

# Teen Vegetarians

The key to a successful vegetarian diet is VARIETY!

## Facts for Teens

Bulletin #4055

**Y**our nutritional needs are high during your teenage years because you are growing and changing quickly. If you have chosen a vegetarian diet, your parents and friends may ask questions about what you eat. They may worry about whether you have a nutritionally balanced diet.

The key to a successful vegetarian diet is VARIETY! You will get enough nutrients if you eat many different foods. There are some nutrients that you should know about and include in your diet. These are protein, calcium, vitamin D, iron, vitamin B12, and zinc.

### What about protein?

Most teens in Maine who eat a varied vegetarian diet rarely have problems getting enough protein. You can meet your daily protein needs by eating enough different foods for your energy needs. Excellent nonmeat sources of protein include cow's milk, soy milk, cheese, beans, breads, cereal, nuts, tofu, tempeh, eggs and yogurt. A mixture of these protein sources eaten throughout the day will provide all the essential amino acids. We now know that you need not plan combinations of foods to create "complete proteins."

### Calcium = strong bones

During your teenage years, most of your adult skeleton will be developed. This makes it very important to build strong bones to prevent osteoporosis, a disease common in older adults. You can easily receive your daily requirement of 1300 mg of calcium by including three or more good sources of calcium in your diet every day. Cow's milk and dairy products are good sources.

### There are six different types of vegetarians. Which one are you?

<b>Semi-Vegetarian</b>	Eats dairy products, poultry, fish and eggs and excludes all other meat.
<b>Pesco-Vegetarian</b>	Eats dairy products, eggs and fish and excludes all other meat.
<b>Lacto-ovo Vegetarian</b> <i>(the most popular)</i>	Eats dairy products and eggs but no other meat.
<b>Lacto-Vegetarian</b>	Eats only dairy products and excludes eggs and all other meat.
<b>Ovo-Vegetarian</b>	Eats only eggs, and excludes dairy products and all other meat.
<b>Vegan</b> <i>(the strictest)</i>	Eats no animal products of any kind.

However, there are other ways to get this vital nutrient in your diet. These include tahini (sesame butter), green leafy vegetables (kale, collards, mustard greens), seeds, nuts, legumes (dry beans and peas), dried figs, soy milk, tofu processed with calcium sulfate, and calcium-fortified orange juice.

### Vitamin D: calcium's partner

Your body needs vitamin D to absorb calcium, which is why it is added to milk. Exposing your skin to sunlight allows your body to make its own vitamin D. If you are not drinking milk or receiving direct sunlight on a regular basis, you may want to consider taking a vitamin D supplement.

## Iron = healthy blood and energy!

Teenagers need a lot of iron, and nonanimal sources of iron are not absorbed as well as animal sources. Nonanimal sources of iron include iron-fortified breads and cereals, tortillas, legumes, bean burritos, bean enchiladas, raisins and other dried fruit, spinach, beet greens, blackstrap molasses and prune juice. Include a vitamin-C-rich food at each meal to increase the amount of iron absorbed. Some good choices are citrus fruits or juices, broccoli, tomatoes and green peppers. Cooking in iron cookware also adds iron to foods.

## Vitamin B<sub>12</sub>: a challenge for vegans

Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> is a concern for vegans because most foods with B<sub>12</sub> are animal-derived. While a diet containing dairy products or eggs will provide enough vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, vegans do not eat these foods. Fortified cereal, soy milk, some brands of nutritional yeast, and fermented soy products – such as tempeh and miso – provide some B<sub>12</sub>. Sea vegetables are also good nonanimal sources. If you are a vegan, you may want to consider taking a nonanimal-derived vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplement.

## Zinc: not to be forgotten.

You need not be concerned about zinc if you eat dairy products. Plant foods do provide zinc, but less than those of animal origin. Eat foods such as whole wheat bread, legumes, tofu, seeds and nuts to be sure you get enough zinc.

## Quick and healthy foods for busy people like you!

Try these foods for quick snacks and meals. They require little or no preparation:

- 🌀 Dried fruits or trail mix;
- 🌀 Pretzels or rice cakes;
- 🌀 Yogurt;
- 🌀 Cold pizza with veggies;
- 🌀 Milk shakes made with calcium-fortified rice milk, soy milk or cow's milk;
- 🌀 Tacos or burritos filled with bean mixtures;
- 🌀 Meatless chili;
- 🌀 Veggie burgers;
- 🌀 Falafel;
- 🌀 Crackers and cheese;
- 🌀 Hummus with crackers and veggie sticks;
- 🌀 Bagels with peanut butter, or peanut butter and a banana rolled in a soft tortilla;
- 🌀 Pita pockets filled with veggies and hummus.

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