

Eating Healthy the Vegetarian Way

A registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) can help you set specific nutrition goals and guide you in planning a personalized healthy eating pattern.

To find an RDN in your area, visit "Find an Expert" at www.eatright.org



Vegetarians choose not to eat meat, poultry, and fish. Instead, they eat mainly plant foods, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans and peas, and seeds and nuts. Some vegetarians eat eggs or dairy foods or both, while others (referred to as vegans) exclude all animal foods and foods with ingredients that come from animals. Whether you decide to adopt a vegetarian diet for health reasons or for cultural, religious, or ethical reasons, this style of eating can be healthy and delicious.

Healthy Vegetarian Choices

A diet rich in plant foods may help to reduce the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, obesity, and cancer. A well-planned vegetarian diet that includes a variety of plant foods can provide plenty of nutrients. The food choices highlighted here are examples of how to meet your needs for several important nutrients.



Protein

Plant foods with protein include beans and peas, nuts and seeds, soy foods, and whole grains, such as quinoa, sorghum, and teff. Eggs and fat-free or low-fat dairy foods also have protein.

Omega-3 Fats

This vital type of fat is found in foods such as ground flaxseeds, chia seeds, hempseeds, walnuts, soy nuts, canola oil, soybean oil, and some other plant oils.

Calcium

Fat-free and low-fat dairy foods are good choices for calcium. You can also get calcium from dark, leafy greens, such as mustard, collard, and turnip greens, as well as from bok choy, broccoli, beans, and dried figs. Some foods have calcium added to them. Look for tofu prepared with calcium, as well as calcium-fortified breads, ready-to-eat cereals, juices, and plant-based milks such as soy, almond, or rice milk.

Iron and Vitamin C

Foods with iron include beans and peas, dark green vegetables (such as spinach and beet greens), some dried fruits, prune juice, pumpkin seeds and sesame seeds, soy nuts, and edamame. You can also choose iron-fortified breads and cereals.

To help your body get more iron from plant foods, eat them with foods and drinks rich in vitamin C. Good choices for vitamin C are citrus fruits and juices, 100% fruit juice with added vitamin C, broccoli, tomatoes, and bell peppers.

Zinc

For zinc, eat beans (such as white beans, kidney beans, or chickpeas), whole grain foods, wheat germ, and zinc-fortified cereals. Dairy foods also have zinc.

Vitamin B-12

Good choices for vitamin B-12 include eggs, fat-free and low-fat dairy foods, and some fortified cereals and soy drinks. Nutritional yeast also contains vitamin B-12.

Vitamin D

For vitamin D, choose dairy foods, as well as some fortified cereals and soy drinks. (Note: Your body makes its own vitamin D when skin is exposed to sunlight.)



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