

The Healthy Vegan

Living as a healthy vegan is possible, but it takes considerable work and careful planning. Please approach with caution the various websites and information that suggests otherwise, though often these websites have excellent recipes. There are many important things our bodies need that are difficult to attain from plant sources. Primarily these things are: protein, iron, B12, and fats. Without these in proper amounts, we begin to feel sluggish and weak, we become susceptible to infections, our digestion can become impaired, and our general health rests at a less-than-optimal state. Anyone subsisting on an exclusively vegan diet should carefully monitor themselves for signs of deficiency, and consistently consult with an appropriate healthcare provider.

The goal of putting together any meal plan is to ensure replete nutrition both in the short and long term. In putting together a vegan meal plan, the aim is to cover all the body's nutritional needs through specific and intentional combining of foods.

It is important to state that every person is an individual – some people adapt more easily to a vegan diet, while for others it isn't a sustainable option without the use of supplements. Discovering where *you* fit on this spectrum helps determine how to best live as a healthy vegan.

Below is a three week meal-plan designed to provide complete nutrition on a vegan diet. Many of these meals are taken exactly-as-served from various monasteries and meditation retreat centres – places where sustaining good health and clear minds on a meatless diet is a top priority.

Because many of the meals included here come from countries where meatless cooking is more common, you may find that some of the names or dishes are unfamiliar to you. Take the time to look things up and experiment with ingredients that are new to you. Often these new foods contain the nutrition we are aiming to include. It may seem like a lot of work in the beginning, and you may find you are spending more time cooking and preparing food than you're used to. This gets easier as you become familiar with the foods you're working with, and inevitably add your own twists and tastes. Please remember though: eating a balanced diet as a vegan *does* require more work and more planning to be done properly. Start to get in the habit of adding nuts, seeds, and beans to most of your foods, and learn to listen to your body's needs and cravings. Watch-out for the temptation to fill a hunger-gap with low quality snacks like chips, french fries, bread, or chocolate. If you find yourself drawn to, or eating lots of these types of foods, it is time to re-assess your diet based on your body's individual needs. If you find you are gaining weight or having difficulty losing weight, this too is a sign it is time to re-assess dietary needs.

It should also be noted that this meal plan is designed for reasonably healthy adults. *A vegan diet is generally inadvisable for children, adolescents, women who are or may become pregnant, athletes, people under significant stress, and anyone with a condition that may necessitate specialized nutritional needs.*

Breakfast:

Whole flake oatmeal with mixed nut and seed granola, or museli

Organic, unsweetened soy, almond, rice or coconut milk

Stewed apples, prunes, cinnamon, raisins

Fresh fruit – grapefruit, oranges, peaches, mixed berries

Avocado pieces and/or shredded coconut

Almonds, cashews

Tahini

This will be the base breakfast most days. Although it is good to start the day with a substantial meal, you don't need to (and probably can't) eat all of this everyday. Try to rotate through the foods to include most of them over a period of a week or so. Don't get too rigid about it, just do what feels right, and check in every once and awhile to make sure you aren't missing anything. Take “a day off” at least every ten days, and have anything you like for breakfast. Get creative!

Substitutes

Many foods are *similar*, but every food offers a slightly different combination of nutrition. Optimizing this is exactly what we're trying to achieve in a vegan diet.

Although oats are a wonderful and nutritious food, substitute or combine some of the other cereal grains such as kamut, quinoa, buckwheat, or millet every so often.

Mix up your nuts and seeds – try pumpkin seeds, sunflower, almonds, walnuts, hemp hearts, cashews, hazelnuts, macadamia nuts, anything! You may also find it helpful (and delicious) to use nut butters as well.

A few other notes before we get into lunches and dinners: you'll see in quite a few places the words “steamed greens” and “mixed oil dressings”. By these it is implied that it *varies* in order to optimize nutrition.

“Steamed greens” are Kale, Spinach, Red or Green Chard, Bok Choy, Beet Greens, Dandelion Greens, or any other leafy green vegetable. Ideally, mix and match, steam them well, and if you can, combine them with vinaigrette style dressing – this helps with absorption and digestion of calcium and other minerals.

Including “mixed oil dressings” aims to ensure our needs for healthy fats and oils is sufficient and balanced. This becomes especially important in a vegan diet, as sources and amounts of healthy fats and oils are difficult to achieve without consciously adding them to your foods. You'll want to experiment here to find combinations you enjoy, and make

sure you mix it up. Oils to experiment with are: olive, sesame, sunflower, safflower, coconut (though it solidifies below about 20 degrees, try it in stir-frys), hemp, avocado, and a few others. Try combining these with some vinaigrettes and spices, which will help with flavour and digestion, though you'll need to give it a good shake before serving.

With the exception of coconut oil, all of the above oils are eaten raw, and should never be used in cooking. They can, and should be, added after the food is cooked and just before serving. For cooking, coconut oil (or peanut oil, though its health value is low) is best.

Day 1

Lunch:

Squash and vegetable soup, thick and hearty.
Green salad with mixed oil dressing and avocado
Roasted almonds, pecan and walnuts

Dinner:

Brown rice pasta with lima beans, kidney beans, sun-dried tomatoes and tomato sauce,
Steamed greens with mixed oil dressing
Multigrain garlic bread

Day 2

Lunch:

Tomato and vegetable soup
Mixed greens salad with lemon and oil dressing

Dinner:

Tofu and Yam coconut curry with carrots and celery on jasmine rice
White bean and red cabbage coleslaw with olive oil and pepper

Day 3

Lunch:

Udon noodle miso soup with tofu cubes, seaweed, and shitake mushrooms
Fresh sprouts: mung, soy, sunflower

Dinner:

Persian-spiced millet with roasted nuts, chickpeas parsley, and raisins
Mixed greens salad with dressing

Day 4

Lunch:

Squash and tomato soup with almonds and cranberries
Rye and Rice crackers with nut butters
Mixed green salad with vinaigrette dressing

Dinner:

Tortillas with brown rice, black bean and lima bean, and garlic oil
Guacamole, salsa
Steamed greens with mixed oil dressing

Day 5

Lunch:

Barley and mushroom soup
Walnut and apple bread
Mixed green salad

Dinner:

(Vegan) Sang paneer, aloo gobi, chutney, and coconut milk, served with jasmine rice
Steamed greens and mixed oil dressing

Day 6

Lunch

Quinoa and root-vegetable soup
Rye bread
Green salad and dressing

Dinner:

Vietnamese Pho soup with tofu, sprouts, rice noodles

Day 7

Lunch:

Stewed kidney and white beans with sage
Cornbread

Dinner:

Hearty vegetable pizza
Green salad with mixed oil dressing

Day 8

Lunch:

Curried root-vegetable stew with toasted coconut and cashew

Dinner:

Persian-spiced cous-cous with mint and cilantro, chickpeas, raisins, pistachios
Steamed greens and fresh sprouts with a creamy dressing

Day 9

Lunch:

Minestrone and vegetable soup
Rye bread and salad

Dinner:

“Polenta Pizza” - not really a pizza as you need a knife and fork to eat it, but polenta is used as the “crust” and then all the usual toppings are applied and baked in the oven

Day 10

Lunch:

Miso soup with seaweed and chives.
Steamed greens

Dinner:

“BBQ” Tempeh and vegetables in a tamarind sauce served with jasmine rice
Mixed bean and red cabbage coleslaw

Day 11

Lunch:

Squash curry soup
Crackers with nut butters

Dinner:

Calzones stuffed with mushrooms, onions, roasted garlic
Green salad with mixed dressing

Day 12

Lunch:

Vegetable medley soup with barley
Whole grain bread

Dinner:

Spiced and fried tofu with rice noodles
Steamed broccoli and cauliflower

Day 13

Lunch:

Spinach, fennel, and leek soup
Rye bread
Green salad with mixed oil dressing

Dinner:

Black-bean enchiladas – brown rice, salsa, guacamole
Steamed greens with dressing

Day 14

Lunch:

Cinnamon baked yam and celery soup
Green salad

Dinner:

Tamarind Tofu slices with wild rice
Steamed vegetables in an oil, yeast, garlic, and dijon sauce

Day 15

Lunch:

Vegan French onion soup

Dinner:

Thai sweet-and-sour tempeh with mixed vegetables on quinoa
Steamed Bok-choy

Day 16

Lunch:

Avocado and spiced tofu sandwiches with fresh sprouts
Cracker and nut butters
Green salad with vinaigrette

Dinner:

Root-vegetable au-gratin
Steamed broccoli with mixed oil dressing

Day 17

Lunch

Mushroom and barley soup
Crackers with nut butters

Dinner:

Vegetable chili with corn bread
Spinach salad with walnut and cranberries

Day 18

Lunch:

Fresh sprouts salad with mixed oil dressing
Bread and crackers with nut butters

Dinner:

Indian paneer on jasmine rice (chickpeas, tofu, cauliflower)

Day 19:

Lunch:

Miso-soup with tofu and seaweed

Dinner:

Vegetable and bean chili

Green Salad with vinaigrette

Roasted root vegetables

Day 20

Lunch:

Root-vegetable stew

Dinner:

Mixed-vegetable and tempeh stir-fry on rice noodles in sesame oil

Day 21

Lunch:

Mixed-vegetable penne

Green salad with mixed oil dressing

Focaccia bread

Dinner:

Thai green curry in coconut milk with snow-peas and chickpeas

Steamed greens in vinaigrette

Below you'll find a table illustrating some common vegan protein sources. On average, each person needs about 0.3 grams of protein per day, per pound of body weight. To calculate this, divide your weight in pounds by 3, and this will give you roughly how many grams of protein you need in a day. As there are many different body types and protein requirements can vary considerably, please use this as a helpful guide, but trust the signs and signals of your body – such as fatigue, lethargy, and prolonged infection times - as a more appropriate measures of protein status.

Protein Content of Selected Vegan Foods

	Portion	Grams Protein
Beans, baked, canned, plain	1 cup	12.07
Beans, kidney, red,	1 cup	13.47
Beans, navy,	1 cup	14.98
Beans, pinto,	1 cup	15.41
Beans, white,	1 cup	19.02
Refried bean	1 cup	13.83
Hummus	1 tbsp	1.11
Lentils,	1 cup	17.86
Lima beans,	1 cup	14.66
Nuts, cashew	1 oz	4.34
Nuts, almonds	1 oz (24 nuts)	6.02
Nuts, mixed nuts,	1 oz	4.90
Nuts, walnuts,	1 oz	4.32
Oat bran, raw	1 cup	16.26
Tofu, firm, prepared	1/4 block	6.63
Rice, brown, long-grain, cooked	1 cup	5.03
Seeds, pumpkin and squash seed kernels,	1 oz	9.35
Seeds, sesame butter, tahini,	1 tbsp	2.55
Seeds, sunflower seed kernels, dry roasted,	1 oz	5.48
Soybeans, cooked, cup	1 cup	28.62
Soymilk, original and vanilla, unfortified	1 cup	8.01
Seitan	3 oz	31
Tempeh	1 cup	41