



NUTRITION™
GET A TASTE FOR THE HEALTHY LIFE™

VEGETARIANS! PAY SPECIAL ATTENTION TO THESE NUTRIENTS

Being a vegetarian means more than just skipping meat. Vegetarians need to pay special attention to the **protein, iron, calcium and vitamin B12** in their diets.

PROTEIN

Your body needs protein to grow and repair tissues and assist with digestion, immunity and many other body functions. Animal foods are excellent sources of protein, so vegetarians who give up all animal foods rely on plant foods for protein. **It is important to choose a variety of plant sources to get a good variety of the amino acids that you need.**

Pick from Many Plant Proteins

All types of vegetarians can get protein from dry beans, peas and lentils, soy foods such as tofu, tempeh, veggie burgers and other veggie “meats,” nuts, seeds, nut butters, grains and cereals. Lacto- or lacto-ovo vegetarians also get protein from milk, yogurt and cheese and, for lacto-ovo vegetarians, eggs.

Many plant foods naturally go together to give you the protein you need, like these examples:

- Minestrone soup with pasta and beans
- Hummus and pita bread
- Red beans and rice
- Peanut butter sandwich
- Lentil soup and crackers
- Veggie burger on a bun

IRON

Your body needs iron to produce hemoglobin, the part of red blood cells that carries oxygen throughout your body. Getting too little iron can mean low energy, fatigue and difficulty concentrating.

The body doesn't absorb the iron in plant foods as well as the iron from meat and other animal foods, so vegetarians must take care to get enough iron. Try these tips to boost iron absorption:

- **First Find Iron:** Choose iron-containing foods such as iron-fortified cereals, enriched grains, dried apricots, prunes, raisins, nuts, seeds, lentils, kidney, pinto, garbanzo and white beans, spinach and beet greens.
- **Then Add Some C:** You'll absorb the iron in plant foods better when you eat them with a vitamin C source such as oranges, grapefruit, berries, broccoli, tomatoes or red peppers. Try sliced strawberries over iron-fortified breakfast cereal or red peppers in a lentil salad.

This discussion of nutrition and physical activity issues is provided as a service to the public. It is for informational purposes only and may not be applicable to everyone. Always consult your health care professional before making any significant changes in your dietary habits or your physical activity routines.



CALCIUM

You need calcium throughout life to build and maintain strong bones and teeth.

Vegetarians who eat dairy products can get calcium from milk, yogurt and cheese, but vegans need alternate sources.

Getting Calcium from Plant Foods

Choose calcium-fortified foods such as cereals, cereal bars, breads, graham crackers, soy and rice beverages, and orange juice. Some other calcium-containing foods are calcium-set tofu (check labels), dark green vegetables such as kale, collards, mustard greens, bok choy and broccoli, nuts and seeds such as almonds and sunflower seeds, and blackstrap molasses.

These foods may contain less calcium per serving than fortified foods, so you may need to eat more to get enough calcium.

Don't Forget D

Your body needs vitamin D to absorb calcium. Vitamin D is found in fluid milk, and D-fortified products such as cereals, cereal bars, soy and rice beverages, yogurt, orange juice and margarine (check the label to be sure). Egg yolks also contain vitamin D.

VITAMIN B12

Your body needs vitamin B12 to make red blood cells and DNA, the body's genetic blueprint. It also maintains healthy nerve function. Vitamin B12 is found only in foods from animal sources such as meat, poultry, fish, milk, cheese, yogurt and eggs.

- **If You Eat Eggs and Dairy:** Generally, getting enough vitamin B12 isn't a problem for vegetarians who eat eggs and dairy products. However, as you get older, your body doesn't absorb B12 as well.
- **Special Concern for Vegans:** Vegans, who don't eat animal foods, should look for foods fortified with vitamin B12 such as breakfast cereals, soy or rice beverages and veggie "meats" (check the label to be sure). Or, look to supplements.
- **Consider a Supplement:** Vegans and older vegetarians who eat eggs and dairy products might consider a supplement. Check the Supplement Facts label on the product for one that provides 100% of the Daily Value (DV) for vitamin B12.

Seek the advice of a registered dietitian for more information on food and supplements.

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