

10 tips

MyPyramid

Nutrition Education Series

vegetarians

10 tips for following a vegetarian diet



Vegetarian diets can meet all the recommendations for nutrients. The key is to consume a variety of foods and the right amount of foods to meet your calorie needs. Follow the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* food group recommendations for your age, sex, and activity level to get the right amount and the variety for nutrient adequacy. Nutrients that vegetarians may need to focus on include protein, iron, calcium, zinc, and vitamin B₁₂.

1 think about protein

Your protein needs can easily be met by eating a variety of plant-based foods. Sources of protein for vegetarians include beans, nuts, peas, and soy products (tofu, tempeh, veggie burgers). Build meals around protein sources that are naturally low in fat, such as beans, lentils, and rice.

2 bone up on sources of calcium

Calcium is used for building bones and teeth. Sources of calcium for vegetarians include fortified breakfast cereals, soy products (tofu, soy-based beverages), calcium-fortified orange juice, and some dark-green leafy vegetables (collard greens, turnip greens, bok choy, mustard greens). These foods are usually low in fat and do not contain cholesterol naturally.



3 make simple changes

Many dishes can be made vegetarian—pasta primavera, pasta with marinara or pesto sauce, veggie pizza, vegetable lasagna, tofu-vegetable stir fry, bean burritos, etc. These changes can increase vegetable intake and cut saturated fat and cholesterol intake.

4 enjoy a cookout

For barbecues, try veggie or “garden” burgers, soy hot dogs, marinated tofu or tempeh, and veggie kabobs. Grilled veggies are great, too!

5 include beans and peas

Because of their high nutrient content, consuming dry beans and peas is recommended for everyone, vegetarians and non-vegetarians alike. Enjoy some beans and rice... or maybe a three bean salad or split pea soup.

6 try different veggie versions

A variety of vegetarian products look (and may taste) like their non-vegetarian counterparts, but are usually lower in saturated fat and contain no cholesterol. For breakfast, try soy-based sausage patties or links. For dinner, rather than hamburgers, try veggie burgers.

7 make some small changes at restaurants

Most restaurants can accommodate vegetarian modifications to menu items by substituting meatless sauces, omitting meat from stir-fries, and adding vegetables or pasta in place of meat. These substitutions are more likely to be available at restaurants that make food to order.

8 nuts make great snacks

Choose nuts as a snack, on salads, or in main dishes. Use nuts to replace meat or poultry. Add walnuts or pecans to a green salad instead of cheese or meat.



9 get your vitamin E

To help meet vitamin E recommendations, choose specific nut and seed choices more often—sunflower seeds, almonds, and hazelnuts (filberts). These are among the best sources of vitamin E in the Meat and Beans Food Group.

10 choose fats wisely

Fatty acids that are necessary for health are called “essential fatty acids.” Choose excellent sources of these, such as some nuts (walnuts) and seeds (flax seeds). Make a Waldorf salad, with apples, celery, walnuts, and low-fat dressing.

