

Nutrition Matters

Nutrition Services, Community and Health Services

For teens thinking about becoming a vegetarian

Vegetarian. You've heard the word a thousand times, but what does it really mean? And, do you want to be one? If you're a teenager and are thinking about becoming a vegetarian, then this fact sheet is for you.



Being a vegetarian means that you've chosen to either completely avoid animal-based foods, or that you restrict certain types of animal-based foods from your diet.

Types of vegetarians and what animal products they eat

Type of vegetarian ↓	Beef, pork, other red meat	Chicken, turkey, other poultry	Fish, other seafood	Eggs	Milk, other dairy products
Vegan					
Ovo-vegetarian				✓	
Lacto-vegetarian					✓
Lacto-ovo vegetarian				✓	✓

Tasty vegetarian/vegan foods

Bean burrito	Lentil soup	Vegetarian chili	Peanut butter with crackers
Trail mix	Rice and tofu	Mango salsa pizza	Veggies with bean dip
Baked beans	Falafel	Hummus on a pita	Vegetable sandwich

Are you considering becoming a vegetarian?

Take this quiz and find out if you are ready!

Please circle "agree" or "disagree" for each of the following statements		
1. I love trying new foods and am willing to try any food once.	Agree	Disagree
2. I like beans, peas, lentils, nuts, chick peas and peanut butter.	Agree	Disagree
3. I enjoy eating a wide variety of foods.	Agree	Disagree
4. I don't mind being different from my friends, and asking for special foods when eating away from home.	Agree	Disagree
5. I am up for the challenge of carefully planning my diet.	Agree	Disagree
6. I eat a lot of leafy, green vegetables.	Agree	Disagree
7. I will order vegetarian pizza, while my friends are all eating chicken wings and burgers.	Agree	Disagree
8. I am familiar with Canada's Food Guide.	Agree	Disagree

SCORE BOARD: Give yourself one point for every time you agreed with a statement

6 to 8: LOOKS LIKE YOU MIGHT BE READY! Enjoy a variety of vegetarian foods

3 to 5: ALMOST READY. Aim for trying a vegetarian meal every week

0 to 2: NOT THERE QUITE YET. Try new foods more often

What to eat				
<p>The amount of food you need every day depends on your age, body size, level of activity and whether you're male or female. Vegetarians can get the nutrients they need by following Canada's Food Guide. Here's what Canada's Food Guide suggests teens eat every day:</p>				
Recommended Number of Food Guide Servings per Day				
	Vegetables and Fruit	Grain Products	Milk and Alternatives	Meat and Alternatives
Females 14-18	7	6	3-4	2
Males 14-18	8	7	3-4	3

1 serving Vegetables and Fruit =
 1 medium size vegetable or fruit, 125 mL (½ cup) fresh, frozen or canned vegetables or fruit, 125 mL (½ cup) 100% juice, 250 mL (1 cup) salad, 60 mL (¼ cup) dried fruit

1 serving Grain Products =
 1 slice bread, ½ small bagel, ½ pita, 125 mL (½ cup) cooked rice or pasta, 30 g cold cereal or 175 mL (¾ cup) hot cereal

1 serving Milk and Alternatives =
 50 g (1½ oz) low-fat cheese, 175 g (¾ cup) yogurt, 250 mL (1 cup) milk or fortified soy beverage

1 serving Meat and Alternatives =
 2 eggs, 175 mL (¾ cup) cooked beans, peas or lentils, 30 mL (2 Tbsp) peanut butter, 75 g (2½ oz) fish, 175 mL (¾ cup) tofu, 60mL (¼ cup) nuts

Adopting a vegetarian diet is not as simple as changing from meat to 'no meat'. You need to substitute foods that contain protein and other nutrients previously provided by meat and other animal-based products.



Protein power

Protein is made up of amino acids that help our bodies grow and repair themselves. Meat is called a "complete protein" because it contains all nine essential amino acids, which our bodies can't make and can only get from food.

Grains and other plant foods are also sources of protein, but they are missing one or more amino acids. Not all plants are low in the same amino acids, so you can get all of the amino acids you need by eating a variety of plant foods throughout the day.

Vegetarian foods that contain protein include tofu, lentils, chick peas, baked beans, whole grain products such as whole grain breads and cereals, nuts & seeds, nut butters (e.g. almond butter), yogurt, eggs, milk and cheese.

Pump up the iron

It is important to pay attention to iron.

- Iron helps the blood carry oxygen to the many cells in your body and keeps you from feeling tired
- The iron in plant-based foods is not as well absorbed by the body as the iron in animal-based foods



To boost your iron status:

- Eat foods that contain iron: legumes (e.g., beans, peas and lentils), whole grain breads and fortified cereals, wheat germ, dark green leafy vegetables, dried fruit, nuts, seeds, tofu, and eggs
- Eat foods high in vitamin C at the same time as the above listed foods to help your body absorb iron from plant-based foods. Oranges, grapefruit, strawberries, kiwi, mango, tomato, broccoli and green peppers are all good sources of vitamin C
- Limit caffeine (pop, coffee, tea and chocolate) and guarana (found in some soft drinks and energy drinks) because they interfere with iron absorption

Zinc, vitamin D, and omega-3 fats

Because a vegetarian diet restricts animal-based foods, vegetarians need to be careful to get enough zinc, vitamin D and omega-3 fatty acids. If you are concerned about your intake of any of the nutrients, vitamins and/or minerals highlighted in this fact sheet and are wondering if a supplement is right for you, talk to your family doctor or call York Region Health Services *Health Connection* at 1-800-351-5653 to speak with a registered dietitian.

Calcium crazed!

Calcium needs are high during the teen years because your bones are still forming. Getting enough calcium helps to lower the risk of brittle bones (osteoporosis) in later life. Using Canada's Food Guide, try to eat 3-4 servings of Milk and Alternatives each day. If you do not eat milk products, here are alternatives for how to get more calcium in your diet:

- Drink fortified soy beverage and calcium-enriched orange juice
- Eat almonds, kidney beans, navy beans, green leafy vegetables (e.g., broccoli, kale, bok choy, collard greens, okra), fortified bread and tofu made with calcium
- Eat foods high in vitamin D (e.g., margarine, fish [e.g., sardines], egg yolk and vitamin D fortified yogurt) because vitamin D helps your body absorb calcium

Get Your B-12



Vitamin B-12 helps to keep the nervous system healthy. We only need small amounts of this vitamin each day, but a deficiency can lead to permanent damage. Vitamin B-12 is not found naturally in any plant foods. Therefore, those who don't drink milk or eat cheese, yogurt, eggs, or fish need to eat B-12 fortified foods (e.g., B-12 fortified breakfast cereals, fortified soy drink and yeast extract) or take a daily B-12 supplement. Talk to your doctor or a registered dietitian if you're thinking about taking a supplement.

Food for thought

Vegetarian diets can be healthy but only if some thought and planning go into your food choices. Only then will you get all the nutrients your body needs.

Quick 'n Easy Hummus

- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 19 oz can chick peas, drained
- 3 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tbsp lemon juice
- ½ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp black pepper

Purée together garlic and chick peas. Add remaining ingredients and process until blended. Serve with whole wheat pita.

Cook Great Food. Dietitians of Canada. 2001.

Resource corner

Dietitians of Canada www.dietitians.ca

The Vegetarian Resource Group www.vrg.org

Becoming Vegetarian (book) by Vesanto Melina and Brenda Davis, Wiley Canada, 2003