

The Healthy Vegetarian

Living as a healthy vegetarian is possible, but it takes work. There are many important things our bodies need that are simply more 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. It is strongly recommended that anyone subsisting on an exclusively vegetarian diet should carefully monitor themselves for signs of deficiency, and regularly 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 vegetarian 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 very easily to a vegetarian 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 vegetarian.

Below is a three week meal-plan designed to provide complete nutrition on a vegetarian 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 vegetarian diet is a top priority.

Because many of the meals included here come from countries where vegetarian 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 vegetarian *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. Children, adolescents, people under significant stress, athletes, and those with conditions that may necessitate specialized nutritional needs will require further tailoring of their meal plans to ensure they are adequately supplying the needs of their body.

Breakfast:

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

Organic, unsweetened yogurt or cottage cheese

Stewed apples, prunes, cinnamon, raisins

Fresh fruit – grapefruit, oranges, peaches, mixed berries

Avocado pieces and/or shredded coconut

Hard or soft boiled egg

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: scrambled eggs with cheese, yogurt and granola, french toast pizza, anything!

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 vegetarian 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. 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, butter is probably best, and coconut oil (or peanut oil, though its health value is low) are also stable at cooking temperature.

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, sun-dried tomatoes and tomato sauce, cheese
Steamed greens with mixed oil dressing
Multigrain garlic and cheese bread

Day 2

Lunch:

Tomato and vegetable soup
Spelt bread with baked marble cheese
Mixed greens salad with lemon and oil dressing

Dinner:

Tofu and Yam coconut curry with carrots and celery on jasmine rice
Red cabbage coleslaw

Day 3

Lunch:

Udon noodle miso soup with tofu cubes, seaweed, and shitake mushrooms

Fresh sprouts: mung, soy, sunflower

Dinner:

Spinach Quiche with cheese

Persian-spiced millet with roasted nuts, parsley, and raisins

Mixed greens salad with dressing

Day 4

Lunch:

Squash and tomato soup with almonds and cranberries

Rye and Rice crackers with brie

Mixed green salad with vinaigrette dressing

Dinner:

Tortillas with brown rice, black bean, marble cheese, and garlic oil

Guacamole, salsa, sour cream

Steamed greens with mixed oil dressing

Day 5

Lunch:

Barley and mushroom soup

Walnut and apple bread

Mixed green salad

Dinner:

Sang paneer, aloo gobi, chutney, and coconut yogurt, served with jasmine rice

Steamed greens and mixed oil dressing

Day 6

Lunch

Spinach and mushroom quiche with cheese

Rye bread

Green salad and dressing

Dinner:

Vietnamese Pho soup with tofu, sprouts, rice noodles

Day 7

Lunch:

Stewed kidney beans with sage

“Vermont Corn Pudding” (baked cornbread with egg, corn, and cheese)

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 (as above) with the addition of stewed root-vegetables.

Dinner:

“BBQ” Tempeh and vegetables in a tamarind sauce served with jasmine rice

Steamed greens

Red cabbage coleslaw

Day 11

Lunch:

Squash curry soup

Crackers with nut butters and cottage cheese

Dinner:

Calzones stuffed with mushrooms, onions, roasted garlic, and feta cheese

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 – cheese, brown rice, salsa, sour cream, 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:

French onion soup with Swiss cheese

Dinner:

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

Day 16

Lunch:

Egg-drop soup with chives and pepper
Green salad

Dinner:

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

Day 17

Lunch

Mushroom and barley soup
Crackers with nut butters and cottage cheese

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 and cottage cheese

Dinner:

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

Day 19:

Lunch:

Miso-soup with tofu and seaweed

Dinner:

Vegetable quiche
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

Protein Content of Selected Vegetarian 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
Butter, without salt	1 tbsp	0.12
Cheese, cheddar	1 oz	7.06
Cheese, cottage, 2%	1 cup	31.05
Cheese, feta	1 oz	4.03
Cheese, mozzarella, part skim milk,	1 oz	7.36
Egg, whole, cooked, fried, hard boiled	1 large	6.27
Hummus	1 tbsp	1.11
Lentils,	1 cup	17.86
Lima beans,	1 cup	14.66
Milk, whole, 3.25%	1 cup	7.86
Nuts, almonds	1 oz (24 nuts)	6.02
Nuts, cashew	1 oz	4.34
Oat bran, raw	1 cup	16.26
Nuts, mixed nuts,	1 oz	4.90
Nuts, walnuts,	1 oz	4.32
Peanut butter, chunk style, with salt	1 tbsp	3.85
Peanut butter, smooth style	1 tbsp	4.01
Peas, green,	1 cup	7.51
Yogurt, plain, whole milk,	1 oz	1.00
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
Tofu, firm, prepared	1/4 block	6.63

On average, each person needs about 0.3 grams of protein per day, per pound of body weight. This means, 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 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.

Good Luck, and Enjoy!