

# Vegetarian Diet

## What is a vegetarian diet?

A vegetarian diet does not include meat. People who follow a vegetarian diet are called vegetarians. They do not eat animal meat, poultry, or fish. Many vegetarians also avoid other animal products such as gelatin, rennet (used to make some kinds of cheese), and animal fats. Vegetarians who eat eggs and dairy products are called ovo-lacto vegetarians. People who do not eat any animal products are called vegans.

A well-planned vegetarian diet can be good for your health. By not eating meat, you eat less cholesterol and less saturated fat. This may lower your risk of heart disease, gallstones, stroke, and some types of cancer.

## Will I get all of the nutrients I need?

All of the rules for a healthy diet are true for a vegetarian diet. You need to eat a variety of foods in the right amounts. You may have to work harder to get all of the nutrients you need if you eat no animal products at all.

A well planned vegetarian diet is safe. If it is too restricted or too high in sweets, sodas, and snack foods, it may be unhealthy. Even if you eat a lot of healthy salads and whole grains and drink fruit juice, you may not get enough of some important nutrients. Here are some of the nutrients you need to be sure to get from your vegetarian diet.

- **Calcium:** If you do not eat any milk products, the amount of calcium in your diet may be too low. Keep in mind that the calcium found in plant foods and even some fortified foods is not easy for the body to absorb. Calcium is absorbed better in smaller amounts throughout the day. Try to choose fortified foods with no more than 500 milligrams (mg) of calcium per serving. If you are a vegan, ask your healthcare provider how you can get enough calcium. You may need to take calcium supplements.
- **Iodine:** Vegans may not get enough iodine. Use a little salt with iodine at the table or when you cook. Salt should be used only in limited amounts, so getting your iodine from a multivitamin mineral supplement may be the best choice.
- **Iron:** It's harder for the body to absorb iron from plants than from meat, poultry, and fish. Eat foods that contain vitamin C, such as citrus fruits, broccoli, and tomatoes, when you eat plant foods that have iron. Eating these foods together helps the body to absorb the iron better.
- **Zinc:** Zinc is not as easy for the body to absorb from plant foods as it is from animal products. Because of this, you may need to eat more zinc than people who eat meat. Be sure to include good sources of zinc in your diet.
- **Vitamin B-2:** Vitamin B2, or riboflavin, is found in green vegetables such as asparagus and broccoli. However, vegetables do not have as much vitamin B2 as milk products, eggs, meats, and liver. You may need a supplement to get all the vitamin B2 that your body needs.

- **Vitamin B-6:** Also known as pyridoxine, vitamin B-6 is found in peas, beans, lentils, bananas, and fortified breads and cereals. Vegetarians usually get enough of this vitamin from their diet.
- **Vitamin B-12:** Vitamin B-12 is found naturally only in animal products such as milk products and eggs. When you read food labels, look for the words cyanocobalamin or cobalamin in the ingredient list. These are the forms of Vitamin B-12 that are most easily absorbed.
- **Vitamin D:** Vitamin D is added to soy, rice, and almond milk, yogurts, some cereals, and juices. The food label will tell you if a food is fortified with Vitamin D. Your skin makes vitamin D when it is exposed to sunshine, so spend some time outdoors. Many people take vitamin D supplements to make sure that they are getting enough.
- **Omega-3 fatty acids:** Include good sources of linolenic acid (omega 3) in your diet. Plant foods high in linolenic acid are flaxseed and flaxseed oil, canola oil, walnuts, soybeans, and soybean oil. Some margarines and nondairy milks are now fortified with omega-3s.
- **Protein:** There are many plant sources of protein. Whole grains and vegetables are a healthy source of protein, but these foods have less protein than beans and nuts. Be sure to eat a variety of foods to get the right mix of proteins.

## **If I am breast-feeding, will my breast milk be healthy for my baby?**

If you get enough nutrients from whole grains, fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts, seeds, and oils, you and your baby can have a healthy diet. You should include milk or other dairy products in your diet. You should also try to eat foods that have a high protein content, such as peanut butter, nuts, eggs, tofu, and legumes. These foods will help supply the protein and calcium your baby needs. Also make sure that you get enough zinc, iron, vitamin B-12, and vitamin D.

Many healthcare providers advise staying on prenatal vitamins while breast-feeding. This can be very helpful for vegetarians. The main focus for healthy vegetarian breast milk is on vitamin B12, vitamin D, and omega-3 fats. Ask your healthcare provider if you need a B12 supplement. Your baby may need to take B12 as well.

Breast-fed babies should also take a vitamin D supplement. You can buy liquid multivitamin drops with vitamin D without a prescription. Ask your provider for a recommendation.

Breast-fed babies who are not yet getting solid food should have supplements of iron after the age of 4 to 6 months. This needed iron is provided by infant cereals if solid foods are started.

If you follow the above guidelines for getting enough nutrients from whole grains, fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts, seeds, and oils, you and your baby can have a healthy diet.

## **How do I know if I am eating a healthy diet?**

If you are not getting enough vitamins or minerals, you may have symptoms such as:

- Rashes
- A painful, swollen tongue
- Tiredness
- Irritability
- Depression
- Pale skin
- Trouble focusing
- Trouble breathing

Check with your healthcare provider if you think you may not be getting all the nutrients you need.

## **Where can I get more information?**

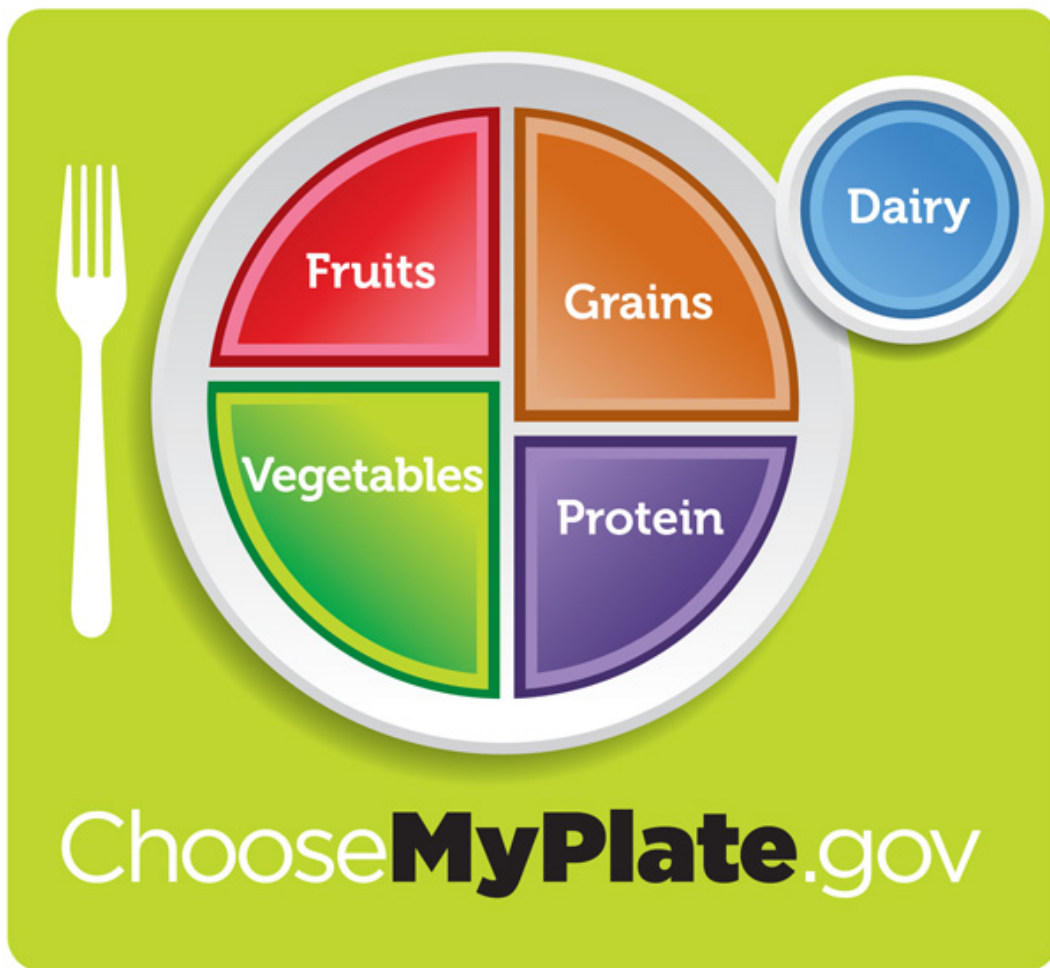
Some helpful Web sites are:

- <http://www.VRG.org>
- <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/healthy-eating-tips/tips-for-vegetarian.html>
- <http://www.eatright.org>

Developed by RelayHealth.

*This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.*

# My Plate



From the US Department of Agriculture

## Nutrient Sources for Vegetarians

<b>CALCIUM</b> mg per serving		<b>IRON</b> mg per serving		<b>VITAMIN B-2</b> mg per serving	
<b>Legumes (1/2 cup cooked)</b>		<b>Breads, cereals, and grains</b>		Almonds, 1/4 cup 0.3	
Vegetarian baked beans	64	Cereal, fortified, 1 cup	2.1 – 18	Cereal, fortified, 1 oz	0.2 – 1.7
Navy beans	60	Whole wheat bread, 1 slice	0.9	Cow's milk, 1/2 cup	0.2
Black beans	46	Oatmeal, instant, 1/2 cup	1.6	Yogurt, 1/2 cup	0.3
Peas	19.2			Egg, large, 1	0.6
Lentils	18.8			Mushrooms, cooked, 1/2 cup	0.2
<b>Soy foods (1/2 cup)</b>		<b>Vegetables (1/2 cup)</b>		Whole wheat bread 1 slice	0.1
Cultured soy yogurt, fortified	367	Potato baked with skin, 1 medium	1.9	Asparagus 1/2 cup	0.1
Tofu	120 – 430	Broccoli	0.9	Banana 1 medium	0.1
Soy, rice, or almond milk, calcium fortified	100 – 159	Bok choy	0.7	Sweet potato 1 medium	0.1
Soy nuts	120	Turnip greens	0.6	Wheat germ 1 cup	0.6
		Tomato juice	0.4	Soy, rice, or almond milk, fortified, 1/2 cup	0.2
		Spinach	0.4		
<b>Nuts and seeds</b>		<b>Fruits</b>		<b>VITAMIN B-6</b> mg per serving	
Almonds, 1/4 cup	88	Prune juice	1.5	Wheat germ	1.1
Almond butter, 2 tablespoons	86	Raisins	1.4	Beef 3 ounces	0.3 – 0.5
		Dried apricots, 10	0.9	Chicken 3 ounces	0.5
		Prunes	0.8	Avocado	0.5
<b>Vegetables (1 cup cooked)</b>		<b>Legumes (1/2 cup cooked)</b>		Mackerel 3 ounces	0.4
Collard greens	239	Navy beans	2.3	Banana 1 medium	0.4
Turnip greens	208	Black beans	1.8	Wheat bran	0.3
Bok choy (1 cup raw)	80	Baked beans, vegetarian	1.7	Brown rice	0.3
Broccoli	79			Molasses 2 tablespoons	0.26
<b>Fruits</b>		<b>Soy foods (1/2 cup)</b>		Sardines	0.2
Calcium-fortified orange juice, 1 cup	300	Tofu	6.6	Oat bran	0.1
Dried figs, 5	137	Soybeans, cooked	4.4	Cabbage	0.1
		Soy milk	0.4 – 1.0		
<b>Dairy</b>		<b>Nuts/seeds (1/4 cup)</b>		<b>VITAMIN B-12</b> mcg per serving	
Yogurt, flavored, 1 cup	280 – 300	Pumpkin seeds	5.2	Cereals, fortified, 1 oz	0.6 – 6.0
Cow's milk, 1/2 cup	137 – 158	Sunflower seeds	2.3	Nutritional yeast miniflakes, 1 tablespoon	1.5
Cheddar cheese, 1/4 oz	153	Cashews	1.5	Soy milk, fortified, 1/2 cup	0.4 – 1.6
Yogurt, plain, 1/2 cup	137 – 230			Veggie "meats," fortified, 1 oz	0.5 – 1.2
<b>Other foods</b>		<b>Other foods</b>		Egg, large, 1	0.5
Blackstrap molasses, 1 tablespoon	41	Blackstrap molasses, 1 tablespoon	3.5	Cow's milk, 1/2 cup	0.4 – 0.5
<b>ZINC</b> mg per serving		<b>PROTEIN</b> grams per serving		<b>LINOLENIC ACID (OMEGA-3 FATTY ACIDS)</b> grams per serving	
<b>Breads, grains, and cereals</b>		Soybeans, 1 cup cooked	28.6	Walnuts, 1/4 cup	2.7
Cereal, fortified 1 oz	0.7 – 15	Lentils, 1 cup cooked	17.9	Flaxseed oil, 1 teaspoon	2.7
Wheat germ, 2 tablespoons	1.8	Black, white, kidney, navy, and pinto beans, 1 cup cooked	15	Flaxseed, ground, 1 tablespoon	1.9 – 2.2
<b>Legumes (1/2 cup cooked)</b>		Yogurt, plain, 8 oz	13	Walnut oil, 1 tablespoon	1.4 – 1.7
Adzuki beans	2.0	Yogurt, flavored, 8 oz	10	Canola oil, 1 tablespoon	1.3 – 1.6
Baked beans, canned	1.8	Cow's milk, skim 8 oz	8	Soybeans, 1/2 cup cooked	1.0
Lentils	1.2	Cheddar cheese, 1 oz	7	Soybean oil, 1 tablespoon	0.9
Lima beans	0.9	Peanuts, 1 ounce	7.9		
<b>Soy foods (1/2 cup cooked)</b>		Egg 1 large	6	<b>IODINE</b> mcg per serving	
Veggie meats, 1 oz	1.2 – 2.3	<b>VITAMIN D</b> mg per serving		Iodized salt, 1/4 teaspoon	90
Soybeans	1.0	Fish, 3 ounces	3 – 20	Sea vegetables	varies widely
Tofu	1.0	Cow's milk, fortified, 1 cup	3		
<b>Vegetables (1/2 cup cooked)</b>		Soy, rice, and almond milk, fortified, 1 cup	1 – 3		
Peas	1.0	Egg, 1 large	1.1		
Mushrooms	0.7	Cereals, fortified, 1 oz	0.5 – 1		
		Cheese, 1 oz	0.2 – 2		

Copyright ©2014 McKesson Corporation and/or one of its subsidiaries. All rights reserved.