

Vegan Nutrition

by Beth Rougier, Registered Dietitian

Top 5 tips



- Eat a wide variety of foods
- Base your meals around fruits, vegetables, whole grains, pulses, nuts, seeds
- Eat a rainbow – choose foods that are red, orange, yellow, green, purple etc
- Consume Vitamin B12 fortified foods daily or take a B12 vitamin supplement
- Limit processed foods that are high in fat or sugar

Frequently Asked Questions

Is it healthy to eat a vegan diet?

The American Dietetic Association state that ‘appropriately planned vegetarian diets, including total vegetarian or vegan diets, are healthful, nutritionally adequate, and may provide health benefits in the prevention and treatment of certain diseases. Well planned vegetarian diets are appropriate for individuals during all stages of the lifecycle including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood and adolescence, and for athletes’. Full article <http://www.eatrightpro.org/resource/practice/position-and-practice-papers/position-papers/vegetarian-diets>

Whole plant foods are low in saturated fat and do not contain cholesterol. They are high in fibre, vitamins and minerals. A whole foods plant-based diet can reduce the risk of heart disease, hypertension, type 2 diabetes and some cancers.

Will I get all the necessary vitamins and minerals?

All nutrient requirements can be met with a vegan diet but like any diet it is important to make good choices. Base meals around fruits, vegetables, whole grains, pulses, nuts and

seeds and limit processed foods high in fat and sugar.



Special consideration needs to be paid to Vitamin B12 which we need for many reasons. Too little can increase your risk of cardiovascular disease and dementia. Vitamin B12 is produced by certain micro-organisms. The only reliable sources of Vitamin B12 in a vegan diet come from fortified foods (such as yeast extract, nutritional yeast flakes, non-dairy drinks, yoghurts, margarine, breakfast cereals) or supplements.

How to get enough Vitamin B12

- Eat fortified foods 2 or 3 times a day to get at least 3 micrograms of B12 a day
- OR take one B12 supplement daily providing at least 10 micrograms
- OR take a weekly B12 supplement providing at least 2000 micrograms



Chew your B12 supplements, to help you absorb as much as

possible. Older people may be unable to absorb naturally occurring vitamin B12 so it may be prudent for those over 50 years of age to consume fortified foods or take a supplement also.

Where do I get protein?

An adequate amount of protein for vegans is 0.90g for every kilogram of body weight. This level isn't difficult to achieve on a plant based diet. Good sources of protein include tofu, beans and pulses, soya products, cereals, nuts and seeds and green leafy vegetables. Protein foods do not need to be combined. Aim for 3 serves of legumes a day (one serve is 1/2 cup cooked legumes or soya milk or ¼ cup peanuts).

What about iron in vegan foods?



The recommended intake for iron is 8 mg/day for

men and 15 mg/day for women. Vegan sources of iron include beans and pulses, dried fruit, green leafy vegetables (such as watercress, broccoli and spring greens), whole grains and fortified cereals. **Consuming foods containing Vitamin C (e.g. fruits and vegetables) with these foods increases iron absorption.**

Some nutrients including calcium, tannins, phenols and phytates inhibit iron absorption. To reduce these inhibitory effects avoid consuming chocolate, tea or coffee with your meals. For more information on iron contents of foods <http://www.vrg.org/nutrition/iron.php>

What about bone health? Will I get enough calcium if I cut out dairy foods?



Calcium is only one nutrient needed for good bone health. It's

also important to have adequate vitamin D (from sunshine, fortified foods or a supplement), and avoid too much caffeine and salt. Being physically active also helps maintain bone health.

The recommended intake of calcium is 700mg per day. Good non-dairy sources of calcium include fortified non-dairy milks, tofu, green leafy vegetables (e.g. spring greens, kale, broccoli), dried fruits, nuts and seeds. It's important to include these foods regularly in your diet or take a calcium supplement. For more information <https://www.vegansociety.com/resources/nutrition-health/vitamins-minerals-and-more/team-healthy-bones>

I've heard soy is not good for you, is this true?

It has been well established that 2-3 servings of soy foods (including milk, yoghurt, tofu and tempeh) daily is an appropriate, healthful intake. Some of the antisoy propaganda has been based on studies involving raw soybeans (which can be toxic to many species in their raw form) being fed to rats and parrots and studies concerning two men who regularly consumed 14-20 servings soy daily and subsequently developed health problems. Moderate soy consumption can; protect women against breast cancer and reduce the risk of recurrence and death from the disease, lower LDL cholesterol and reduce the risk of

prostate cancer by 26-30%. For a comprehensive review of the literature on soy read Soy: What's the Harm by Jack Norris (RD) http://www.veganhealth.org/articles/soy_wth

Where do I get omega 3 fats on a vegan diet?

Omega 3 fats are good for heart health. The best sources on a vegan diet are linseeds (flaxseeds) and linseed oil, rapeseed (canola) oil, hemp seeds and walnuts. Evidence suggests that the type of omega-3 fats found in these foods may not have the same benefits for reducing the risk of heart disease as those found in oily fish. However eating a well planned vegan diet with plenty of fruit, vegetables, wholegrains and minimal processed fatty and sugary food is a heart healthy diet already. For more information <http://www.veganhealth.org/articles/omega3>

Where do I get more information?

- Vegan Society <http://www.vegansociety.com/resources>
- Viva <http://www.viva.org.uk/>
- Vegan Health <http://www.veganhealth.org/>