

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 may begin to feel sluggish and weak, and we may become more susceptible to infections, our digestion can become impaired, and our general health rests at a less-than-optimal state. 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 3-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.

Notes about the Meal Plan

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.

Nuts + Seeds

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.

The Healthy Vegetarian Meal Plan

Breakfast

The breakfast listed below 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 every day. 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!

- 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

Lunch + Dinner

	Lunch	Dinner
Day 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Squash and vegetable soup, thick and hearty - Green salad with mixed oil dressing and avocado - Roasted almonds, pecans, walnuts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tomato and vegetable soup - Spelt bread with baked marble cheese - Mixed greens salad with lemon and oil dressing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tofu and yam coconut curry with carrots and celery on jasmine rice - Red cabbage coleslaw
Day 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Udon noodle miso soup with tofu cubes, seaweed, and shitake mushrooms - Fresh sprouts: mung, soy, sunflower 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spinach quiche with cheese - Persian-spiced millet with roasted nuts, parsley, and raising - Mixed greens salad with dressing
Day 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Squash and tomato soup with almonds and cranberries - Rye and rice crackers with brie - Mixed green salad with vinaigrette dressing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tortillas with brown rice, black beans, marble cheese and garlic oil - Guacamole, salsa, sour cream - Steamed greens with mixed oil dressing

Day 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Barley and mushroom soup - Walnut and apple bread - Mixed greens salad 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sang paneer, aloo gobi, cutney, and coconut yogurt served with jasmine rice - Steamed greens and mixed oil dressing
Day 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spinach and mushroom quiche with cheese - Rye bread - Green salad and dressing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vietnamese pho soup with tofu, sprouts, rice noodles
Day 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stewed kidney beans with sage - “Vermont corn pudding” (baked cornbread with egg, corn and cheese) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - hearty vegetable pizza - green salad with mixed oil dressing
Day 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Curried root vegetable stew with toasted coconut and cashew 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Persian-spiced couscous with mint and cilantro, chickpeas, raisins, pistachios - Steamed greens and fresh sprouts with a creamy dressing
Day 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minestrone and vegetable soup - Rye bread and salad 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “polenta pizza” – not really a pizza as you need a fork and knife 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - miso soup (as above) with addition of stewed root vegetables 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “BBQ” tempeh and vegetables in a tamarind sauce served with jasmine rice - Steamed greens - Red cabbage coleslaw
Day 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Squash curry soup - Crackers with nut butters and cottage cheese 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Calzones stuffed with mushrooms, onions, roasted garlic, and feta cheese - Green salad with mixed dressing
Day 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vegetable medley soup with barley - Whole grain bread 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spiced and fried tofu with rice noodles - Steamed broccoli and cauliflower
Day 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spinach, fennel and leek soup - Rye bread - Green salad with mixed oil dressing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Black bean enchiladas – cheese, brown rice, salsa, sour cream, guacamole - Steamed greens with dressing
Day 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cinnamon baked yam and celery soup - Green salad 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Taramind tofu slices with wild rice - Steamed vegetables in an oil, yeast, garlic and Dijon sauce

Day 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - French onion soup with swiss cheese 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thai sweet-and-sour tempeh with mixed vegetables on quiona - Steamed bok choy
Day 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Egg-drop soup with chives and pepper - Green salad 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Root vegetable au-gratin - Steamed broccoli with mixed oil dressing
Day 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mushroom and barley soup - Crackers with nut butters and cottage cheese 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vegetable chili on cornbread - Spinach salad with walnut and cranberries
Day 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fresh sprouts salad with mixed oil dressing - Bread and crackers with nut butters and cottage cheese 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Indian paneer on jasmine rice (chickpeas, tofu, cauliflower)
Day 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Miso soup with tofu and seaweed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vegetable quiche - Green salad with vinaigrette - Roasted root vegetables
Day 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Root vegetable slaw 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mixed vegetable and tempeh stir-fry on rice noodles in sesame oil
Day 21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mixed vegetable penne - Green salad with mixed oil dressing - Focaccia bread 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Thai green curry in coconut milk with snow peas and chickpeas - Steamed greens in vinaigrette

Protein sources

Below you'll find a table illustrating some common vegetarian protein sources. 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.

Protein Content of Selected Vegetarian Foods

Source	Portion	Grams of protein
Beans, baked, canned, plain	1 cup	12.07
Beans, red kidney	1 cup	13.47
Beans, navy or pinto	1 cup	15
Beans, white	1 cup	19.02
Bean, refried	1 cup	13.83
Brussel sprouts	8 sprouts	8g
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
Chia seeds	2 tbsp	4
Egg, whole, cooked, fried, hardboiled	1 large	6.27
Green peas	1 cup	7.51
Hemp seeds	3 tbsp	10
Hummus	4 tbsp increased portion	4.44
Lentils	1 cup	18.86
Lima beans	1 cup	14.66
Milk, whole, 3.25%	1 cup	7.86
Nuts, almonds	1 oz (approx. 24 nuts)	6.02
Nuts, cashews	1 oz (approx. 18 nuts)	4.34
Nuts, mixed	1 oz	4.90
Nuts, walnuts	1 oz (approx. 15 halves)	4.32
Nut butter, peanut	1 tbsp	4
Nut butter, almond	1 tbsp	3
Oat bran, raw	1 cup	16.26
Portobello mushrooms, cooked	1 cup	5
Pumpkin and squash seeds	1 oz (approx. 1/4 cup)	9.35
Quinoa	1 cup cooked 1/3 cup uncooked	8
Rice, brown, long-grained, cooked	1 cup	5.03
Seeds, sesame + tahini	1 tbsp	5.48
Soybeans, cooked	1 cup	28.62

Soy milk, original and vanilla, unfortified	1 cup	8.01
Seitan	3 oz	31
Tempeh	1 cup	41
Tofu, firm	1/4 block	6.63
Yogurt, plain, whole milk	1 oz	1