



VEGETARIAN NUTRITION FOR ADULTS



“How we maintain the health of our body, mind, soul, and planet is a choice each has to make. A balanced vegetarian diet will result in improved health and fitness, greater mental equipoise, and higher spiritual attainment. Following a vegetarian diet can help us achieve the health and purity of our body, mind, soul, and planet. We will not only be contributing to peace for ourselves and all life, but we will also be doing our part toward making Planet Earth a haven of joy and peace.”

- *Sant Rajinder Singh*

Science of Spirituality is an international, multi-faith organization transforming lives through meditation under the direction of Sant Rajinder Singh Ji Maharaj.

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Questions and Answers about Vegetarian Nutrition

What is a Plant-based Diet?

A plant-based diet is a diet that focuses around plant foods: fruits, vegetables, legumes, grains, nuts and seeds, and zero animal products. “Plant-based” refers to whole foods – not processed foods that were once whole foods.

What is a Vegan Diet?

A vegan diet excludes eating any animal or anything that comes from an animal – so eggs, dairy, and often honey are excluded.

What is a Lacto-vegetarian Diet?

A lacto-vegetarian diet consists of eating fruits, vegetables, grains, legumes (beans, peas, and lentils), nuts, seeds, and dairy products. Lacto-vegetarians do not eat meat, fish, fowl, or eggs. A lacto-vegetarian diet contains all the essential nutrients, vitamins, minerals, and proteins that adults need and can be low in fat, high in complex carbohydrates, and packed with a wide variety of fruits and vegetables.

Is Becoming a Vegetarian Good for Your Health?

Plant-based eating is recognized not only as nutritionally superior but also as a way to reduce the risk of many chronic illnesses. Vegetarians are more likely than the general population to eat the recommended portions of fruits and vegetables each day. Vegetarians tend to consume a lower proportion of calories from fat, also fewer calories, with more fiber, potassium, and vitamin C than non-vegetarians.

Research has shown that vegetarians are less likely to suffer from obesity, coronary heart disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, cancer, dental disease, diverticular disease, appendicitis, constipation, and gallstones.

In July 2009, the American Dietetic Association concluded that well-planned vegetarian diets are appropriate for individuals during all stages of the life cycle, including pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood and adolescence, and for athletes.

Is a Vegetarian Diet Recommended for Older Adults?

A well-planned vegetarian diet is health supporting for all ages and can help to overcome or reduce symptoms of certain problems that may become more common with age.

A new study published in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* has found that older vegetarian women eat better and have lower blood sugar and cholesterol levels than their non-vegetarian counterparts.

Studies by Brants et al., (1990, Netherlands) and Lowik et al., (1990, Netherlands) compared the B₁₂ status of adult (65-97 years) lacto-vegetarians to non-vegetarians. They concluded that a lacto-vegetarian diet can be adequate as one ages, with positive impacts on heart disease risks.

Can my Nutritional Needs be Met?

A well-balanced vegetarian diet can provide all essential nutrients. Concerns about vegetarian diets are focused mainly on the following nutrients:

Protein

Proteins are considered the “building blocks” of the body. Proteins are part of every living cell, tissue, and organ in our body which are constantly being broken down and replaced. As long as one is eating a variety of plant foods in sufficient quantity to maintain one’s weight, the body gets plenty of protein. Many nutritional authorities, including the American Dietetic Association, believe protein needs can easily be met by consuming a variety of plant protein sources over an entire day. To obtain the most benefit from proteins you consume, it is important to eat enough calories to meet your energy needs.

Beans, whole grains, and vegetables contain adequate amounts of protein. To consume a diet that contains enough, but not too much, protein focus on grains, vegetables, legumes (peas, beans, and lentils), fruits, and low-fat dairy products.

Vitamin B₁₂

B₁₂ helps keep the body’s nerve and blood cells healthy and helps make DNA, the genetic material in all cells. Vitamin B₁₂, an essential B vitamin, is not found in any significant amounts in plant foods. In the lacto-vegetarian diet, one can easily get B₁₂ from dairy products.

The General Conference Nutrition Council recommends that vegetarians not eating dairy should include foods high in vitamin B₁₂. Nutritional yeast, fortified breads, cereals, and soy milks are good choices (or use a vitamin B₁₂ supplement).

Iron

Iron functions as a carrier of oxygen in the blood. Studies show that in Western countries, vegetarians get the same amount of iron as meat eaters. Iron sources for vegetarians include fortified cereals, spinach, kidney beans, peas, lentils, turnip greens, molasses, whole wheat breads, and dried apricots, prunes, and raisins.

Essential Fatty Acids (Omegas)

Omega-3, omega-6 and omega-9 fatty acids are important in the normal functioning of all tissues of the body. Adequate amounts of omega-6 are found in leafy vegetables, seeds, nuts, grains, and vegetable oils (corn, safflower, soybean, cottonseed, sesame, and sunflower). Good vegetarian sources of omega-3 are flaxseed oil, flaxseeds, walnuts, hemp seed oil, hemp seeds, chia seeds, algae, fortified foods, and plant-based (not fish-based) omega-3 supplements. If there are enough omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids, the body produces omega-9. A diet high in omega-3 fatty acids is proven to be cardioprotective.

Calcium

Calcium, a mineral found in many foods, is needed to maintain strong bones and to carry out many important functions in the body. It is easy for lacto-vegetarians to get enough calcium to meet their daily needs with dairy products. Calcium-rich nondairy foods include: dark leafy greens (collard, turnip, bok choy, kale, and mustard greens), broccoli, almonds, carrots, sesame seeds, calcium-fortified soymilk, breakfast cereals and orange juice, and tofu made with calcium sulfate.

Vegetarian Recipes

Breakfast Smoothie

1/2 cup water
1 cup ice
1 cup plain nonfat Greek yogurt
1 banana
1 cup raw spinach
1 tsp. ground flaxseed
Sweeten to taste

Combine all ingredients in a high-speed blender.

Makes 3 cups

Vegetarian Reuben Sandwich

2 slices rye bread, lightly toasted
1 Tbsp. mustard
1/2 cup well drained sauerkraut
2-3 slices tomato
3 slices Lightlife Smart Bacon or Tempeh Fakin' Bacon
1-2 slices Swiss cheese

Spread mustard on bread. Arrange remaining ingredients in order listed above on bottom slice of bread.

Microwave for 30 seconds or until the cheese is melted. Cover with top slice of bread and heat 10 seconds more.

Variation: For open-faced sandwiches layer all ingredients on one slice of bread and heat.



Avocado Dinner Salad (Vegan)

1 large head romaine lettuce
1 red or green bell pepper
1 large tomato
1 large cucumber
1 large or 2 small avocados
1 - 15 oz. can chickpeas, drained
1 - 15 oz. can whole black olives, drained

Cut first 5 ingredients into bite-size pieces. Combine all ingredients in a large bowl. Toss with dressing of your choice.

Serves 4

White Bean, Sweet Potato & Kale Stew (Vegan)

32 oz. vegetable stock
1 onion, chopped
1 sweet potato, cut into bite-size pieces
1/4 cup cashew or almond butter
3 cups cooked cannellini beans, rinsed
1 - 5 oz. pkg. baby kale
1 - 15 oz. can diced tomatoes
2 Tbsp. Italian blend seasoning

Combine 1 cup stock, onion and sweet potato in a large pan and bring to a boil. Simmer 10 minutes until sweet potato is tender. In a small bowl stir 1/2 cup stock and nut butter together until smooth. Add contents of small bowl, remaining stock, and rest of ingredients to the pan and bring to a boil. Simmer 5-8 minutes until kale is wilted but still bright green.

Serves 4