

What is Vegan Fashion?

By Ginger Burr – Total Image Consultants

The term vegan is a hot buzzword right now and chances are good that you have heard it often. In fact, you probably know someone who is vegan...maybe even you. At the very least you have it heard it in reference to various celebrities from Ellen Degeneres to Alicia Silverstone to Bill Clinton. The growing awareness is certainly heartening. I am all for people not eating anything that comes from an animal, but there is a problem: you are hearing only part of the story.

Yes, being vegan is about what you eat, but it is not *only* about food—not by a long shot. It has a more insightful, heartfelt encompassing intention. When you truly embrace the concept in its truest sense it goes well beyond what you eat and affects all aspects of your life including what you wear.

The true foundation of veganism is ahimsa—the principle of non-violence towards all living things. The truth is that while there is certainly massive amounts of brutality and suffering imposed upon animals to become the food on your plate, there is equally as much cruelty heaped on them to become a pair of leather shoes, a fur winter coat or a wool sweater—all in the name of fashion and beauty.

Why is no one talking about this? Because the general motivation for eating a vegan diet often centers (at least initially) around the health benefits. Eating plant-based meals is good for you and it is easy to talk about what that will do for your body. There isn't a need to talk about animal cruelty except perhaps as an afterthought. But, when it comes to vegan fashion, i.e., not wearing any materials that come from an animal, there are no health benefits. The *only* reason you would do it is because you do not want to inflict unnecessary suffering on another living being. As a result, vegan fashion has had less airtime and it is easy to forget about it completely. But it makes a difference and my passion is spreading the word. Of course, being an image consultant, I also have the tools to help make the transition easy and beautiful. It's a win-win.

The first step in assessing your closet and begin creating an animal-friendly wardrobe is to know which fabrics are cruelty-free and which are not.

The fabrics/materials that are NOT vegan are wool, silk, leather, down and fur. Each contributes to the brutal death of an animal (yes, even wool) and causes immeasurable suffering before they die. If you want to create a cruelty-free wardrobe, eliminating these fabrics (or at least not adding any more of them to) your wardrobe is the first step.

Chances are good that if this is new to you, your first thought will be, but what CAN I wear. The truth is there are still plenty of options out there including cotton, linen, rayon, polyester, microfibers, acrylic, acetate, nylon, tencel, modal, flax, hemp, and

bamboo. The next time you shop (or look through your closet), read the labels of clothing. You will be surprised by how much is not from an animal and yet you still get the warmth and style. For instance, modal feels like silk and many acrylics feel like wool. You sometimes have to look a little harder (especially in the winter) to find what you need, but you do not have to sacrifice style or warmth to create a cruelty-free, vegan wardrobe. And, the payoff to your heart, soul and sense of well-being is huge and ultimately worth the effort!