



Vegetarian Nutrition

a dietetic practice group of the
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RDN Resources for Consumers:

Vegetarian/Vegan Myths

Myth #1: A Vegetarian/Vegan Diet is not safe for a Growing Child

A well-planned vegetarian/vegan diet is safe for people of all ages, including babies, children, teenagers, pregnant mothers, and adults. Consuming a variety of nutritious plant foods can provide all of the nutrients children need during this important time of growth. However, adding fortified foods or supplements may be required.



Myth #2: It is Hard for a Vegetarian/Vegan to Eat Enough Protein

It is very easy to consume enough protein on a plant-based diet, as long as a person eats a variety of foods throughout the day. Good sources of protein include: legumes (lentils, beans, peas), soy-foods (tofu, tempeh, edamame), seitan, meat alternatives (veggie burgers, plant-based crumbles), milk (cow's milk and soy milk), nuts, seeds, and grains (farro, millet, quinoa).

Protein requirements can be met when a variety of plant foods are eaten and overall calorie needs are met. All of the essential amino acids can be eaten throughout the day and there is no need to 'combine proteins' at the same meal.

Myth #3: You Have to Eat Fake Meat

Being vegetarian does not mean you have to resort to only eating meat alternatives. While meat alternatives are becoming increasingly popular and can fit into a healthy diet, there are many whole, plant-based food options that are sure to please any palate. It's important to note that not all meat alternatives are created equal – be sure to read the ingredients and nutrition fact labels to ensure they are made from quality ingredients, and are not too high in salt, added sugars, or saturated fat.



Looking for vegetarian recipe inspiration? Check out www.vegetariannutrition.net.

Myth #4: Going Vegetarian/Vegan means you have to give up most foods

Vegetarians and vegans have an enormous amount of nutrient-dense food options to choose from. Giving up animal products will allow you to explore new foods.

A vegan diet is typically rich in whole grains (brown rice, millet, barley, oats, whole wheat bread), a variety of fruits and vegetables, nuts, seeds, legumes (such as lentils, chickpeas, kidney beans, adzuki beans), soy foods (tofu, tempeh, miso), seitan, etc. A vegetarian diet will include those foods and may or may not include dairy products and eggs. Go ahead, be adventurous and try some new foods today!

Myth #5: Vegetarians/Vegans Cannot Eat Enough Iron

Vegetarians/vegans have similar iron intake as compared to the general population. There are several reasons why it is easy for a vegetarian/vegan to get enough iron:

Many commonly eaten foods are high in iron: dark leafy greens (collards, bok choy), beans, tofu, tempeh, black strap molasses, quinoa, tahini, fortified breakfast cereals, etc.

Vegan and vegetarian diets are good sources of vitamin C, which greatly increases absorption of iron. Adding a vitamin C-rich food, such as tomatoes, bell peppers, or citrus fruit, to a meal increases iron absorption.



Many combinations of commonly eaten foods, such as beans and tomato sauce or stir-fried tofu and broccoli, are high in both vitamin C and iron. Broccoli and bok choy are foods that contain both vitamin C and iron.

Myth #6: The Only Rich Sources of Calcium for Bone Health Are Dairy Products

Calcium needs can easily be met on plant-based diets because of the many calcium-rich plant foods available. Plant foods may provide additional benefits for bone health since they can be good sources of other compounds believed to affect bone health. Other factors that contribute to good bone health include exercise and vitamin D intake.

Lifestyle factors that contribute to poor bone health include high sodium intake, extreme weight loss, alcohol, and smoking.

Naturally calcium-rich foods include: leafy green vegetables (collards, kale, mustard and turnip greens), bok choy, calcium-set tofu, and almonds. Calcium-

fortified foods include: certain brands of juices (apple, orange, and vegetable juice blends), fortified breakfast cereals, protein bars, margarine, and many non-dairy soy, rice or almond beverages.

For more information about any of the topics above, please see one of our free resources at: <http://vegetariannutrition.net>.

A registered dietitian nutritionist can help you develop a healthy vegetarian eating plan that meets your needs.

To find an RDN in your area, visit: <https://vegetariannutrition.net/find-a-registered-dietitian/>.

