

Balanced Vegetarian and Vegan Eating

Vegan

An eating pattern that does not include any food of animal origin. This includes foods such as meat, poultry, fish, dairy products, eggs, and honey.

An eating pattern can be vegan, but that does not imply it will confer health benefits. It is essential that meals remain balanced with all the nutrients required to fuel your body optimally. A properly planned vegan eating pattern based around whole foods can have a significant impact on one's well-being. Research has even shown that it can lead to a reduced risk for heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, cancer, and even osteoporosis.

A properly planned vegan eating pattern can be appropriate across the entire lifespan from infancy to old-age. However, extra care must be taken during the developmental stages of infancy and for growing children please refer to a Registered Dietitian in these cases.



Vegetarian

An eating pattern that includes all plant-based foods and excludes flesh-based foods (i.e. meat, poultry, wild game, and seafood). A vegetarian diet is different from a vegan diet in that it may include eggs (ovo-vegetarian), dairy (lacto-vegetarian) or both (lacto-ovo vegetarian).

Although this style of eating eliminates sources of nutrients from your diet, a well-planned vegetarian diet can provide appropriate nutrition at all stages of the life-cycle.

Important Points

- **Consume a Higher Volume of Food** – Since plant-based foods are less energy-dense compared to animal-based foods, it is likely that you will have to consume a higher volume of food. Research shows that when vegetarians and vegans consume enough food to meet their energy needs, protein needs are also met which helps to maintain muscle, hair, skin, nails and immune function.
- **Cook/Soak/Sprout Legumes to Reduce Anti-Nutrients** – Substances in some plants can reduce our body's absorption of certain nutrients. To minimize this, cook foods properly, and if possible, soak overnight or sprout for 1-2 days. Our bodies can also adapt to these compounds over time!
- **Enjoy a variety of foods** – Meal plan with different proteins, vegetables, fruits, grains, nuts/ seeds, fats, and dairy foods. This will provide your body with the variety of essential nutrients it needs to maintain good health.

Important Points

- **Maintain Balance** – Aim for ¼ plate of protein, ¼ plate grains/starchy foods, and half your plate vegetables. If your protein sources are legumes (chickpeas/beans/lentils) try for ½ plate legumes and ½ plate veggies. A balanced plate means a balanced macro/micronutrient intake!
- **Remember Some Key Nutrients** – For vegetarians and vegans, it may be more difficult to obtain enough protein, omega 3 fats, iron, vitamin B12, vitamin D, and calcium. These are all important for our health and well-being. Supplements might be necessary in some cases; talk to a Registered Dietitian before starting any supplementation.

Practical Tips

- **Take it Slow** –You may quickly find out what aspects of this eating pattern are easy to implement, and which ones are more difficult. Do not be discouraged; keep in mind that every change you make is getting you closer towards your overall goal!
- **Eating out? Prepare!** – Most restaurants accommodate those with dietary restrictions. Pay special attention to restaurant websites and ingredient lists or simply ask staff questions regarding items on the menu.
- **Love Legumes** – Legumes (beans, splits peas, lentils) are a relatively inexpensive protein source. Canned legumes are more convenient than dried versions since you do not have to cook them, but dried legumes are cheaper and have no salt added.
- **Eating at Someone's House** – Helping your family and friends understand your choices is important; it will lower your stress levels and you will likely have something to eat when you visit. If necessary, bring a food item that you know for certain you will be able to enjoy!

- **Delicious Dairy** – For vegetarians, dairy is a wonderful source of protein, B vitamins, magnesium, calcium, and vitamin D. Greek yogurt and cottage cheese are especially high in protein and can be added to meals or eaten as a snack with fruit. Fermented dairy products, such as yogurt and kefir provide healthy probiotics to improve gut health. For vegans, there are wonderful alternatives to dairy such as soy beverages and soy yogurts that provide similar nutrients to dairy. Just be sure that your choices are fortified with calcium and vitamin D!
- **Enjoy Eggs** – For vegetarians, eggs are a great source of protein, also providing vitamin A, iron, and B vitamins. They are an easy protein to add to any meal or snack. Pre-boil eggs ahead of time for a quick peel-able snack, or batch-bake mini crust-less quiches in muffin tins for the week. Eggs are easy to scramble up and enjoy on toast, in a wrap or added into vegetable fried rice.
- **Try Tofu** – For vegetarians and vegans, tofu is a versatile and inexpensive source of protein, iron, and in most cases, calcium. It has little flavour by itself, but it can take on the flavour of anything you put it with, so feel free to experiment with spices! Try crumbling it up and using it in place of scrambled eggs or ground meats. You could also cube it or slice it and add it into sauces or stir fries.

