



*Reprinted from the Journal of the American Dietetic Association, Volume 103, Number 6, V. Messina, et al, *A new food guide for North American vegetarians*. P. 771-775, Copyright 2003, with permission from The American Dietetic Association.

You can use this vegetarian food guide pyramid to help you select foods and plan your meals. The vegetarian food groups are whole grains, protein foods like nuts and legumes, vegetables, fruits and oils. The pyramid has the number of servings of each group to have everyday. It also tells you how big a portion is.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, www.eatright.org

Vegetarian Resource Group, www.vrg.org

Vegetarian Society (UK), www.vegsoc.org

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AN APPLE A DAY

Becoming A Vegetarian

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University of Nevada
Cooperative Extension

Prepared by University of Nevada Cooperative Extension and
the University of Nevada School of Medicine.

WHAT IS A HEALTHY VEGETARIAN DIET?

Studies show some health benefits from eating a well balanced vegetarian diet:

- Healthy weight
- Less heart disease, diabetes, or high blood pressure
- Less likely to get lung or colon cancer

Important Nutrients:

Iron

Vegetarians must choose foods carefully to get enough iron. Iron helps get oxygen to the cells of our body. Most adults need to get 8 milligrams of iron from their diet every day. Women who are still having periods need 18 mg.

Vegetarian foods that are good sources of iron include dried beans (pinto beans, garbanzo beans, navy beans, etc.), soybeans, tofu, spinach, chard, beet greens, blackstrap molasses, bulgur wheat, and dried fruit. Some vegetarian foods that have iron added to them like breakfast cereals. Eating foods that provide Vitamin C (oranges, grapefruit, potatoes, strawberries, cantaloupe, tomato, and broccoli) helps us use the iron in vegetarian foods better.

Vegetarians may want to take one-a-day vitamin-mineral supplement with iron.

Protein

Everybody needs the right kind and the right amount of **PROTEIN** to stay strong and healthy. Protein is made up of “building blocks” that are called amino acids.

Foods that come from animals (meat, fish, milk, eggs) and soy beans (tofu, soy milk, tempeh) have all of the protein building blocks we need. Many of the foods in a vegetarian diet are missing some of the necessary amino acids. In order to get the right amount of protein you can eat plant foods that complement each other. Here are some examples of vegetarian “combos” that provide complete protein:

Grains and Legumes

Cornbread and chili beans
Beans in a tostada or burrito
Brown rice and peas or lentils
Lentil and barley soup
Minestrone soup and whole grain bread
Peanut butter sandwich

Legumes, Nuts, and/or Seeds

Peanuts and sunflower seeds
Lentil casserole with sesame seeds
Seed bread and split pea soup

Dairy and Grains

Breakfast cereal and milk
Macaroni and cheese
Cheese sandwich
Rice cooked with milk rather than water
Peanut butter sandwich and yogurt

Calcium

Calcium is important for our bones, teeth, and muscles. Younger people (19-50 years) need about 1000 milligrams of calcium everyday. People over 50 need about 1200 mg/day.

If you don't eat dairy foods (milk, cheese, yogurt), you will need to select other foods to get enough calcium.

Plant sources of calcium include all types of greens (turnip, spinach, kale, beet, collard), tofu made with calcium, broccoli, calcium-fortified soy, almond, rice and coconut milk.

VITAMIN B12

This vitamin comes primarily from animal-derived foods. A vegetarian diet that included dairy products or eggs provides adequate vitamin B12.

Fortified foods, such as some brands of cereal, nutritional yeast, soy milk, or foods made from soy, are good non-animal sources of B12. Tempeh and sea vegetables may also contain some vitamin B12.

Check labels to discover other products that are fortified with vitamin B12.

Recommended Books

[Becoming Vegetarian: The Complete Guide to Adopting a Healthy Vegetarian Diet](#) by Vesanto Melina and Brenda Davis. 2003. ISBN: 0-470-83253-3

The authors are registered dietitians who are practicing vegetarians. This book is a guide for following a plant-based diet. It defines vegetarianism, discusses health benefits, and gives nutrition plans for all ages.

[Conveniently Vegan](#) by Debra Wasserman. The Vegetarian Resource Group, 1997. ISBN: 0-931411-18-1

The author is co-director of The Vegetarian Resource Group, a national nonprofit educational organization. The book has over 150 healthful and convenient recipes and their nutrient analyses.

[Vegetarian Cooking for Dummies](#) by Suzanne Havala, MS, RD. Hungry Minds Inc., 2001. ISBN: 0-7645-5350-X

This is a good vegetarian “starter” book. It has recipe ideas with simple instructions for dips, spreads, soups, salads, entrees, side dishes, breads, rolls and desserts. It has good “tips, tricks, and techniques” for adapting recipes to a vegetarian format.

[Diet for a Small Planet, 20th Anniversary Edition](#) by Frances Moore Lappe. Ballantine Books, a division of Random House, Inc, 1991. ISBN: 0-345-32120-0

This is a classic book about the social and personal significance of vegetarian diet. It includes simple rules for a healthy diet, discusses food combining for protein adequacy, and has hundreds of easy to make recipes.

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