring it back. Sloppy Joes these days, I grew up on it. Sloppy Joe's, you can chop in some walnuts there or stuffed peppers. Another kind of classic go-to that you can prep in advance. You can do stuff like bell peppers. The thing that I love about some of these feel-good comfort foods is that you literally in your brain can be like, "I'm actually boosting the nutrition here too." It's not on the sly, but it's amazing that what you're doing is just creating a bump up while you're doing some of the substitutions and swapping in.

You can go a multitude of ways. Walnuts pair really nicely with sweet potatoes. There's a recipe on the walnuts that we're excited about, a falafel that has walnuts chopped into it. Because they can be chopped and because their texture can change and because they can either be two-ear crunchy, depending, they have a versatility that I think has been under-explored, but hopefully, it will change.

**[00:36:35] Melissa:** I'm a huge fan of not crunchy, crunchy, but that range from chewy to crunchy and just that texture. I just love having that, whether it's in a salad or just anything. I am always craving that. That's a great benefit just from a-- the flavor's great, the nutrition's great, but then there's the texture aspect.

**[00:36:57] Dr. Wendy:** Yes. Sometimes it's about a uniform texture. I've learned from some great chefs, sometimes you want a uniform texture, so you want to chop to the smallest particle size. If you're making a grain salad with vegetables, you chop them down on purpose sometimes so that it's all consistent across. Other times you do it on purpose to have contrast so that you have big and small crunchy and smooth. Playing with that really impacts, what I'm hearing, impacts the experience.

**[00:37:31] Melissa:** Right. Like with the stir fry, I can imagine that you've got maybe some chicken or something, and that's a little mouthfeel to that. Then you've got the stir fried vegetables, but then with the nuts, it's a different kind of crunch to it.

**[00:37:46] Dr. Wendy:** It picks up flavor. The amazing thing I feel like is walnuts are far from a one-trick pony like I've just described, but they actually pull in flavor or they attach to the grooves in an interesting way.

**[00:38:01] Melissa:** It holds onto it.

**[00:38:02] Dr. Wendy:** Yes. You get it into a stir fry and it will take on a characteristic of the flavors of that stir fryer. You get it into a meatloaf and it takes that on, or get it into this chorizo, this is actually a totally plant-based. It's all plants, the chorizo, but you can certainly add meat to it. It takes on all the spices, it has beans in it also. You're getting plant-forward in a variety of ways by making delicious tweaks to your diet.

**[00:38:31] Melissa:** Excellent. I'll definitely include the harvest grain bowl. Is that what it's called? The harvest grain bowl?

**[00:38:36] Dr. Wendy:** Yes.

**[00:38:37] Melissa:** Handout. I love resources like that that gives you the roadmap and then you pick, okay, well, what kind of beans do I want to use, what kind of grain do I want to use, and so on.

**[00:38:49] Dr. Wendy:** It's like mix and match, or choose your own adventure, whatever. [laughs]

**[00:38:53] Melissa:** Yes. I love that. As we're wrapping up, let's do a recap, the bottom-line takeaway for our listeners. Of course, as you said, we've got health professionals listening, we've got the general public listening, and all of us people, we just eat. A recap and some takeaways for our listeners from the research to the recipes.

**[00:39:15] Dr. Wendy:** I would start with the word. You can call it plant-based or plant-forward. The idea is that you get the plants front and center, and that they have the value of coming in into this dietary eating pattern. When you're reading the science, you will hear plant-based though. Plant forward is I think just so much friendlier. It's like plant friendly. It really articulates what should be on the plate, and that we know that replacing from this most recent research that replacing just 1 to 1.5 ounces of meat, a very small shift replacing that, which is less than a small burger.

3 ounces is a small one, you can't even find that, but that's what they say is a standard. Less than half of a 3 ounce serving of meat with walnuts may improve diet quality overall. Some of those nutrients that I talked about and make improvements on your diet. Then to do that broadly across the diet, we see that plants in general, if you incorporate them where meat was or is in your diet, and that you don't have to replace all of it to get those benefits.

Then the other one I just want to underscore is that walnuts have that versatility. They're slam dunk nutrition. I always start with that. Why are we talking about the food? I'm like you, registered dietician nutritionist. We like it because it's high in nutrition already. The recipes that include them on their own or in a substitution to meat, they have a unique personality, I think, because they can be chameleon-like into some of our meals or complement in a crunch or a chew, like we were talking about, so that it provides the benefits. At the end of the day, why do we eat? Because it tastes good.

**[00:41:08] Melissa:** Exactly.

**[00:41:09] Dr. Wendy:** Then we'll have that. It's a really nice practical option in making these partial substitutions into our meat-friendly also, fish-friendly, poultry-friendly diet as well. Plant-forward is not anti-meat, it is pro-plants.

**[00:41:25] Melissa:** Love it. It's not anti-meat, it's pro-plants. I love that. I keep my walnuts in the freezer. Is that a good option? Is that what you recommend?

**[00:41:34] Dr. Wendy:** You can certainly store them in the freezer as you're doing, Melissa, but you can also go between uses in the refrigerator. As long as it's an airtight container, if you store them in there, then they're easy access. They're in your line of sight and you can pull them out for whatever you need. They can come right out of the freezer because they have a nice high fat content. They don't freeze solid, low water content. You can, you can take them right out of the freezer if that's your preference.

**[00:42:02] Melissa:** Great, awesome. Where can people find more about this topic and connect with you online? I'm sure there's some websites and social media handles. Of course I'll have all of these links in my show notes at soundbitesrd.com.

**[00:42:17] Dr. Wendy:** I would encourage them to go see your show notes, first and foremost, but if you go to walnuts.org, that's the house, the home to so much research, so many tips that, the 30 years of research I talked about, recipes so that you can start including them in a variety of ways, easily searchable handouts. If you're a health professional or just an avid health enthusiast who wants to get some more tips on not only incorporating them in, but why they matter, then walnuts.org is the place to go. I can be found in a variety of places. I have a website too. wendybazilian.com is my website, and you can get ahold of me there. You can find me lots of different places, Melissa, and I'm happy to come through friends as well.

**[00:43:03] Melissa:** Excellent. Thank you. I know everybody listening, you're probably on the go, so wendybazillion.com, walnuts.org. For some reason, I get a lot of questions, where are the show notes. They're at soundbitesrd.com. I feel like a broken record. Then the specific links will be, like if you're searching around on walnuts.org and there's something that we mentioned that you can't find, go to my show notes at soundbitesrd.com. There's, like Dr. Wendy said, research, recipes, the anatomy of a grain bowl. This is a great resource that we're going to include as well.

Wendy, before I let you go, I was just curious if there's anything that you're working on that you'd like to share with us. I'm really excited about a new award that you're receiving. I'm going to steal your thunder. I want you to share that.

**[00:43:49] Dr. Wendy:** Thank you, Melissa. I am working on a number of things. One of which is a new book that I'm, you can probably hear me sweating, the final moments of that that will come out later this year.

**[00:44:01] Melissa:** Great.

**[00:44:02] Dr. Wendy:** I did receive an award. I was honored with one of the highest professional awards for our profession from the Academy of Nutrition Dietetics called the Distinguished Lecturer Award for my contribution to our field. I was invited to deliver a major presentation this year, 2024, in Minneapolis at our Food and Nutrition Conference and Expo. I am delighted, excited, nervous, and I'm looking forward to seeing a lot of peers, friends, and anyone who's listening, if you want to come, I'll get you a ticket.

**[00:44:40] Melissa:** I'm first in line. I will be there. I am so excited for you. You are so deserving of this award. You're a phenomenal speaker and just so science-focused and just so personable and relatable. Congratulations on that. I look forward to your book. Thank you so much for coming on the show again. This has been a fun conversation, and I hope that everybody listening will put some of this stuff into action.

**[00:45:06] Dr. Wendy:** Thank you so much for your support. It means the world to me.

**[00:45:10] Melissa:** If you are listening and you liked this episode, share it with a friend, tell someone about the podcast. As always, enjoy your food with health in mind. Till next time.

**[00:45:23] Announcer:** For more information, visit soundbitesrd.com. This podcast does not provide medical advice. It is for informational purposes only. Please see a registered dietician for individualized advice. Music by Dave Burke, produced by JAG in Detroit Podcasts. Copyright, Sound Bites, Inc. All rights reserved.

**[00:45:50] [END OF AUDIO]**