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UTM EatWell

Going Vegetarian? Some food for thought...

As a vegetarian, you need to replace the nutrients provided by meat (protein, iron, vitamin B12, magnesium and zinc) with other healthy food sources every day.

If you're also cutting out dairy from your diet, you'll need to replace the nutrients found in milk products (protein, calcium, vitamin B12, vitamin D, magnesium, and zinc) with other sources.

Replacing Meat

In place of meat, aim for **2 to 3 servings of meat alternatives every day**. One serving is equal to:

- 175 mL (¾ cup) cooked beans, lentils, chickpeas, or other legumes
- 150 g (¾ cup) tofu
- 150 g soy-based “veggie” burger
- 2 eggs
- 60 mL (¼ cup) nuts (almonds, walnuts, sunflower seeds)
- 30 mL (2 Tablespoons) peanut butter, almond butter, or other nut butters

Vegetarians who stop eating meat but do not replace it with meat alternatives and other nutrient-rich foods can become **deficient in vitamin B12 and iron** (something to be avoided as it robs you of energy and your ability to concentrate!).

Since meat alternatives like beans, tofu, and nuts are not as high in iron (or as easily absorbed as the iron in meat), **adding iron-rich foods like dried fruit, pumpkin seeds, and iron-fortified cereals to your daily menu is a good idea.**

Only animal-based foods like meat or dairy have vitamin B-12. If you are a vegetarian who also avoids eggs and dairy (i.e. vegan), you may require a vitamin B-12 supplement.

Other important tips:

- **Avoid drinking tea or coffee with meals** as they are thought to **inhibit iron absorption** (wait 1 hour after meals).

- Try to include a fruit or vegetable at each meal (something high in **vitamin C** like oranges, strawberries, peppers, broccoli, tomatoes) as this **helps your body absorb the iron** from beans and tofu more easily.

Milk & Alternatives

Vegetarian or not, all adults over age 19 should have **2 to 3 servings of milk or milk alternatives (teens need 3 -4 servings) every day**. One serving is equal to:

- 250 mL (1 cup) milk, chocolate milk, or soy beverage (fortified with added calcium and vitamin D)
- 175 g (3/4 cup) yogurt or soy-yogurt
- 50 g (1.5 oz.) cheese, paneer or soy-cheese

Keep in mind that some brands of almond milk or rice milk do not have added vitamin D and all are very low in protein so they are not good alternatives to milk. And although beans, spinach, and other leafy greens do contain some calcium, they do not have enough to fully replace milk or soy beverages.

Speak to your doctor or Dietitian about a supplement if you are not consuming enough milk or alternatives on a daily basis, as you may need a calcium and/or vitamin D supplement.

Grain Products

Choosing healthy grain products is even more important for vegetarians, as they can be a key source of protein, iron and other minerals as you begin to replace meat with other foods. Eating whole grains every day like oatmeal, brown rice, whole-wheat bread, whole-grain cereals, and quinoa is an important part of a healthy vegetarian diet.



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Vegetables & Fruit

Don't be a vegetarian who doesn't eat vegetables!

Make sure to have lots of dark green (spinach, romaine lettuce, broccoli, Bok choy) and orange (squash, sweet potatoes, carrots) vegetables as well as fruit every day. Deeply and brightly-coloured vegetables and fruits (like beets, kale, tomatoes, and mangoes) often have more nutrients and antioxidants than pale ones like (Iceberg lettuce, cucumbers, and apples).

Great Vegetarian Meal Ideas

- Vegetarian chili with kidney beans
- Whole-wheat wrap with falafel (chickpea balls) and salad
- Stir-fried vegetables and tofu in teriyaki sauce
- Roti or chapatti with vegetables, dahl and paneer
- Corn tortillas with refried beans and salad
- Quinoa salad with lentils, vegetables, and feta cheese
- Hummus or bean dip with whole-wheat pita and vegetables



Need some **FREE** professional help?

The Health & Counselling Centre at UTM (Davis Building, Room 1123) has a **Registered Dietitian** who can assess your diet and help you make changes. Call (905) 828-5255 to make an appointment.