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Dietitians
Australia

A Guide to Vegetarian Eating

A balanced vegetarian diet can give you all the nutrients you need at every stage of life. A healthy vegetarian diet includes lots of different types of wholegrains, fruit, vegetables, legumes, nuts and seeds, plus dairy foods and/or eggs if not vegan.

Main Types of Vegetarians

- **Lacto-ovo-vegetarians** eat dairy and eggs but don't eat animal flesh
- **Lacto-vegetarians** eat dairy but don't eat eggs and animal flesh
- **Ovo-vegetarians** eat eggs but don't eat dairy and animal flesh
- **Vegans** exclude all animal foods from their diet including eggs and dairy and generally honey

Important Nutrients for Vegetarians

Protein:

Important for growing and repairing cells, producing enzymes and hormones, and nerve, muscle and immune function.

Food sources:

- Legumes (e.g. beans, lentils, chickpeas)
- Soy foods (e.g. tofu, tempeh, soy milk, soy yoghurt)
- Textured vegetable protein (TVP)
- Eggs

- Nuts and seeds
- Dairy foods (e.g. milk, yoghurt and cheese)
- Wholegrains, quinoa and amaranth

Iron:

Important for producing blood and moving oxygen around the body

Food sources:

- Legumes
- Iron-fortified foods e.g. breads and cereals
- Tofu and tempeh
- Nuts and seeds
- Green leafy vegetables
- Eggs
- Dried fruit
- Wholegrains, quinoa and amaranth

Tips:

- Eat foods high in Vitamin C with meals to boost iron absorption e.g. citrus, strawberries, tomatoes, broccoli
- Don't drink tea and coffee with meals
- Don't take your calcium supplement with meals

Vitamin B12

Important for cell division, forming red blood cells and nerve function.

Food sources:

- Dairy foods e.g. milk, yoghurt and cheese
- Eggs
- Milk alternatives with added vitamin B12
- Meat alternatives with added vitamin B12

If you don't eat these foods often, you may need a B12 supplement. Check with your doctor or dietitian before starting any new supplements.

Calcium

Important for strong bones and teeth, nerve and muscle function and forming blood clots.

Food sources:

- Dairy foods e.g. milk, yoghurt, cheese
- Milk alternatives (soy, nut, oat, rice) with added calcium
- Some nuts and seeds e.g. almonds, brazil nuts, sesame seeds
- Calcium-set tofu
- Asian greens, kale, broccoli
- Dried apricots and figs

Zinc

Important for many body functions, including the immune system and wound healing.

Food sources:

- Legumes
- Grains
- Nuts and seeds
- Eggs
- Dairy e.g. milk, yoghurt and cheese
- Soy products e.g. tofu, tempeh, soy milk

Tip:

- Soak legumes before cooking or use canned legumes to boost zinc absorption

Iodine

Essential for a healthy thyroid

Food sources:

- Dairy products e.g. milk, yoghurt, cheese
- Eggs
- Iodised salt (and bread made with iodised salt)
- Nori

Omega-3

Healthy fats for general health and to protect against disease

Food sources:

- Flaxseed, chia or canola oil
- Hemp seeds
- Walnuts, chia seeds and linseeds
- Soybeans
- Eggs or omega-3 enriched eggs

Tips:

- Swap sunflower and corn oils for canola or olive oils in cooking

Vitamin D

Important for strong bones and the immune system

Food sources:

- Eggs
- Vitamin D fortified foods e.g. margarine

Tip:

The best way to get Vitamin D is spending a short time in the sun.

Vegetarian Meal Ideas

Breakfast

- Cereal, muesli or porridge with soy or cow's milk, yoghurt and berries with a tablespoon of ground flaxseeds or chia seeds
- Wholegrain toast with nut butter, avocado or Marmite™
- Wholegrain toast with canola or olive oil spread and a poached egg

Lunch

- Wholegrain salad sandwich with lettuce, tomato, cucumber, avocado, baby spinach with or without cheese
- Vegetable and legume soup with a slice of wholegrain toast
- Veggie burger on a wholegrain roll with salad
- Falafel roll with lettuce, tomato, onion, hummus and cheese (soy or dairy) on wholemeal pita bread
- Pizza – wholemeal pita bread spread with tomato paste & topped with tomato, capsicum, mushroom and a sprinkle of cheese (soy or dairy)

Dinner

- Tofu or tempeh and vegetable stir fry with cashews and brown rice
- Tacos or burritos filled beans, textured vegetable protein (TVP) or tofu, salad, avocado and salsa
- Chickpea and vegetable curry served with cup brown rice and a sprinkle of nuts
- Pasta with a tomato-based vegetable and lentil or TVP sauce (e.g. lentils or TVP, mushrooms, onion, zucchini and capsicum)

Snacks

- Banana or berry smoothie (made with low fat cow's milk or fortified soy milk, low fat yoghurt, fruit and chia seeds).
- Dried fruit, nut and seed mix (eg dried apricots with almonds sunflower seeds and pumpkin seeds)
- Fresh fruit
- Yoghurt (soy or dairy)
- Vegetable sticks (e.g. carrot, celery, capsicum) with hummus
- Milo® (made on low fat cow's milk or vitamin B12 and calcium-fortified soy milk)
- Wholegrain crackers or rice cakes with Marmite™, peanut butter, hummus, tahini, avocado or cheese and tomato
- Slice of wholegrain toast or English muffin with grilled cheese and tomato
- Raisin toast with canola or olive oil spread