

# The Nutritionist's Corner

## Tips for Balancing Your Body with Vegetarian and Vegan Lifestyles

People may choose to eat a vegetarian diet for any number of reasons. Whether for ethical purposes, for health, for religious practice, for culture, or for any other reason, vegetarians and vegans have an opportunity to experiment with different foods to help them to meet their nutrient needs.

There are lots of different beliefs about the benefits of a plant-based diet. While eating mainly fruits and vegetables can help provide you with vitamins and minerals, it is very important to realize that you may be missing out on some nutrients that are crucial to a healthy, balanced diet.

### Curious to know what you may be missing?

Here are some of the nutrients you should be aware of, and where you can find them.

**Protein:** We need protein to help us to grow and maintain many of the functions in our bodies. Protein is most readily found in meat products. Luckily, vegetarian and vegan protein sources are becoming much easier to find. Natural proteins, like **beans, nuts and nut butters, eggs (the most complete protein!), soy products (like tofu), and dairy products** are all great ways to help you to meet your recommended daily intake of protein.

Remember, these products are usually less protein-dense than meat products, so it is important to make sure that you include some source of protein at most meals. Miss your chicken nuggets and meatballs with your spaghetti? Foods are available that have similar qualities to these favorites, but are made with soy or other vegan proteins.

**B Vitamins:** Vitamin B12 is involved in the metabolism of every cell in the body. Lacto-ovo vegetarians—those who eat eggs and dairy products—usually can easily meet their daily requirements for vitamin B12. Stricter vegetarians and vegans should try to eat **fortified breakfast cereals and bread products** to help meet the daily recommendation. Try **veggie burgers and**

**nutritional yeast**, which are also great sources of Vitamin B12.

**Calcium:** Calcium is essential for strong teeth and bones. If you drink **milk**, getting enough calcium into your diet can be easy. Other great sources of calcium are **fortified orange juice, leafy green vegetables like bok choy or spinach, beans, almonds, soy products, and fortified breakfast cereals**. Remember, natural foods are a better way to get your nutrients, like calcium, than a supplement.

**Iron:** Iron carries oxygen in your blood, and is a very important nutrient to include in your diet. Iron sources include **spinach, fortified cereals, kidney beans, whole wheat breads, potatoes with skin, and enriched pasta**. To help you body absorb the iron offered in these foods, pair them with **vitamin C** in peppers, citrus fruits, or broccoli.

**Zinc:** Zinc helps your body with wound healing and can boost your immune system. **Beans** are a great source of zinc for vegetarians and vegans. **Fortified foods, pumpkin seeds, and milk** are all great ways to fit zinc into your diet.

### Looking for some creative vegan dishes?

Plain tofu and fresh vegetables are great meal options, but, like anything else, can become overused. Stop by the Vegan Station to take a look at innovative, creative twists on vegetarian and vegan entrées. Along with fiber-rich beans and carbohydrate-dense rice, you'll find lots of dishes using meat substitutes and soy-based products to keep your taste buds guessing, and to help you meet your daily needs of all of these nutrients.

**Visit the Vegan Station on Wednesday, April 6 to try an Indian-style Vegan Dish with the Traveling Chef!**

Learn more about healthy eating habits at [www.mypyramid.org](http://www.mypyramid.org)

