

# Teen Vegetarians

The key to a successful vegetarian diet is VARIETY!

## Facts for Parents

Bulletin #4054

### Why would someone want to become a vegetarian?

People adopt this lifestyle for many reasons. These include a desire for better health, concern for global sustainability, awareness of world hunger, compassion for animals or belief in nonviolence. Some people choose vegetarian diets because of religious principles, or even simple food preferences.

### Will my teen get enough nutrients from a vegetarian diet?

Yes, as long as your teen eats a varied, well-balanced diet. There are some key nutrients to pay special attention to. Most are easily found in a plant-based diet, but you should be aware of them, and make sure foods containing these nutrients are available to your teen.

**Protein**—This is often a huge concern for parents. Animal products are generally considered our only source of protein. Yet getting enough protein on a vegetarian diet is almost never an issue. You may have heard about making “complete proteins” by combining different foods. This was a recommendation in the 1970s. We now know that protein needs can be met by eating a variety of plant-based foods: it is not necessary to combine foods to form “complete proteins.” The amount will vary depending on your teen’s caloric needs.

Dairy products are a great source of protein. However, don’t worry if your teen chooses not to eat dairy products: there are other good sources. These include legumes—such as dry beans and dry peas—nuts, peanuts, tofu, tempeh, and soy. Textured vegetable protein made from soy, but formed to

### There are six different types of vegetarians. Where does your child fit?

<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.

resemble meat products, is another choice. Visit a local health food store for the best selection.

**Calcium**—This is a nutrient of great importance to all of us, but especially to a growing teen. Dairy products are a very rich source of calcium. Teens who do not eat dairy products can get calcium from tofu processed with calcium sulfate, tahini (sesame butter), green leafy vegetables (kale, collards, mustard greens), seeds, nuts, legumes, dried figs, calcium-fortified orange juice and soy milk. Many products are fortified with calcium. Check the cereal aisle.

**Vitamin D**—The body needs vitamin D to absorb calcium, which is why it is added to milk. Exposure to sunlight allows our bodies to make vitamin D. If your teen is not drinking milk or receiving direct sunlight on a regular basis, he may want to take a vitamin D supplement.

**Iron**—Teenagers need a lot of iron. Nonanimal sources of iron include iron-fortified breads and cereals, noodles, rice, tortillas, legumes (dry beans and peas), raisins and other dried fruit, baked beans, spinach, bean burritos or bean enchiladas, beet greens, blackstrap molasses, and prune juice. Plant sources of iron are not absorbed as well as animal sources: 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>**—This nutrient is a concern for vegans because most foods with B<sub>12</sub> come from animals. While a diet containing dairy products or eggs will provide enough vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, vegans do not eat these foods. Fortified cereals, 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 your child is a vegan, she may want to consider taking a nonanimal-derived vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplement.

**Zinc**—If your child eats dairy products, zinc is generally not a concern. Plant foods

provide zinc, but less than animal foods. To ensure that your child is getting enough zinc, suggest that she eat whole wheat bread, legumes, tofu, seeds and nuts on a regular basis.

### **Help your vegetarian teen eat a healthy diet:**

- ☉ Support your teen's decision to become a vegetarian, and encourage him to educate himself about nutritional needs. This will give him a sense of independence and accountability.
- ☉ Subscribe to a vegetarian magazine and or buy a cookbook together.
- ☉ Encourage your teen to make a meatless main dish a few days a week to go along with the family's regular meal.
- ☉ Take a vegetarian cooking or nutrition class together.
- ☉ Go out as a family and try out some vegetarian restaurants.
- ☉ Encourage her to educate her peers about vegetarian nutrition for a project or paper.

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