



Vegetarianism...

More Than Just Eating Veggies

What Is Vegetarianism?

Vegetarianism has different meanings to different people. In general, red meat consumption is eliminated from all vegetarian diets. Here is a list of the most common vegetarian practices, from the most restrictive to the least restrictive:

- **Vegans** are strict, total, or pure vegetarians. They eat only foods from plant sources, such as nuts, fruits, vegetables, beans, and grains.
- **Lacto-vegetarians** eat plant foods and dairy products.
- **Lacto-ovo-vegetarians** eat plant foods, dairy products, and eggs.
- **Pesco-vegetarians** eat plant foods, dairy products, eggs, and fish.
- **Partial-vegetarians** eat all foods except red meat.

What Are the Benefits?

Some of the health benefits of a vegetarian diet may include:

- Decreased blood cholesterol levels and blood pressure.
- Lower incidence of heart disease, some forms of cancer, and digestive disorders like constipation and diverticula disease.
- Lower incidence of obesity and some forms of diabetes.

Why Is It Essential to Select a Balanced Menu?

If you choose to be a vegetarian, variety in your diet is essential to ensure an adequate intake of nutrients. Vegetarians who find their caloric intake is not adequate to sustain a healthy body weight should increase the size of their meals and the frequency of their snacks. It is important that calories are not obtained through unhealthy, high-fat, and sugary snack foods. A vegetarian can be well nourished if the diet selected provides an adequate amount of protein, vitamins, and minerals.

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Since vitamin B12 is found only in animal products, a vitamin B12 supplement, fortified cereal, or fortified soy milk is necessary for strict vegans. Iron and calcium intake is often low in vegetarian diets, and a supplement may be needed for these nutrients. If you are a vegetarian and are concerned about meeting your nutritional needs, please seek advice from a qualified health professional.

Why Is Protein So Important to a Vegetarian Diet?

Protein is instrumental for growth, maintenance of body tissues, and fluid/salt balance. Proteins consist of various combinations of twenty amino acids. Nine of these amino acids cannot be made by the body and must be obtained in the diet. These are called the essential amino acids.

Animal protein (from meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and milk) is generally high-quality protein since it contains all of the essential amino acids and is highly digestible.

Plant protein (from beans, nuts, grains, and vegetables) is often lower in quality because it is less digestible and lacks one or more of the essential amino acids.

Soy protein is one exception. Tofu and other soy foods are complete, high-quality sources of protein.

It is possible for vegetarians to obtain all the essential amino acids needed for health by eating a variety of plant protein foods throughout the day. Many plant protein foods complement each other because one usually supplies the essential amino acids missing from the other and creates a “complete protein.”

What Combinations of Plant Foods Create a “Complete Protein?”

- **Grains + Legumes**
(beans, peas, lentils, and peanuts):
 - Rice and Beans
 - Whole Wheat Bread with Peanut Butter
 - Corn Tortillas and Beans
 - Lentil Soup with a Whole Grain Roll
 - Tofu and Pasta.
- **Nuts/Seeds + Legumes**
(beans, peas, lentils, and peanuts):
 - Sunflower Seeds and Peanuts,
 - Sesame Seeds in Bean Soups and Casseroles.

For more information about vegan and vegetarian diets, please visit www.snac.ucla.edu.



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GETTING THE MOST FROM A VEGETARIAN DIET

All vegetarians can meet their nutritional needs by selecting a wide variety of foods from the following groups. If properly planned, a vegetarian diet can be healthy. It is important to select foods that are low in saturated fat and high in fiber when planning any diet. Nutrients of greatest concern in vegetarian diets are vitamin B12, vitamin D, calcium, and iron, since their richest food sources are meats and milk products. However, with careful planning, vegetarians can meet their needs with plant sources and/or fortified foods.

Milk Products

Not all vegetarians consume dairy products, but those who do should select 1% low-fat or non-fat milk and milk products (3 cups per day). One cup of milk or yogurt, 1 1/2 oz. of natural cheese, or 2 oz. processed cheese can be considered as 1 cup from the milk group. Vegans can substitute calcium-fortified soy milk or rice milk products. Milk is a good source of calcium and vitamin D, but it does not provide much iron. Therefore, it is important to consume other foods that are rich in iron, such as beans, spinach, enriched and whole grains, dried fruit, and fortified cereals.

Beans, Nuts, and Other Meat Substitutes

Choose 5.5 oz. equivalent servings daily of the following protein-rich foods.* Remember, nuts and seeds are excellent sources of heart-healthy unsaturated fat but they are concentrated in calories so keep portion sizes small.

Dried Beans & Peas (1 oz equivalents)

- 1/4 cup cooked dry beans (such as black, kidney, pinto, or white beans)
- 1/4 cup cooked dry peas (such as chickpeas, cowpeas, lentils, or split peas)
- 1/4 cup baked or refried beans
- 1/4 cup (about 2 oz) of tofu
- 1 oz tempeh, cooked
- 1/2 soy or bean burger

Nuts & Seeds (1 oz equivalents)

- 1/2 oz nuts (7 walnut halves, 8 cashews, 12 almonds, 20 peanuts, 24 pistachios)
- 1/2 oz seeds (such as pumpkin, sunflower, squash, or sesame)
- 1 Tbsp. of nut butter

Eggs

- 1 whole or 2 whites = 1 oz equivalent



Fruits and Vegetables

Select three or more servings of fruit each day and four or more servings of vegetables each day.* Fruits and vegetables are excellent sources of vitamins and minerals. They are also low in fat and high in fiber, a perfect choice for any healthy diet. Eat vitamin C-rich foods (such as oranges, berries, broccoli, cantaloupe, potatoes, tomatoes, and chili peppers) with iron-rich foods to enhance the body's absorption of iron. To consume enough calcium to meet your daily requirements, eat plenty of dark green vegetables (such as collards, mustard greens, kale, and broccoli), and drink a glass of calcium-fortified orange juice each day.

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*suggested amounts based on a 2,000 calorie diet



Grains

For a well-balanced diet, vegetarians should consume six or more servings of grains per day.* Select whole grain breads, cereals, rice, pasta, barley, bulgur wheat, and couscous. One serving equals one slice of bread or 1/2 cup of rice or other grain.

Why is Vitamin B12 So Important?

Since vitamin B12 is found only in animal products, it is essential for vegans to obtain vitamin B12 from fortified food sources such as soy milk and breakfast cereals or a supplement. Vitamin B12 promotes normal growth and protects nerve fibers. Another reason to make sure you receive an adequate intake of vitamin B12 is that a high folate intake, which is common among vegetarians, can disguise vitamin B12 deficiency. Eggs and dairy products contain vitamin B12, so it is not a concern for most lacto-vegetarians and lacto-ovo-vegetarians.

Supplements

If vegetarians are concerned about their nutrient intake, they should consider a multi-vitamin, multi-mineral supplement that provides 100% of the Daily Value for most vitamins and minerals. A separate calcium supplement may also be needed depending on dietary intake. Please consult a Registered Dietitian or Physician for specific recommendations.

Suggestions for Additional Information

Vegetarian diets require careful planning to ensure the proper intake of important nutrients. For further information concerning nutrition and meal planning, please consult a Registered Dietitian. The following are several non-profit organizations that provide information on the web about vegetarian diets, recipes, books and other resources, and additional Internet links:

- The Vegetarian Resource Group: www.vrg.org
- The North American Vegetarian Society: www.navs-online.org
- Vegetarian Nutrition: A Dietetic Practice Group of the American Dietetic Association: www.vegetariannutrition.net/
- USDA's MyPyramid: www.mypyramid.gov/tips-resources/vegetarian_diets_print.html
- The Vegetarian Society of the United Kingdom: www.vegsoc.org/health
- Vegan Outreach: www.veganoutreach.org