

## Vegetarian Diets

The American Dietetic Association has written that vegetarian diets may reduce the risk for several chronic diseases and conditions, including obesity, heart disease, hypertension, diabetes and some types of cancer. For persons living with HIV/AIDS, vegetarian eating needs to be carefully planned to be nutritionally adequate since the elimination of animal foods also eliminates important sources of calories, protein and other nutrients.

There are many reasons why people choose to eat vegetarian diets and there are several kinds of vegetarian diets. Some of the reasons are religious or ethical beliefs, environmental concerns, animal rights and general health. Most vegetarians do not eat meat, fish and poultry. “Lacto-ovo” vegetarians do eat dairy and eggs. “Vegans” eat no animal products at all, including milk, cheese, other dairy items or eggs.

Since animal products, dairy, and eggs are such a rich source of protein, and since adequate protein intake is one of the most important dietary goals for persons living with HIV/AIDS, the challenge is to get enough protein from other sources.

Good plant sources of protein include lentils and other legumes (beans of all kinds—kidney, black, navy, white, chick peas and dry peas,) tofu, nuts and seeds. Many other common plant foods supply significant amounts of protein, such as whole grain breads, greens, potatoes, pasta and corn. There are many soy-based products which provide necessary nutrients and are available in major super markets and health food stores. Low-fat dairy products are also excellent sources for non-vegans.

It is important to eat a variety of plant protein foods to assure the intake of all essential amino acids. It is particularly important for vegetarians living with HIV/AIDS to consume enough calories to maintain weight. Animal foods, which can be high in fat, are often the main source of calories in non-vegetarian diets, so

special care must be taken to get enough calories from vegetarian sources without turning to fatty, sugary choices.

Without animal foods in the diet, there are some other nutrients that will be in short supply without special planning. These are iron, calcium and Vitamin B-12.

Good plant sources of iron are the dried beans already mentioned, spinach, chard, beet greens, bulgur, prune juice and dried fruit. Iron absorption is increased if a food containing Vitamin C is eaten at the same time, such as citrus fruit or juice, tomatoes, strawberries or broccoli.

Good amounts of calcium are found in collard greens, kale, turnip greens, broccoli and fortified soy foods and beverages. Low-fat dairy products are high in calcium. Read food labels to find the calcium.

While the recommended intake of B-12 is very low, it is very important to consume an adequate amount. Those who eat dairy products or eggs regularly will get the needed amount. For others, many foods are fortified with B-12 as indicated on the food label.

This includes cereals or soy foods and beverages.

### Vegetarian Menus

Meal plans for vegetarians concentrate on slightly different food groups: whole grains, vegetables, fruits and meat substitutes (legumes, nuts and seeds). For some, the dairy group will be included. A sample day of a healthy vegetarian diet might look like this:

#### Breakfast

1 cup cereal  
1 cup milk or fortified rice/soy milk  
Toast with margarine and jam

#### Snack

1 cup milk or fortified rice/soy milk  
1/2 cup nuts

## Vegetarian Diets *continued*

### Lunch

Egg salad or tofu salad sandwich  
Handful of carrots  
1 cup juice

### Snack

6 Triscuits®  
1-2 slices cheese  
1 cup juice

### Dinner

Baked potato with margarine, sour cream and cheese  
1 cup baked beans or chili  
Tossed salad with dressing

### Snack

ice cream with 1/2 cup nuts

### Total

3200 calories  
115 grams protein  
11% calories from fat

Additional ideas, suggested by the Physicians  
Committee for Responsible Medicine<sup>1</sup> are as follows:

### Breakfast

Hot or cold cereal with fruit or soymilk; fruit alone;  
whole grain toast with jam; burrito with beans, lettuce,  
tomato; tofu scrambler.

### Lunch

Garden salad with lemon juice or fat-free dressing;  
three-bean, chickpea, lentil or black bean and corn  
salad; noodle, couscous, bulgur or rice dishes; veg-  
etable or bean soups; hummus on whole grain bread  
with cucumber, carrot or tomato; whole wheat pita  
with black bean dip, peppers, tomato and lettuce;  
Italian eggplant sub—baked eggplant slices, pizza  
sauce and sautéed mushrooms on a sub roll.

### Dinner

Pasta marinara with chopped, sautéed vegetables  
added; beans and rice; soft tacos with beans, lettuce,  
tomato and salsa; vegetarian chili; fried rice and veg-  
etables; veggie-burgers; fajitas with sautéed peppers,  
onion, eggplant in a tortilla; veggie lasagna—try low-fat  
tofu to replace ricotta; rice pilaf, packaged rice dinners.

### Grams of protein in vegetarian foods

Fluid milk: 1 cup = 8  
Yogurt: 1 cup = 8  
Skim milk powder: 1/4 cup = 11  
Cottage cheese: 1/4 cup = 7  
Peanut butter: 2 Tbsp = 7  
Hard cheese or soy cheese: 1 oz = 7  
Nuts: 1/4 cup = 4 to 9  
One egg = 7  
Lentils or beans: 1 cup = 12 to 19  
Tofu: 1/2 cup = 21  
Whole wheat bread: 1 slice = 3  
Brown rice: 1/2 cup = 3  
Collard greens: 1/2 cup = 2  
Corn: 1/2 cup = 3  
One medium potato and skin = 4.5  
Whole wheat spaghetti: 1 cup = 7  
Liquid nutritional supplements: 1 cup = 9 to 20  
Sunflower seeds: 1/4 cup = 6.25  
One veggie burger = 30  
Pudding: 1 cup = 10  
Hummus: 1/4 cup = 3  
Trail mix: 1 cup = 21

For more good information on vegetarianism,  
see the website or contact:

The Vegetarian Resource Group (VRG)  
P.O. Box 1463, Dept. IN  
Baltimore, MD 21203  
(410) 366-VEGE  
[www.vrg.org](http://www.vrg.org)

1. "Your Nutrition Guide, Foods for Good Health," brochure pub-  
lished by Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine,  
Washington, DC, 2003.