

Eat Right

Food, Nutrition, and Health Tips from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

Healthy Eating Tips for Vegetarians

While there are many reasons people choose a vegetarian eating style, a well-planned vegetarian diet can be healthy, taste great and may provide health benefits in the prevention and treatment of certain diseases.

What is a vegetarian diet?

There are many types of vegetarians, but most follow a vegetarian diet that excludes meat, poultry and seafood. Some may choose a plant-based diet that excludes eggs and dairy, like milk, yogurt and cheese.

Well-planned vegetarian diets are appropriate for individuals of all ages including infants, children, teens and pregnant and breastfeeding women, as well as adults.

Are there health benefits?

Vegetarians often have lower cholesterol levels, blood pressure and rates of hypertension and Type 2 diabetes than non-vegetarians.

Vegetarians also tend to have a healthier weight and lower overall cancer rates. These health benefits may result from higher intakes of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts and fiber along with lower intakes of saturated fats.

Food Groups for Vegetarians

These food groups may look familiar. They are the same food groups featured in USDA's MyPlate.

- **Fruits:** Eat a wide variety of colorful fruits, including fresh, frozen and canned



with no added sugar. Fruit supplies fiber, vitamins and minerals.

- **Vegetables:** Choose vegetables in a variety of colors, especially orange, red and dark-green for their vitamins, minerals and fiber. Vegetables like broccoli, bok choy and collard greens provide calcium. Vegetables can be fresh, frozen or canned without salt.
- **Grains:** Eat more whole grains in place of refined ones. Some grains, like quinoa and millet are higher in protein. Many ready-to-eat cereals are fortified with iron and even vitamin B12. Replace white rice, pasta and breads with whole-grain options.
- **Proteins:** Variety, again, is important in this food group. Beans, peas and lentils are packed with iron, zinc, fiber and protein. Nuts, seeds and soy products are also great choices.
- **Dairy:** Milk, yogurt and cheese are rich in calcium and most are fortified with vitamin D. Choose low-fat or fat-free options. Non-dairy alternatives are also available such as calcium-fortified soymilk and almond milk.

Healthful Vegetarian Meal and Snack Ideas

As you can see, a healthy vegetarian eating style depends on variety and thoughtful planning. Here are some ideas to get you started.

Breakfast

- Spread almond butter on a whole-grain toasted bagel and top with apple slices.
- Instant oatmeal made with low-fat or fat-free milk with nuts and dried cranberries
- Whole-grain toaster waffle topped with blueberries and yogurt

Lunch

- Vegetable burger or falafel with cheese, mushrooms and tomato on a whole-grain bun
- Main dish salad with your choice of leafy greens, cut-up vegetables, beans or tofu, fruit and nuts
- Peanut butter and banana sandwich on whole-wheat bread with carrot and celery sticks
- Chili made with beans and textured vegetable protein plus shredded cheese and cornbread

Dinner

- Whole-grain pasta with tomato sauce plus vegetables (mushrooms, tomatoes, eggplant, peppers and onions)
- Pizza with or without cheese and topped with vegetables and tofu or meat substitute.

- Tacos or burritos filled with beans, textured vegetable protein, tofu or tempeh
- Tofu and vegetable stir-fry with brown rice
- Baked potato topped with broccoli and cheese

Snacks

- Hummus and pita wedges
- Bagel with nut butter
- Yogurt layered with crunchy whole-grain-cereal and sliced fruit
- A cup of vegetable soup and whole grain crackers

For additional help in planning your or your child's vegetarian eating plan, go to www.eatright.org to find a registered dietitian nutritionist in your area. Additional information is also available on www.ChooseMyPlate.gov.



The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics is the largest organization of food and nutrition professionals. The Academy is committed to improving the health and advancing the profession of dietetics through research, education and advocacy.

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