



Plant-Powered Lifestyle Mentorship Program Overview

ABOUT PLANT POWERED METRO NEW YORK

Plant Powered Metro New York is catalyzing the local movement for vibrant health through whole food, plant-based (WFPB) nutrition. A substantial and growing body of scientific evidence is revealing that a diet of unprocessed plant foods has the capacity to prevent, treat, and sometimes reverse many common chronic diseases, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, dementia, gastrointestinal disorders, autoimmune diseases, and more. PPMNY helps to amplify the evidence so that individuals, families, and communities know that they have more choice and power to prevent and fight chronic illness.

THE NEED FOR LIFESTYLE MENTORSHIP

As an organization, PPMNY is committed to creating support systems that empower people to change their lifestyles through the power of whole plant foods. Based on the evidence, we recommend that -- to optimize health -- individuals eat a diet comprised primarily of whole grains, legumes, fruits, and vegetables, with limited nuts and seeds, no oils, and minimal sweeteners and salt. Generally, this health-promoting dietary pattern includes 75-80% of calories from carbohydrates (largely unrefined), 10% from protein, and 10-15% from fat (largely unsaturated).

Many people come to PPMNY's educational events, or they have read books, heard podcasts, or seen documentaries, which feature the evidence in a way that inspires them to make changes to their diet and lifestyle. However, many find it difficult to make a complete transition to -- or even take small steps toward -- an ideal diet due to financial limitations, time, a lack of basic kitchen skills, cultural dissonances, family and societal pressures, and various other barriers. Moreover, while some people have been able to access the plant-based clinicians and health coaches in our community, others have limited financial means to take advantage of these expert services.

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

PPMNY's Plant-Powered Lifestyle Mentorship program is designed to leverage the power of the average person, along with the power of personal relationships, to initiate and sustain diet and lifestyle change. Our program connects knowledgeable laypeople who serve as informal mentors and guides with those who are new to, or struggling with, whole food, plant-based nutrition. Some of the things mentees may learn from their mentors to sustain and support their transition to a WFPB way of life include:

- How to make easy, WFPB staple meals even picky eaters will love

- How to read nutrition labels on packaged foods to choose healthy options
- Tips and tricks for eating out while maintaining a WFPB diet
- Navigating and fostering conversations around a WFPB way of eating with friends and family

The mentorship relationship is designed to last 30 days. If desired, the mentoring pair can choose to continue for another month or two, or the mentee may choose to be matched with someone else. When they first meet, mentors will guide their mentee through a mentoring agreement to ensure that they understand each person's personal goals and life circumstances, as well as have a plan for the frequency and scope of their interactions. At this time, due to the ongoing situation with Covid-19, PPMNY's mentorship program will be conducted virtually, with no in-person interaction between mentors and mentees. However, there is no better time than now to initiate healthy, sustainable lifestyle change (the best match for Covid-19 is a healthy immune system!), and the support and encouragement that makes a mentor so valuable is just as powerful virtually. Mentoring pairs are strongly encouraged to attend PPMNY's virtual events together, to further become part of a community with shared values around nutrition and health.

MEDICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Please note that the vast majority of mentors are not licensed clinicians. They understand the simple, widely-accessible principles of whole food, plant-based nutrition but are not meant to replace medical partners and dietitians whose expertise may be especially important for those with advanced disease. Mentors' role is to focus on *lifestyle* changes that will enable mentees to make dietary transition possible. **Under no circumstance should anyone on medication initiate dietary change before first talking to their doctor and ensuring that that individual will help them manage their medications.** This responsibility lies solely with those seeking mentorship, and mentees will be asked to sign a waiver to this effect.

Numerous studies have shown that people adopting a WFPB diet can experience significant reductions in blood pressure and cholesterol levels and sometimes eliminate or reduce their need for diabetes and cholesterol medications over a short period of time. Participants taking medications for hypertension or diabetes should be prepared to work with their healthcare provider to make adjustments over the course of their dietary change.

Side effects from the dietary transition tend to be minimal, including some discomfort while the body detoxifies and the composition of the intestinal microbiome shifts (e.g., night sweats, flu-like symptoms, bloating) due to the much higher fiber content of a WFPB diet compared to the standard American diet. Most issues should resolve early on, though some may linger.

MENTOR RESPONSIBILITIES

- Initiate contact with their mentee, and walk them through a mentorship agreement and goal-setting in their first conversation
- Respond to their mentee within a reasonable timeframe; mentors will be up front with their mentees about their work and family boundaries
- Honor mentees' work and family boundaries, and their time constraints
- Keep their mentee accountable to the goal(s) they identified and helping them set new goals over time
- Refrain from “prescribing” specific approaches to or variations on whole food, plant-based nutrition, but may offer additional resources for mentees who are curious about different nutritional approaches
- Recognize the individual's personal path to optimal nutrition, celebrating small wins even if they are not perfect, yet using each opportunity as a learning moment
- Work with the PPMNY Lifestyle Mentorship Coordinator if any challenges arise in communicating with their mentee, or if the fit isn't right
- Provide support and friendship in a professional and respectful manner
- Attend PPMNY's virtual events with their mentee
- Provide post-mentorship feedback and information to PPMNY for data collection on mentorship effectiveness
- Participate in a mentors' community to learn from other mentors and swap ideas

MENTEE RESPONSIBILITIES

- Complete a mentorship agreement and set goals with their mentor's support
- Respond to their mentor within a reasonable timeframe; mentees will be up front with their mentors about their work and family boundaries
- Honor mentors' work and family boundaries, and their time constraints
- Request help when they need it, and not hold back!
- Work with the PPMNY Lifestyle Mentorship Coordinator if any challenges arise in communicating with their mentee, or if the fit isn't right
- Attend PPMNY's virtual events with their mentor

INITIATING A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

Please reach out to PPMNY's Lifestyle Mentorship Coordinator Sarah Hofmann at sarah@ppmny.org to become a mentor or mentee. Each person will be asked to complete an intake form in order to gather information to ensure a good-fit match. Please note that the intake process may include a brief interview with our mentorship coordinator. Matches will be made based on preferences for geographic location, family stage, interests or needs in lifestyle transition (e.g. kitchen skills), etc.