

## 'Tweaked' makes vegan tasty, healthy

### Buffalo Grove woman shares flavorful Indian favorites in private classes

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By RYAN PAGELow [rpagelow@scn1.com](mailto:rpagelow@scn1.com)

Because you really are what you eat, Vidya Nahar of Buffalo Grove, a lifelong vegetarian, cooks all the meals for her family of four from scratch using only natural, healthy ingredients.

Raised in Mumbai, India, vegetarianism was a part of her family's religion of Jainism, which emphasizes non-violence toward all living beings. She really got into healthy vegetarian cooking after immigrating to the United States in 1993 with her husband and demonstrates her recipes in private monthly cooking classes.

She tweaks traditional Indian dishes that she learned from her mom and books to make them healthier, using whole grains, dried beans, lentils, spices, nuts, dairy products, fruits and vegetables.

"My cooking isn't fancy. It's very basic. But it gives us all our nourishment," she said.

She notes that there is a difference between being a healthy vegetarian and simply a vegetarian because you can harm yourself with a diet mainly consisting of processed carbohydrates, saturated fats, empty calories and foods lacking nutrition.

For protein, she relies on incorporating several different kinds of beans that she soaks for hours before cooking in a pressure cooker, rather than using canned beans. She also prefers brown rice instead of white rice, multi-grain bread over white bread, whole-grain pasta over white pasta, and brown sugar or molasses over white sugar.

"Use as many whole grains as possible," she said.

Just because something is healthy, doesn't mean it has to be flavorless. A dish can be enhanced by adding ginger, garlic or a number of spices, such as mustard seed, cumin, coriander or masala.

She spends about \$200 to \$300 a month on groceries to feed a family of four with vegetarian and often organic foods, she said. She also spends about an hour or two each day preparing meals.

During a two-hour class on Sunday, she demonstrated how to make brown rice with black beans and homemade yogurt.

She also made spicy funka, which are steamed clusters of toor daal, or split pigeon peas, ground in a food processor with hot peppers, ginger, cilantro and spices. She made a yogurt soup to pour over the funka, which added a rich, hearty flavor.

For dessert she made sesame laddoos, which are bite-size balls of sesame seeds, peanuts, shredded coconut and cinnamon, sweetened with molasses straight from sugar cane.

Most of the students in her cooking classes are Indians who are familiar with traditional foods from the subcontinent and who found out about her classes through word-of-mouth or the Internet.

"They know the recipes. It's about how to make it healthier. India is such a vast place, there are different ways of cooking," she said.

She calls her cooking classes Vyanjan, which means condiment in Sanskrit, and is an acronym for "Vidya's yummy and natural, joyful and nutritious."

Apart from the cooking classes, she teaches yoga, pilates, Bollywood dance and card tricks.

For more information about her classes, visit [www.vyanjan.us](http://www.vyanjan.us)

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