



RD Resources for Consumers:

Vegetarian/Vegan Teens

Appropriately planned vegetarian and vegan diets are healthful and nutritionally adequate for all stages of the life cycle, including teenagers.

Many teens choose a plant-based diet because of environmental and ethical concerns regarding meat production and consumption. According to the 2016 position paper of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, appropriately planned vegetarian, including vegan, diets are healthful, nutritionally adequate, and may provide health benefits for the prevention and treatment of certain diseases. These diets are appropriate for all stages of the life cycle, including teenagers.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2014, adolescents between the ages of 10 and 19 made up more than 13 percent (almost 42 million) of the population in the United States. These teenagers represent increasingly diverse racial/ethnic, socioeconomic, and geographic factions of the U.S. population. By 2050, estimates show that adolescents will make up 11.2 percent (almost 45 million) of the population.

Types of Vegetarians

Lacto-ovo: Includes dairy products such as milk, cheese, yogurt, and eggs but excludes meat, poultry, and fish.

Lacto: Includes dairy products but excludes eggs and foods containing eggs as well as meat, poultry and fish.

Vegan: Includes only foods of plant origin and excludes meat or animal products such as milk or eggs. A vegan diet consists of fruits, vegetables, beans, grains, seeds, and nuts.

Vegetarian/Vegan Meal Ideas

Breakfast

- Oats made with 1% milk or any non-dairy milk. Add nuts and fruit as desired
- Whole-wheat or multi-grain toast with nut butter (peanut or almond) and a piece of fruit
- Smoothie made with soy milk or yogurt and fruit

Lunch

- Vegetable sandwich with hummus, with or without cheese, on whole-grain bread
- Vegetable and bean/lentil soup with whole grain bread (sandwich or toast)
- Veggie burger or falafel on a whole-grain bun
- Pita bread filled with veggies or peanut butter
- Chili with beans and textured vegetable protein
- Salad – mixed greens, tomatoes, cucumbers, beets, carrots, olives, chick peas, sunflower seeds
- Whole grain salad – cooked quinoa or bulgur, vegetables, beans

Dinner

- Tofu stir-fry with brown rice or soba noodles
- Pasta with tomato sauce plus vegetables (mushrooms, tomatoes, eggplant, peppers, and onions)
- Tacos or burritos filled with beans, textured vegetable protein, tofu, or tempeh
- Pizza with or without cheese and topped with vegetables, tofu, or meat substitute

Snacks

- Trail mix made with nuts, seeds and dried fruit
- Air popped Popcorn
- Vanilla Greek yogurt with berries
- Hummus with assorted veggies
- Whole grain bread or english muffin/bagel with nut butter
- Whole grain tortilla, peanut butter and banana roll-up
- Ants on a log – celery, peanut butter, raisins
- Apple with peanut butter
- Whole grain crackers or pita bread with hummus
- Multigrain baked tortilla chips with black beans, salsa, guacamole

Food Sources of Important Nutrients to Consider

Protein

- Beans
- Whole-grains
- Soy products (e.g. tofu, tempeh, soy milk)
- Nuts & nut butters
- Dairy products
- Eggs

Iron

- Beans
- Green leafy vegetables (e.g. kale, collard greens)
- Fortified breads and cereals
- Instant oatmeal
- Nuts & nut butters
- Potatoes (eaten with their skin)
- Enriched pasta
- Dried fruit

Calcium

- Cow's milk
- Fortified soymilk or rice milk
- Leafy green vegetables
- Broccoli
- Beans
- Calcium-fortified orange juice
- Calcium-set tofu
- Almonds and almond butter
- Sesame seeds and sesame butter (e.g. tahini)
- Blackstrap molasses
- Figs

tip

Consuming a good source of vitamin C (e.g. citrus fruits, orange juice, tomatoes) with iron rich foods increases iron absorption.

Vitamin B12

- Vitamin B12-fortified foods (such as nutritional yeast, soymilk, meat analogs, or ready-to-eat cereals. Be sure to check the label.)
- Dairy products
- Eggs

tip

A daily vitamin B-12 supplement of 5 to 10 ug or a weekly B-12 supplement of 2,000 ug may be used to help prevent B12 deficiency..

Vitamin D

- Eggs
- Vitamin D-fortified foods (such as soymilk, cow's milk, orange juice, ready-to-eat cereals)
- Vitamin D is also made in the skin from sunlight

tip

Vegetarians who do not consume vitamin D sources or receive direct sunlight on a regular basis should consider taking a supplement.*

*Please check ingredient labeling, not all supplements are vegan or vegetarian friendly.

Diet Tips for Teens

- **Eat real food**; limit ultra-processed foods, simple starches and sugar
- Include a daily source of **calcium, vitamin D** and **vitamin B-12** such as 1-2 cups of fortified soymilk or almond milk
- Include good sources of **omega 3 fats** such as 1-3 teaspoons of ground flaxseeds or a handful of walnuts; eat a variety of nuts for healthy fats, protein, and minerals
- Eat a **rainbow of vegetables and fruits** to get vitamins and minerals
- Include a **variety of whole grains and beans** to get protein, fiber and minerals such as magnesium, zinc, and iron
- Take a **daily supplement** with vitamin B12, vitamin D, iodine, iron, and zinc
- If you consume milk or dairy, choose **low-fat products**

Planning a Healthy Diet

- Get tips for planning a balanced diet using the Choose My Plate guidelines found at: www.choosemyplate.gov/tips-vegetarians ↗
- FAQs about being a vegetarian/vegan teen from the Vegetarian Resource Group at: www.vrg.org/teen ↗
- Check out the USDA Food & Nutrition Information Center's Vegetarian Nutrition page: www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/vegetarian-nutrition ↗
- Get more information on how to eat a plant-based diet, and specific nutrients such as calcium, iron, and Vitamin B-12 at: www.vegetariannutrition.net ↗

Vegetarian Nutrition

a dietetic practice group of the

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RD Resources are a project of the Vegetarian Nutrition Dietetic Practice Group. More topics available at www.VegetarianNutrition.net. Professional resources also available for members at www.VNDPG.org. © 2018 by VN DPG.

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