



Is a Meatless Diet Really Healthy?

The answer is, it certainly can be. The bottom line depends on your food choices over time. Vegetarian eating offers several health benefits that tend to result in lower rates of heart disease, high blood pressure, Type 2 Diabetes and some forms of cancer. Vegetarian meals can easily include all of the nutrients you need for good nutrition.

Vegetarians fall into groups defined by the types of animal-derived food they eat.

There are four main types:

Semi-vegetarians follow a vegetarian eating plan of some type but occasionally consume meat, fish, and/or poultry.

Lacto-ovo-vegetarians eliminate red meat, fish and poultry from their meal plans. Foods consumed on the lacto-ovo-vegetarian diet are plant, milk and egg based. They have not come in contact with those meat products listed above.

Lacto-vegetarians do not consume animal products including meat, poultry, fish and eggs. Foods consumed on the lacto-vegetarian diet are plant and milk based.

Vegans do not consume animal products, including meats, poultry, fish, milk, eggs and cheese. Foods consumed on the vegan diet are strictly plant based and have not come into contact with foods of non-plant origin.

Making a vegetarian eating plan work for you starts with knowing your nutritional needs and then selecting foods that meet those needs. For instance, unsupplemented vegan diets do not provide vitamin B-12. Dairy products and eggs supply vitamin B-12; however, depending on food choices, some lacto-ovo-vegetarians may have inadequate intakes.

In addition to regular supplementation with vitamin B-12, vegans require a dietary source of vitamin D when sun exposure is insufficient. This occurs at northern latitudes and in certain other situations. Many fortified nondairy milks and breakfast cereals provide vitamin D, although the form used to fortify cereals is often not vegan. Vegetarians may also choose vitamin D supplements.



If you're considering a vegetarian lifestyle, follow these helpful tips to get started:

- Choose a variety of foods.
- One serving from calcium-rich food groups provides approximately 10% of adult daily requirements. Choose at least 8 or more servings a day.
- Include 2 servings a day of foods that supply omega-3 fatty acids, such as fatty fish, legumes, walnuts and flaxseed.
- Include at least 3 servings of vitamin B-12 a day.
- Consume foods rich or fortified in vitamin D.

Sources: American Dietetic Association

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