

healthy eating and vegetarianism



What is vegetarianism?

All vegetarians do not eat meat, fish, and poultry. Some vegetarians are also vegan, and do not use any animal products, including cheese, milk, eggs, leather and wool. Some people follow parts of the vegetarian lifestyle, such as eating fish and eggs but not meat or poultry.

People may follow a vegetarian lifestyle for one or more of the following the reasons:

- A belief in non-violence
- Compassion for animals
- Health considerations
- Religious considerations
- Ecological concerns



Are you a vegetarian?

You may feel an aversion to meat, and feel unable to eat meat products. However, it is important for you to consider this reaction seriously. If you think it over, you may find that you have been using an aversion for meat to avoid eating certain foods. If this is the case, it is important for you to discuss this with your therapist.

Alternatively, you may find that you do stand by the values of vegetarianism. If you are following vegetarianism, it is important for you to carefully manage your vegetarian diet.

Vegetarian dietary needs

If you plan to pursue a vegetarian diet, you need to consume a healthy balance of foods that will provide your body with the nutrients it needs. It is important to provide your body with the following essential nutrients (which may be at risk in a vegetarian menu): protein, iron, calcium, and vitamin B12.

Protein

Non-vegetarians obtain most of their protein needs from meat. To consume adequate protein as a vegetarian, it is important to eat a varied diet. Good sources of protein for vegetarians include lentils and other legumes, tofu and soy products, low-fat dairy products, nuts, and seeds. Whole grain bread, potato, pasta, and corn will also provide small amounts of protein in your diet.



Iron

It is important for vegetarians to compensate for the lack of meat in their diet to ensure that they absorb enough iron. Some sources of iron include dried beans and other legumes, blackstrap molasses, wheatgerm, pasta, bulgur, spinach, prune juice, and dried fruit (particularly dried apricots). Foods with Vitamin C act to increase the absorption of iron. For this purpose, citrus fruit or juices, tomato or broccoli should be eaten with meals. (See handout on Dietary Iron)

Calcium

As some vegetarians do not eat dairy products, calcium needs to be obtained from alternative sources. High calcium vegetarian options include fortified soy milk and tofu fortified with calcium. Other sources with smaller amounts of calcium include molasses, almonds, spinach, kale and broccoli. (See our handout on Calcium)



Vitamin B12

Vitamin B12 is found primarily in animal products. Most vegetarians can obtain adequate B12 from dairy products, but vegans need to consider foods that are artificially fortified with B12, including soy milk and some cereals.

Developed in conjunction with Kate Fleming, Dietician

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