



A VEGETARIAN DIET

Everything you need to know about vegetarianism

The vegetarian diet has gained popularity in recent years with estimates that vegetarians now account for 18% of the global population.

Apart from the ethical and environmental benefits of cutting meat from your diet, a well-planned vegetarian diet may also reduce your risk of chronic disease, support weight loss and improve the quality of your diet.

SHOULD YOU BECOME A VEGETARIAN?

People choose a vegetarian diet for many reasons. For some people, eating vegetarian is a way to be healthier but for others vegetarianism may be motivated by religion, animal rights, or environmental concerns.

If you're considering a vegetarian diet, you'll want to consider what type of vegetarian you want to be. Once you've decided which foods you'll avoid, you'll also want to come up with a plan to ensure that you're able to get all the nutrients your body needs.

WHAT IS A VEGETARIAN DIET?

The vegetarian diet involves abstaining from eating meat, fish, and poultry. There are several forms of vegetarianism, each of which differs in their restrictions.

The most common types include:

- **LACTO-OVO-VEGETARIAN DIET:** Eliminates meat, fish and poultry but allows eggs and dairy products.
- **LACTO-VEGETARIAN DIET:** Eliminates meat, fish, poultry, and eggs but allows dairy products.
- **OVO-VEGETARIAN DIET:** Eliminates meat, fish, poultry, and dairy products but allows eggs.
- **PESCATARIAN DIET:** Eliminates meat and poultry but allows fish and sometimes eggs and dairy products.
- **VEGAN DIET:** Eliminates meat, fish, poultry, eggs, and dairy products, as well as other animal-derived products, such as honey.
- **FLEXITARIAN DIET:** A mostly vegetarian diet that incorporates occasional meat, fish, or poultry.

HEALTH BENEFITS

Vegetarian diets are associated with a variety of health benefits.

ENHANCE WEIGHT LOSS

Switching to a vegetarian diet can be an effective strategy if you're looking to lose weight. A meta study of 12 research projects noted that vegetarians, on average, experienced a 2 kg of weight loss over 18 weeks more than non-vegetarians.

Vegetarians tend to have a lower body mass index (BMI)

than omnivores — BMI being a measurement of body fat based on height and weight.

REDUCE CANCER RISK

Some research suggests that a vegetarian diet may be linked to a lower risk of cancer — including those of the breast, colon, rectum, and stomach. However, more research is needed to understand how vegetarianism may impact cancer risk.

STABILIZE BLOOD SUGAR

Several studies indicate that vegetarian diets may help maintain healthy blood sugar levels and may also prevent diabetes by stabilizing blood sugar levels in the long term.

According to one study in 2,918 people, switching from a non-vegetarian to a vegetarian diet was associated with a 53% reduced risk of diabetes over an average of five years.

PROMOTES HEART HEALTH

Vegetarian diets reduce several heart disease risk factors to help keep your heart healthy and strong. Some research

suggests that vegetarian diets have lower levels of triglycerides, total cholesterol, and “bad” LDL cholesterol — all of which are risk factors for heart disease when elevated. Another study found that a low-calorie vegetarian diet was more effective at reducing “bad” LDL cholesterol than a Mediterranean



diet. Vegetarianism can be associated with lower blood pressure levels and high blood pressure is another key risk factor for heart disease.

POTENTIAL DOWNSIDES

A balanced vegetarian diet can be healthy and nutritious however, it may also increase your risk of certain nutritional deficiencies.

Meat, poultry, and fish supply a good amount of protein and omega-3 fatty acids, as well as micronutrients like zinc, selenium, iron, and vitamin B12. Other animal products like dairy and eggs also contain plenty of calcium, vitamin D and B vitamins.

When cutting meat or other animal products from your diet, it's important to ensure you're getting these essential nutrients from other sources.

Studies show that vegetarians are at a higher risk of protein, calcium, iron, iodine, and vitamin B12 deficiencies. A nutritional deficiency in these key micronutrients can lead to symptoms like fatigue, weakness, anaemia, bone loss and thyroid issues.

You could of course be a vegetarian eating a diet made up entirely of snack cakes, French fries, and milkshakes, all of which have little nutritional value. As a result, the many health benefits may not apply.

REMEMBER: Empty calories can creep into any type of diet, meat-free or not.

Including a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, protein sources and fortified foods is an easy way to ensure you're getting appropriate nutrition.

Multivitamins and supplements are another option to quickly bump up your intake and compensate for potential deficiencies.

FOODS TO EAT

A vegetarian diet should include a diverse mix of fruits, vegetables, grains, healthy fats, and proteins. To replace the protein provided by meat in your diet, include a variety of protein-rich plant foods like nuts, seeds, legumes, tempeh, tofu, and seitan.

If you follow a lacto-ovo-vegetarian diet, eggs and dairy can also boost your protein intake. Eating nutrient-dense whole foods like fruits, vegetables and whole grains will supply a range of important vitamins and minerals to fill in any nutritional gaps in your diet.

A few healthy foods to eat on a vegetarian diet are:

- **FRUITS:** Apples, bananas, berries, oranges, melons, pears, peaches.
- **VEGETABLES:** Leafy greens, asparagus, broccoli, tomatoes, carrots.
- **GRAINS:** Quinoa, barley, buckwheat, rice, oats.

- **LEGUMES:** Lentils, beans, peas, chickpeas.
- **NUTS:** Almonds, walnuts, cashews, chestnuts.
- **SEEDS:** Flaxseeds, chia, and hemp seeds.
- **HEALTHY FATS:** Coconut oil, olive oil, avocados.
- **PROTEINS:** Tempeh, tofu, seitan, natto, nutritional yeast, spirulina, eggs, dairy products.

FOODS TO AVOID

There are many variations of vegetarianism, each with different restrictions. Lacto-ovo-vegetarianism, the most common type of vegetarian diet, involves eliminating all meat, poultry, and fish. Other types of vegetarians may also avoid foods like eggs and dairy. A vegan diet is the most restrictive form of vegetarianism because it bars meat, poultry, fish, eggs, dairy, and any other animal products.

Depending on your needs and preferences, you may have to avoid the following foods on a vegetarian diet:

- **MEAT:** Beef, veal, and pork.
- **POULTRY:** Chicken and turkey.
- **FISH AND SHELLFISH:** This restriction does not apply to pescatarians.
- **MEAT-BASED INGREDIENTS:** Gelatine, lard, carmine, isinglass, oleic acid, and suet.



- **EGGS:** This restriction applies to vegans and lacto-vegetarians.
- **DAIRY PRODUCTS:** This restriction on milk, yogurt and cheese applies to vegans and ovo-vegetarians.
- **OTHER ANIMAL PRODUCTS:** Vegans may choose to avoid honey, beeswax, and pollen.

SAMPLE MEAL PLAN

To help get you started, here's a one-week sample meal plan for a lacto-ovo-vegetarian diet.

MONDAY

- **BREAKFAST:** Oatmeal with fruit and flaxseeds.
- **LUNCH:** Grilled veggie and hummus wrap with sweet potato fries.
- **DINNER:** Tofu banh mi sandwich with pickled slaw.

TUESDAY

- **BREAKFAST:** Scrambled eggs with tomatoes, garlic, and mushrooms.
- **LUNCH:** Zucchini boats stuffed with veggies and feta with tomato soup.
- **DINNER:** Chickpea curry with basmati rice.

WEDNESDAY

- **BREAKFAST:** Greek yogurt with chia seeds and berries.
- **LUNCH:** Farro salad with tomatoes, cucumber, and feta with spiced lentil soup.
- **DINNER:** Eggplant parmesan with a side salad.

THURSDAY

- **BREAKFAST:** Tofu scramble with sauteed peppers, onions, and spinach.
- **LUNCH:** Burrito bowl with brown rice, beans, avocado, salsa, and veggies.
- **DINNER:** Vegetable paella with a side salad.

FRIDAY

- **BREAKFAST:** Whole-wheat toast with avocado and nutritional yeast.
- **LUNCH:** Marinated tofu pita pocket with Greek salad.
- **DINNER:** Quinoa-black-bean meatballs with zucchini noodles.

SATURDAY

- **BREAKFAST:** Smoothie of kale, berries, bananas, nut butter and almond milk.
- **LUNCH:** Red lentil veggie burger with avocado salad.
- **DINNER:** Flatbread with grilled garden vegetables and pesto.

SUNDAY

- **BREAKFAST:** Kale and sweet potato hash.
- **LUNCH:** Bell peppers stuffed with tempeh with zucchini fritters.
- **DINNER:** Black bean tacos with cauliflower rice.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Most vegetarians avoid meat, poultry, and fish, though some also restrict eggs, dairy, and other animal products.

A balanced vegetarian diet with nutritious foods like produce, grains, healthy fats, and plant-based protein may offer several health benefits, but it may increase your risk of nutritional deficiencies if poorly planned.

Be sure to pay close attention to a few key nutrients and round out your diet with a variety of healthy whole foods. That way, you'll enjoy the benefits of vegetarianism while minimizing the side effects.

