



Vegetarian Diet

A vegetarian diet has no meat, fish, seafood, or poultry. Vegetarians eat mostly grains, vegetables, fruits, dried beans, nuts and seeds. A vegetarian diet is often low in fat, especially if low-fat milk products are used, and if it does not have too many nuts and seeds. Vegetarian diets are also high in fiber. This type of diet may lower your cholesterol, help you control your weight and may prevent some cancers. There are four types of vegetarian diets:

- Lacto-ovo-vegetarian: includes dairy products, eggs, and plant foods
- Lacto-vegetarian: includes dairy products and plant foods
- Ovo-vegetarian: includes eggs and plant foods
- Vegan: includes only plant foods

It may be difficult to get enough of some vitamins and minerals while on a vegan or vegetarian diet. Multivitamins may be needed. Adding servings of the following to your diet may also help:

- Vitamin B-12: dairy products, eggs, fortified cereals, fortified soy and rice beverages. Because B-12 is found naturally only in animal foods, vegans need to get the recommended daily allowance of 2 micrograms of this vitamin from a food that is supplemented with B-12 or take a vitamin supplement.
- Vitamin B-6: legumes, sweet potatoes, avocados, fortified cereal
- Calcium: If you do not include dairy products in your diet, you need to get calcium from other foods. Foods high in calcium include broccoli, tofu, soybeans, collard greens, turnip greens, dried figs and calcium-fortified juice. As a teen, you're building up your bones for the rest of your life. If you do not eat dairy products, you may need a calcium supplement.
- Vitamin D: Vitamin D fortified cow's milk or soy milk can provide your Vitamin D requirement.
- Zinc: Foods high in zinc include almonds, bran flakes, wheat germ, cashews and chickpeas.
- Iron: legumes, whole wheat, brown rice, leafy greens, fortified cereal and bread, dried fruit. Eating these foods with a food high in vitamin C (citrus fruits and juices, tomatoes and broccoli) will help you to better absorb iron. Some girls on a vegetarian diet may not get enough iron and will require a vitamin supplement.
- Protein: eggs, dairy products, nuts, peanut butter, tofu, beans, seeds, soy milk, grains, and cereals.
- Omega-3 fatty acids: Linoleic acid may help increase the amount of omega-3 fatty acids in the body. Try foods like walnuts, flax seed and linseed oil.

Vegetarian diets tend to be high in fiber and low in fat and calories. That may be good for people who need to lose weight or lower their cholesterol but it can be a problem for kids and teens who are still growing. Diets that are high in fiber tend to be more filling, and therefore strict vegetarians may feel full before they've eaten enough calories to keep their bodies healthy and strong. It's a good idea to let your doctor know that you're a vegetarian so that he or she can keep an eye on your growth and make sure you're still getting adequate amounts of calories and fat.

Reputable websites where you can find out more:

www.VRG.org

The Vegetarian Resource Group, a nonprofit organization promoting veganism, runs this website that offers sound, practical advice, including specific advice for teenagers.

www.nutrition.gov

The US Department of Agriculture's website has information and links to consumer information on vegetarianism and other nutrition topics.

Suggested reading:

A Teen's Guide to Going Vegetarian by Judy Krizmanic (Puffin Books)

The Teen's Vegetarian Cookbook by Judy Kriamanic (Puffin Books)