

Vegetarian Options for the Worksite



A worksite vegan nutrition program can be implemented by employers as a wellness intervention strategy to improve the health, quality of life, and work results of employees. The health advantages to consuming a plant-based diet are many. Vegetarians are less likely to become overweight and have lower risk of diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, and even some cancers later in life.¹⁻¹⁶

1. Vegetarian Nutrition

- **Protein:** Vegetarian and vegan diets provide more than enough protein through a variety of grains, beans, vegetables, and fruits.

As the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND) points out, "...appropriately planned vegetarian diets, including total vegetarian or vegan diets, are healthful, nutritionally adequate, and may provide health benefits in the prevention and treatment of certain diseases."¹⁷

According to AND, "Research indicates that an assortment of plant foods eaten over the course of a day can provide all essential amino acids and ensure adequate nitrogen retention and use in healthy adults, thus complementary proteins do not need to be consumed at the same meal."¹⁷ Particularly good protein sources include beans, tofu and other soy-based products, nuts, seeds, and whole grains, such as oats, barley, and quinoa.

AND also points out that even athletes can meet their protein needs on plant-based diets. Because of their naturally higher food intake, athletes consume more protein, as well as more calories.

- **Calcium:** Dairy milk is the leading source of saturated fat in typical diets. Calcium is also found in beans, fortified breads and cereals, raisins, broccoli, and dark leafy greens. Other good calcium sources are fortified soy- or rice milk, fortified juices, and tofu.

- **Vitamin D:** Vitamin D is activated by the body after exposure to sunlight. If one does not get regular sun exposure, fortified foods such as cereals, rice milk or soymilk, and supplements are available. Vitamin D is also found in all common multiple vitamins.

- **Iron:** Diets consisting of vegetables, fruits, grains, legumes, and nuts provide adequate iron. In fact, AND notes that, "Studies typically show iron intake by vegans to be higher than that of lacto-ovo-vegetarians (vegetarians who consume dairy and egg products) and of nonvegetarians, and most studies show iron intake by lacto-ovo-vegetarians to be higher than that of nonvegetarians."¹⁸

Vegetarian sources of iron include dark green leafy vegetables, spinach, pasta, rice, soybeans, and chickpeas. Consuming foods rich in vitamin C, such as orange juice, along with iron-rich foods, enhances absorption of iron.

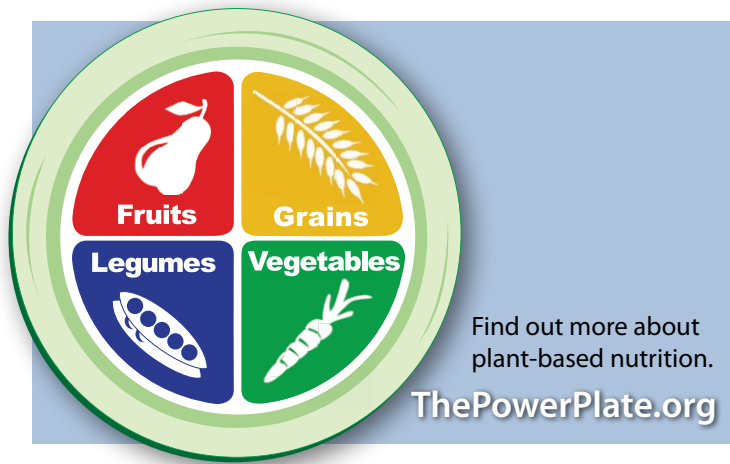
- **Vitamin B12:** Unfortified plant foods contain little or no B12. However, all common multiple vitamins contain vitamin B12. The vitamin can also be easily found in fortified cereals, fortified soy- and rice milks, and fortified meat alternative products.

2. Making Over the Menu: New Products and Food Ideas

Making over your menu to include more plant-based options is now easier than ever. Whether your worksite focuses mainly on heat-and-serve food items or you are able to prepare foods from scratch, you'll find plenty of options.

GEICO Intervention Study

In a 2008 study using 109 volunteers, those that "followed a low-fat vegan diet reported dramatic changes in the intake of nutrients linked to decreased risk of chronic diseases. This study showed that with education on the use of a low-fat, plant-based diet and modest worksite support, employees can implement changes in their diets that, if sustained, may reduce the risk of common and costly diseases," like type 2 diabetes, heart disease, high cholesterol, etc.¹⁹



Soy burger patties:

- **“Beef” Fajitas** – Slice burgers into strips and serve with salsa, guacamole, and tortillas.
- **Tex-Mex Burgers** – Top with barbeque sauce, lettuce, tomato, some corn chips for extra crunch, and serve on a bun.
- **Pasta with Meat Sauce** – Crumble burger patties, cook in pre-made marinara sauce, and serve over pasta.
- **Veggie Joes** – Crumble burger patties, cook in homemade or pre-made sloppy joe sauce, and serve on a bun.

Adapting Existing Recipes

Many popular recipes that you already serve can be made vegetarian. Sometimes, this is as simple as using vegetable stock instead of chicken stock in soups or replacing meat with one of the many meat alternatives listed below:

- **Beans or other legumes** are highly nutritious and substitute well for meat in chili, soups, and burritos.
- **Seitan** is a meat substitute made of wheat gluten. It is available in frozen or refrigerated chunks and is well suited for replacing meat in dishes such as fajitas and stir-fries.
- **Tempeh** is made from fermented soybeans. It can be crumbled and used in place of ground meat or sliced for use in curries and stir-fries.
- **Textured Vegetable Protein (TVP)** is a soy product available in dry flakes or chunks. After re-hydrating, it makes a great substitute for ground meat in recipes such as chili, spaghetti sauce, or burritos.
- **Tofu** is very mild in taste and easily absorbs the flavor of any recipe. Firm varieties are excellent in stir-fries or as a salad bar option. Softer varieties are easily blended into soups, sauces, and desserts.

More Vegetarian Menu Ideas

Sandwiches

- Hummus with sliced tomatoes, cucumbers, and shredded carrots in pita bread or in a wrap
- Vegan deli slices that look and taste like bologna, ham, and turkey on whole-grain bread with soy cheese, mustard, lettuce, and tomato
- Peanut butter (or other nut butter) and jelly or sliced banana on whole-wheat bread
- Falafel, a seasoned chickpea patty, in pita bread with a variety of veggie toppings

Hot Meals

- Vegetarian soups such as lentil, minestrone, or black bean
- Red beans and rice
- Baked potatoes with veggie chili or salsa
- Stir-fry vegetables with tofu or veggie chicken strips over brown rice
- Pasta fagioli with Italian herbs, white beans, and tomatoes
- Meat analogs, such as barbecue veggie riblets or sloppy joes with soy crumbles



Meatless Favorites

Here are five popular main dishes that are easy to make meatless:

- **Spaghetti** goes well with marinara sauce and chunky vegetables, using textured vegetable protein, if desired, to make a “meaty” sauce.
- **Tacos and burritos** can be filled with beans or soy protein crumbles, rice, and salsa.
- **Chicken fingers** are available in meatless varieties that can be served with barbecue sauce, on salads, or in a variety of other dishes.
- **Burgers**, made of vegetables and beans or soy protein, are easy to serve on a bun with lettuce and tomato.
- **Pizza** can be served without cheese (or with nondairy cheese substitutes), along with vegetables such as tomato slices, broccoli, or mushrooms.



Check Out the New Products

In response to increasing demand, many food manufacturers provide competitively priced vegetarian foods. These vegetarian options are both healthful and appealing:

- Veggie burgers or hot dogs
- Vegetarian soups
- Meatless “chicken” tenders
- Veggie barbeque riblets
- Ready-made burritos
- Soy pudding

While heat-and-serve vegetarian products taste great on their own, you can get more mileage out of them and build more variety in your menu by being creative. Here are some ideas for embellishing two of the most commonly used meat alternative products:

Meatless “chicken” tenders or nuggets:

- **Buffalo “Chicken” Tenders** – Toss tenders in hot sauce.
- **Teriyaki “Chicken” Wrap** – Toss tenders in pre-made teriyaki sauce and serve with shredded lettuce, carrots, and extra sauce in a whole grain tortilla.
- **“Chicken” Sandwich** – Serve on a bun with lettuce and tomato.
- **Asian “Chicken” Skewers** – Toss tenders in teriyaki sauce and skewer with cooked chunks of onions, peppers, and pineapple.

Side Dishes & Snacks

- Chopped raw vegetables or side salad with low-fat dressing
- Pretzels, rice cakes, popcorn, pita chips, and soy crisps
- Baked beans
- Dried fruit, mixed with nuts and cereal
- Whole-grain breads or crackers
- Fruit leather and fruit bars
- Baked sweet potato “fries”
- Applesauce or other fruit cups
- Pita, breadsticks, and raw vegetables with hummus
- Granola bars and energy bars
- Fresh whole fruit

Create a Salad Bar

Salad bars are simple, effective ways to provide healthful foods. And here’s a tip: Variety is key. You’ll want to offer a variety of healthful choices every day to help increase traffic to the salad bar. Try these:



- Fresh produce
- Raisins and other dried fruits
- Hummus or other bean dips
- Three bean salad
- Chickpeas, black beans
- Pasta salad
- Nuts/seeds (sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, almonds)
- Grain salads such as tabouli
- Low-fat, dairy-free salad dressings

Offer Nondairy Beverages at Every Meal

Serving nondairy beverages and foods is a great way to meet the needs of those who are lactose intolerant or allergic to milk and those who prefer not to consume dairy products. Here are some easy choices:

- Water
- Juice
- Soymilk
- Rice milk
- Almond milk

3. Introducing New Options

Promotion and employee involvement are essential to increased sales after new health items are introduced in the worksite cafeteria. Here are some methods that may be helpful:

- Ask employees for ideas about what they would like to see on the menu.
- Hold a meeting with the worksite leadership to make them aware of new menu options and the benefits of including more vegetarian foods. Encourage them to spread the word to employees.
- Announce your menu improvements to the community press.

• Introduce new foods through a taste-testing event. Make it fun for employees by letting them vote for their favorites or create a competition among departments for which group has the highest participation in the taste test.



• Let employees sample new items as they go through the lunch line.

• Take advantage of special days to try new foods. Whether it is for World Vegetarian Day (October 1) or several days in March for National Nutrition Month, special days can highlight health and nutrition.

• Think creatively about what to call your new menu items. For example, “Zesty Bean Bowl” sounds much more appealing than “Rice and Beans.”

• Market and advertise your new menu items in as many ways as possible, using colorful signs and posters, an e-mail to employees, or a feature in the office newsletter.

4. Vegetarian Product Vendors

Many manufacturers produce meat alternatives or vegetarian prepared foods. The following list can help you get started:

Archer Daniels Midland

Brand: Soy 7

Product Type: Frozen meat alternative products, dry mixes

Web: www.admworld.com/naen/nutrition/soyfoods.asp, www.soy7.com

Phone: 800-637-5843

Dean Foods/White Wave Foods

Brand: Silk

Product Type: Aseptic or refrigerated soymilk

Web: www.holepunchpress.com/

Phone: 303-635-4636



Eco-Cuisine

Brand: Eco-Cuisine
Product Type: Dry mixes
Web: www.eco-cuisine.com/
Phone: 303-402-0289

Kellogg's

Brand: Morningstar Farms
Product Type: Frozen meat alternative products
Web: www.kelloggfoodawayfromhome.com/segments/school/
Phone: See website for appropriate number for your region

Kraft Foods

Brand: Boca
Product Type: Frozen meat alternative products
Web: www.kraftfoodservice.com/ProductsandBrands/OurBrands/Boca/Products.htm
Phone: 1-800-537-9338

Legacy Foods

Brand: Ultra Soy/Imagic
Product Type: Shelf stable meat alternative products, dry mixes
Web: www.legacyfoods.com/
Phone: 620-663-5711

Lightlife Foods

Brand: Lightlife
Product Type: Frozen meat alternative products and prepared foods
Web: www.lightlife.com
Phone: 800-SOY-EASY

Mon Cuisine

Brand: Mon Cuisine
Product Type: Frozen meat alternative products and prepared foods
Web: <http://www.moncuisine.com/>
Phone: 800-245-5620

Pierre Foods

Brand: Pierre
Product Type: Frozen meat alternative products
Web: <http://www.pierrefoods.com/>
Phone: 800-969-2747

Sysco Corporation

Brand: MoonRose
Product Type: Frozen meat alternative products and prepared foods
Web: www.sysco.com/products/moonrose.asp
Phone: 281-584-1390

Turtle Island Foods

Brand: Tofurky
Product Type: Frozen meat alternative products
Web: www.tofurkey.com
Phone: 800-508-8100

VeggieLand

Brand: VeggieLand
Product Type: Frozen meat alternative products
Web: <http://www.veggieland.com/business.html>
Phone: 973-808-1540

Wholesome & Hearty Foods

Brand: Gardenburger
Product Type: Frozen meat alternative products
Web: www.gardenburgerfoodservice.com
Phone: 800-459-7079

5. Additional Resources

Vegan in Volume by Chef Nancy Berkoff, R.D., is a cookbook full of plant-based institutional-size recipes. Available for sale: www.vrg.org/catalog/volume.htm.

Vegetarian Resource Group (www.vrg.org) offers many tips and recipes for food service. VRG's quarterly journal has a "Food-service Update" section which is also available online. Contact: 410-366-8343 or e-mail vrg@vrg.org.

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