

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 several types of vegetarians, but most follow a vegetarian diet that excludes meat, poultry and seafood. Some may choose a plant-based diet that also excludes eggs and dairy, such as 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 dietary 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, canned and dried with no added sugars. Fruit supplies dietary 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 such as broccoli, bok choy and collard greens provide calcium. When choosing frozen or canned vegetables, look for products with lower amounts of sodium.
- **Grains:** Eat more whole grains in place of refined ones. Some grains, such as 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 contribute iron, zinc, dietary fiber and protein. Unsalted 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. Calcium-fortified soymilk is also part of this group. *(Individuals who choose not to consume dairy will need to obtain calcium and vitamin D from other sources, but the amount absorbed by the body can vary. A registered dietitian nutritionist can help you determine if a supplement is needed.)*

Healthful Vegetarian Meal and Snack Ideas

A healthy vegetarian eating style depends on variety and thoughtful planning. Many cultures offer vegetarian selections.

Breakfast

- Oatmeal or millet made with low-fat or fat-free milk or soymilk with nuts and dried fruit.
- Whole-grain toast topped with mashed avocado, a glass of low-sodium tomato juice and a piece of fruit.
- Brown rice with black beans, salsa, cooked plantain and a poached egg.

Lunch

- Veggie burger with low-fat cheese and mushrooms, or falafel in a whole wheat pita with cucumber, tomato, lettuce and onion.
- A bowl with your choice of leafy greens, cut-up vegetables, beans or tofu, fruit, nuts and cooked grains.
- Polenta with sautéed greens and roasted peppers.
- Chili made with beans and textured vegetable protein plus shredded low-fat cheese and cornbread.

Dinner

- Whole-grain pasta with tomato sauce and vegetables, such as mushrooms, tomatoes, eggplant, peppers, onions and garbanzo beans.
- Lentil stew with flatbread and a side salad.
- Tacos or burritos filled with beans, textured vegetable protein, tofu or tempeh.
- Tofu or edamame and vegetable stir-fry with brown rice.
- Baked potato topped with vegetarian chili and low-fat cheese.

Snacks

- Hummus, carrot sticks and pita wedges.
- Half a whole wheat bagel with nut butter and fruit.
- Yogurt layered with crunchy whole-grain-cereal and sliced fruit.
- A cup of vegetable soup and whole grain crackers.

For a referral to a registered dietitian nutritionist and for additional food and nutrition information, visit www.eatright.org.



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

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Source: *Finding Your Way to a Healthier You*, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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