It may not sound like much, but changing your diet even slightly can have a big impact on your own health and the health of the planet. When taken at scale, we now know just how powerful our individual actions can be.

One way any of us can help the environment while also improving our own health is to eat less meat! An increasing number of studies show that just reducing the amount of meat in our diets and, instead, eating more fruits, vegetables, grains, nuts and seeds, can have a big impact.

Adopting a plant-rich diet doesn’t have to mean giving up all meat. Reducing the amount of meat you eat and gradually introducing more plant-based items into a diet is a great way to start. Even reducing your weekly meat consumption by the equivalent of 1 burger or 2 pieces of chicken is enough to make an impact over your lifetime.

The popularity of going more “plant-based” is on the rise. According to a Johns Hopkins study, 2/3 of Americans are already reducing the amount of meat they consume.\(^1\)

As plant-based diets become main-stream, major meat producers, including JBS, Tyson, and Cargill, are making or investing in plant-based proteins that will replace meat in our diets.\(^2\) In July 2019, Impossible Foods reported that they were actually running out of their signature meatless patties. Over 5,000 restaurants served their meatless products, and by the end of the year, with the help of fast food chains adopting their meatless options into their menus, that figure would likely reach 17,000.\(^3\)

Top Actions I Can Take for a Healthy Planet:

ADOPT A PLANT-RICH DIET

For 40 years, our team at Rare has worked on behavior change campaigns in over 450 community-led projects in 60 countries improving the lives of millions who depend on natural resources. As part of our “Make It Personal” Campaign, we identified 7 key behaviors that offer the most potential for climate impact if adopted by individual Americans. The goal of Rare’s Make it Personal campaign is to encourage 10% of Americans to adopt at least 1 of these 7 actions. **If we all do our part, we can reduce the emissions that are driving the impacts of climate change.**
Evidence around adopting a plant-rich diet from a health standpoint is significant. Health is perhaps the biggest reason people are shifting to a more plant-based diet. By simply reducing your meat consumption, you can lower your risk of numerous chronic illnesses including heart disease, cancer, and diabetes, and in some cases, reverse the effects these illnesses have on the body.

Less Meat = More Savings. When we think of eating on a budget, we tend to lean towards unhealthy, processed food. But it turns out you can save nearly $750 a year by eating more fruits, vegetables and grains. Cambridge University Press cited that a main motivation for reducing meat consumption was cost.

Americans consume almost 4 times the beef per capita as the global average. Beef itself is one of the most greenhouse gas intensive proteins in the world. For context, beef has 20 times the impact on land use and greenhouse emissions to that of beans. Reducing animal food intake and mostly eating plant based foods will greatly help reduce our country’s greenhouse gas emissions.

Try new popular new meat substitutes. With so many new brands available in store shelves, try substituting one of the many plant-based meat options instead of meat in one of your favorite recipes, such as lasagna, enchiladas, or chili.

Try 1 meatless recipe a week. There are so many great resources that offer plant-rich recipes. Some of our favorite vegetable-forward cookbook authors and blogs are:

- Mark Bittman, minimalist chef from NYTimes who is a pioneer in “flexitarian” cooking.
- Deb Perelman of Smitten Kitchen, a self-described “obsessive home cook” who uses meat infrequently, but you’d never notice.
- The Theus Family have been vegetarian for 30 years and share their favorite meatless recipes on Veggie Soul Food.

Make it a friendly competition. Practice your cooking skills and try new recipes by hosting a cooking competition amongst friends. Or, compete to see who can commit to most meatless meals: having a partner will help hold you accountable and increase the likelihood of success.

Go local, buy from small regional agriculture where you can find sustainably grown produce and ethically raised meat. You can check your local food co-ops, health food stores and farmers markets. Look for availability in your area at Local Harvest.

Visit rare.org/MakItPersonal for more information.