



A guide to vegetarian eating

The trend towards vegetarianism is increasing in popularity particularly in younger age groups and women. It is estimated that between 5 -10 % of our population is following a vegetarian diet. A well planned vegetarian diet can be nutritionally balanced for both adults and children however it is very important not to simply avoid animal products but to substitute them with nutritious alternatives such as dairy foods, eggs, pulses ,nuts, seeds, and cereals.

There are 2 types of vegetarians

Lacto-ovo vegetarians.

Lacto-ovo vegetarians avoid meat, poultry and fish but eat eggs, milk and dairy products as well as cereals, vegetables, pulses, grains, seeds and nuts The nutritional issues that these group face are similar to those following a conventional diet i.e. watch out for high fat, high salt. Choose mainly low fat cheese for example Edam, Gouda along with plenty of grains, vegetables, and fruits. Ensure you take an iron and folic acid supplement before during pregnancy as requirements are higher for these nutrients.

Vegans

Vegans avoid meat, poultry, fish, eggs, milk and dairy produce but eat cereals, fruit, vegetables, pulses, grains, seeds and nuts. Vegans have very different nutritional issues. Without any foods of animal origin getting enough calories to maintain a healthy weight can be difficult especially for growing children and nutrients such as Vitamin B12 and iron (needed for healthy red blood cells), Vitamin D and calcium (needed for healthy bones/teeth) and zinc (essential for healthy growth) all require special attention

How to achieve a healthy vegetarian diet

The current healthy eating guidelines recommend that we reduce fat, sugar and salt in our diets and eat more fruit and vegetables; this can be achieved by a vegetarian diet. No single food contains all the nutrients that our bodies need so a variety is required. See the food Pyramid on Healthy Eating Guidelines.

Cereal and potato shelf.

6+ portions recommended/day. Choose fortified cereals to help with iron and Vitamin B12 intakes.

Fruit and vegetable group

5 or more recommended daily. Good sources of Vitamin A and C and folic acid

Milk and dairy group.

The main nutrients supplied by this group are calcium, Vitamin B12, protein, energy and Vitamin A. Soya Milk and products are used by those following a vegan diet but ensure that the products you choose are fortified with calcium, to help meet your requirements



The meat alternative group.

This group includes peas, beans, lentils, tofu, nuts, seeds, textured vegetable protein, quorn cheese and eggs. Do not give whole nuts to children under 5 or to anyone with swallowing difficulties.

Fats and oil group

This group also contains sugar sweets confectionary, crisps, biscuits etc Vegetarians who require a higher energy may need to include additional servings from this group.

Nutrients that require special attention

Energy

Everybody needs energy to grow and be healthy. Sometimes vegetarian diets can be bulky and low in energy. Here are some ideas to for snacks which will help to increase energy intake Popcorn,pretzels,crackers,oatmeal cookies,peanut butter, fruit shakes,smoothies,dried fruit, hummus, salad dressings,sauces,gravies, foods cooked in healthy oils like sunflower/olive .

Protein

Protein is necessary for growth and repair of our bodies. Protein is made up of amino acids which our bodies can't make so we need to take it in everyday. Animal foods like eggs, milk, soya products, cheese, and yogurts contain the necessary protein for growth but some vegetables and plant foods don't so ensure you combine animal and vegetable foods at each meal e.g.

- Milk and breakfast cereal
- Peanut butter sandwich and glass milk
- Bean dish and a white sauce
- Beans on toast
- Muesli and nuts

Vegans need to be especially careful here.

Iron and Vitamin C

Iron is essential for red blood cells and carrying oxygen around our bodies to give us energy. Vitamin C helps us to absorb iron so check that you are taking them together at each meal. E.g. Egg yolks contain iron and include orange juice to drink Breakfast cereals are fortified with iron but again include orange/grapefruit juice.

Vegetarian women and teenagers should pay special attention to iron intake. For further information consult your dietitian.

Calcium

Calcium is important for healthy development of bones/teeth. Good sources of calcium for vegetarians are

- Fortified Soya milks
- Dairy products including yogurt and cheese
- Smaller amounts are also found in
- Green vegetables
- Enriched white bread



- Nuts e.g. almonds/brazil
- Peas,beans,lentils
- Sesame seeds
- Dried fruit
- Tofu
- Tinned fish where bones are eaten

During childhood, pregnancy and breast feeding vegans may need to take a calcium and Vit D supp. For further information consult your dietitian

Vitamin D

Vitamin D helps with the absorption of calcium in our bodies. It is mainly found in

- Oily fish
- Egg yolks
- Dairy foods
- Fortified Soya milk
- Fortified Margarines and spreads

Most people also access Vit D due to the action of sunlight on our skin but very young vegetarian children may not have much exposure and may require a supplement. For more information consult your dietitian

Vitamin B12

Vitamin B12 is essential for healthy blood cells. The main foods that supply Vitamin B12 are animal foods so vegans need to look for alternative sources for example

- Eggs
- Yeast extracts
- Textured Vegetable Protein
- Soya Milks
- Fortified breakfast cereals

For more information on healthy eating and other topics log on to www.indi.ie
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