

FACTS ABOUT OUR FOOD

~ WHAT DO I EAT IF I DON'T EAT MEAT? ~

Reducing or eliminating meat consumption is a powerful way to oppose cruelty to animals. It's also healthy and, unlike a meat-based diet, environmentally friendly.

□ DEFINITIONS

What is a vegetarian diet?

A vegetarian diet is one that is free of all meat including fowl and fish and may or may not include dairy foods and eggs. A vegetarian diet containing eggs and dairy is also referred to as *lacto-ovo-vegetarian*.

What is a vegan diet?

A vegan diet is one that is free of all meat, fowl and fish as well as animal-derived foods including dairy and eggs. *Vegan* refers to a lifestyle choice that excludes the use and consumption of animal-derived products and ingredients in any form, including leather, fur, wool and silk, as well as hidden or trace ingredients in food as well as body and hair care products, household cleansers and any other product that contains animal ingredients (see <http://www.caringconsumer.com/ingredientsfactsheet.html>).

□ BENEFITS OF A VEGETARIAN DIET

Animal-friendly

Animals on today's factory farms are subject to a life of extreme stress and suffering; eating less or no meat means fewer animals suffer and are killed.

Healthy

A well-balanced vegetarian or vegan diet is low in fat and high in fibre and nutrients.

Environmentally friendly

Meat production uses twice as much water and requires two to four times as much land as a plant-based diet. In addition, the animal waste generated by factory farms is a leading cause of industrialized pollution.

□ NUTRITION

Eliminating meat from the diet poses no challenges in obtaining enough protein, vitamins or minerals. Eliminating both meat and dairy foods from the diet requires that particular care be taken in obtaining an adequate amount of vitamin B12, vitamin D and iodine. If a healthy, varied and well-balanced diet is maintained, nutrient and protein requirements will be met by the vegan diet. Beans and legumes, nuts and nut butters, tofu, leafy greens and other vegetables, fruits, and whole grains are important sources of vitamins and minerals.

Protein

Most people in the western world consume far more protein than is needed. Protein is not stored in the body for later use. Excess protein is eliminated from the body, and a high protein diet puts strain on the kidneys. *Amino acids* are manufactured from protein. The human body requires 22 amino acids to stay healthy, 13 of which the body synthesizes; the remaining nine must be obtained from diet. These are called *essential amino acids (EAA)*. Unlike meat and dairy foods, no one vegetable or plant food contains all EAA. However, it is easy to obtain the required amino acids from a vegan diet simply by eating a variety of foods that together contain all EAA. These can be obtained by eating soy or legumes plus a grain (such as rice) or corn dish. It was once thought that these combinations of food must be eaten together at the same meal, however, it is now known that if the combined foods are eaten within a day or two (e.g., grains at breakfast and beans or soy at dinner), the proper balance of amino acids will be obtained. The (average) recommended dietary allowance of protein for adult males (aged 25-50) is approximately 63 grams and 50 grams for adult females (aged 25-50).

Vitamins and Minerals

B12: there are no reliable, unfortified plant sources of vitamin B12; therefore, fortified foods and/or supplements are necessary for vegans. In foods, B12 is measured in micrograms ("µg" or "mcg"). Daily recommendations of B12 are 1.5 - 2.5 µg, twice a day, from fortified foods or supplements or 10 - 100 µg, once a day, from a supplement.

Iodine: Iodine is needed for healthy thyroid function, which regulates metabolism. Both too much and too little iodine can result in abnormal thyroid metabolism and goitre. In addition, components of soy (called goitrogens) counteract iodine. As it is not found consistently in a plant food, vegans should take a modest iodine supplement on a regular basis to ensure they are meeting requirements; 75-100 mcg every few days should be ample.

Vitamin D: Vitamin D can be obtained through fortified soymilk and fortified margarine. It is also made by the action of sunlight (UV rays) on skin; 10-15 minutes of daily sun exposure is enough for light-skinned people. Dark-skinned people require 3-6 times as much sun exposure to get the required amount of vitamin D.

❑ ALTERNATIVES TO MEAT

Soy

Soy is a popular staple of the vegetarian and vegan diet, and for good reason. As well as being packed with protein, soy contains phytochemicals known as *isoflavones*, which are powerful antioxidants that may reduce the risk of coronary vascular disease (CVD) and cancer. The highest quality soy foods (those that contain isoflavones) are tofu, tempeh, soy flour, roasted soybeans, miso and some soymilks. As with many foods, soy should not be consumed in excess (due to the effect of goitrogens on the thyroid as mentioned above). Other meat alternatives include seitan, nuts and legumes.

Tempeh: Tempeh is a cake of soybeans that is made by removing the hull of cooked, organic soybeans, mixing with a culture, and aging for a day or two. It can be added to stir-fries, vegetable dishes, and casseroles. It is high in protein and rich in calcium.

Tofu: Tofu is a white soybean cake made from cooked soybeans and nigari (magnesium chloride). Tofu can be used in soups, stir-fries, sauces, dressings, burgers, and many other types of dishes. It tends to absorb the flavours or seasonings added to a dish.

Texturized (Soy) Protein: It is also called Texturized Vegetable Protein or TVP. If texturized soy protein is used, look for a product made from organic soybeans because some non-organic TVP products are high in MSG.

Seitan

Seitan is derived from the protein portion of wheat (called gluten). It is high in protein and low in fat, and works well in Asian dishes such as mock chicken stir-fry. Organic food shops should have a mix for making seitan.

Beans and legumes

Beans and legumes are low in fat and are rich in protein, complex carbohydrates, fibre, iron and zinc.

Types of beans and legumes: Adzuki, Black, Great Northern, Kidney, Mung, Navy, Pink, Pinto, White, Yellow, Chickpeas and Lentils.

Nuts and Seeds

Nuts and seeds in general are very nutritious, providing protein, many essential vitamins, and fibre. Nut butters can be added to soups and stews to thicken them.

Types of nuts: Almonds, Brazils, Cashews, Chestnuts, Coconuts, Hazels, Macadamia, Peanuts, Pecans, Pine Nuts, Pistachios, Walnuts

Types of seeds: Pumpkin, Sesame, Sunflower. For more information on the nutritional content of specific nuts and seeds, visit: <http://www.vegsoc.org/info/nutsseeds.html>

❑ ALTERNATIVES TO MILK AND CHEESE

Soy Milk: a milk substitute made by soaking organic soybeans, cooking and blending the soybeans, and finally straining off the soymilk.

Soymilk is available in different flavours including vanilla, chocolate or reduced fat. Soymilk may be used for drinking, on cereal, and in cooking.

Soy Cheese: a cheese substitute made from soymilk.

Some soymilk or soy cheese products also contain dairy proteins such as whey or casein (caseinates) that some people want to avoid due to allergies or diet preferences.

Other dairy substitutes: these include milks or cheeses made from rice, almonds and potatoes.

These contain less protein than soymilks, but are an alternative to soy and add variety to the diet.

❑ “VEGETARIAN CHEESE”

Commercial cheese contains *rennet* (or *rennin*), an ingredient made from a calf's intestine, which is used to coagulate the dairy product. Most organic cheese does not contain rennet, but it's best to read the ingredients to be sure.

❑ EGG SUBSTITUTION IN RECIPES

There are a few options for substituting eggs in cooking and baking. Tofu may be substituted for one egg by using ¼ cup of soft tofu and a food processor – it's best to food process the tofu to eliminate any chunky or grainy bits; 1 tbsp. of ground flax seed with 3 tbsp. of water may also be used. In baking, 3 tbsp. of applesauce will replace one egg and works well for sweeter recipes. In general, one may simply omit the egg in recipes calling for one egg without altering the recipe. *Egg replacer* is also available at many health food stores.

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