

Healthy Eating Tips for Vegetarians

Intrigued by meatless Mondays? Wondering what vegetarians eat; how vegans get protein? Tasty, healthy, socially conscious plant-based meals can be part of any diet...

What is a vegetarian diet?

A vegetarian diet excludes meat, poultry and seafood. A fully plant-based vegan diet further excludes eggs and dairy. Well-planned, nutrient dense vegetarian diets are appropriate for people of all ages including infants, children, teens and pregnant and breastfeeding women, adults and seniors.

Are there health benefits?

Yes! Vegetarians often have healthier body weight, lower cholesterol and lower blood pressure than non-vegetarians. Rates of heart disease, cancer and Type 2 diabetes is also lower in plant-based eaters. These health benefits may result from higher intake of fiber and phytonutrients from fruits, vegetables, leafy greens, whole grains, and nuts along with lower intakes of saturated fats.

Healthy Plant-based foods:

Vegetables: Veggies are packed with vitamins, minerals and fiber. Choose vibrant colors, especially orange, red and dark green. Broccoli, bok choy and collard greens provide calcium; Spinach, iron and bell peppers, Vitamin C. The list goes on and on! Fresh is best, frozen is fine. For canned veg, look for brands that don't add salt.

Fruits: Colorful, seasonal fruits supply fiber, phytonutrients and anti-oxidants that help your body fight free radicals and stay healthy. Eat a wide variety of colorful fruits, including fresh, frozen and canned with no added sugar.

Grains: Whole grains can be part of a healthy diet. Quinoa and millet are high in protein. Wild rice, buckwheat and gluten free oats are packed with fiber and nutrients. Steer clear of refined flours, pasta and breads in favor of whole grain options.

Proteins: It's a myth that vegetarians have a hard time getting enough protein! All plant foods are made up of amino acids, and amino acids are the building blocks of protein! Just like gorillas can get their protein from grasses and plants, so too can you! Beans, peas and lentils are packed with protein and have the added benefit of iron, zinc and fiber. Nuts, seeds and soy products are also great choices.

Fats: Healthy plant-based fats promote brain health and have cardiovascular benefits. Coconut oil, avocado and avocado oil and olive oil can be part of a healthy diet.

Dairy: While dairy milk, yogurt and cheese are rich in calcium, non-dairy alternatives are fortified and don't include the risks of hormones and animal by-products. Nuts milks, hemp milk, oat milk, coconut milk and soymilk are all readily available. Rice milk tends to be overly sweetened and is generally not an everyday choice.

Beautiful, Healthy Plant-based Meal and Snack Ideas

A healthy vegetarian or vegan eating style depends on variety. Here are some ideas to get you started.

Breakfast

- ✓ Spread mashed avocado on a slice of whole-grain or gluten free bread and top with sprouts and hemp seeds
- ✓ Spread almond butter on a whole-grain toasted bagel and top with thin apple slices.
- ✓ Soak ½ cup gluten free oats overnight in 1 cup non-dairy milk and top with nuts and fresh fruit or dried cranberries in the morning
- ✓ Whole-grain toaster waffle topped with blueberries and tahini

Lunch

- ✓ Veg burger or falafel with non-dairy cheese, mushrooms, tomato, lettuce and pickles on a whole-grain bun
- ✓ Salad: leafy greens, cut-up vegetables, beans or tofu, fruit, nuts, hemp seeds
- ✓ Peanut butter and banana sandwich on whole-wheat bread with carrot and celery sticks
- ✓ Avocado roll with seaweed salad and miso soup

Dinner

- ✓ Chili made with beans, lentils and quinoa topped with shredded non-dairy cheese and a side of cornbread and salad
- ✓ Whole-grain pasta with tomato sauce plus vegetables (mushrooms, tomatoes, eggplant, peppers and onions) and a gorgeous green salad
- ✓ Pizza with or without cheese, topped with your favorite vegetables and arugula
- ✓ Tacos or burritos filled with beans, corn, diced tomatoes, shredded lettuce, cilantro and avocado
- ✓ Vegetable stir-fry with quinoa
- ✓ Butternut squash soup with a mixed salad and whole grain flatbread
- ✓ Baked potato topped with sautéed mushrooms, broccoli and melted Daiya cheese and chives

Snacks

- ✓ Hummus with pita wedges, celery sticks, bell pepper strips and carrots
- ✓ Sliced veggies and fruits
- ✓ Bagel with nut butter
- ✓ Coconut Yogurt layered with crunchy granola, hemp seeds and sliced fruit
- ✓ A cup of vegetable soup and whole grain crackers