Vegetarian Variety
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Variety is important when it comes to vegetarian eating. A well-planned vegetarian diet has many health benefits and can meet your nutrient needs.

Most people think of vegetarian diets as excluding meat, fish and poultry, but there are many types of vegetarian diets.

Types of vegetarian diets

• Lacto-vegetarian diets include milk and milk products.
• Ovo-vegetarian diets include eggs.
• Lacto-ovo-vegetarian diets include milk, milk products, and eggs.
• Vegan diets do not include milk, milk products, eggs, meat, fish, poultry or products containing these foods.
• Semi-vegetarian diets include some poultry and/or fish.

Pay special attention to the following nutrients to make sure you get enough in your vegetarian diet. To help meet your nutrition needs, you must expand, not limit, your food choices.

Review your vegetarian diet with your dietitian to see if a supplement is required to meet your nutrition needs.
Nutrients to pay special attention to

› Protein
Protein is needed for growth and to build and keep muscles and red blood cells healthy. Choose a variety of protein foods at each meal and snack.

Protein sources which may be found in a vegetarian diet are:

• Milk, cheese, yogurt, kefir*, eggs, some poultry and fish
• Soy and soy products such as fortified soy beverages, tofu*, edamame*, tempeh*, textured vegetable protein (TVP)*, veggie burgers and other meat substitutes
• Pulses like beans, dried peas, lentils and chickpeas
• Grains including quinoa, bulgur, brown rice and oatmeal
• Nuts and seeds such as almonds, walnuts, cashews, peanuts, nut butters, sesame seeds, sunflower seeds, and flax seeds

*See page 8 for more information about these foods.
Iron carries oxygen to all parts of the body. The iron from plant foods is not as well absorbed in the body as the iron from animal foods, so vegetarians need to eat almost twice as much iron.

Vegetarian sources of iron include:

- Pulses like beans, dried peas, lentils and chickpeas
- Blackstrap molasses
- Soy and soy products such as fortified soy beverages, tofu, edamame, tempeh, TVP, veggie burgers and other meat substitutes
- Fortified pasta, breads and cereals
- Dried fruit such as prunes, raisins and apricots
- Dark green vegetables such as collards, okra, bok choy, cooked spinach and kale, as well as potatoes with the skins
- Quinoa
- Nuts and seeds like cashews, almonds, pumpkin and sesame seeds

Iron is better absorbed when eaten with foods rich in vitamin C like: oranges, grapefruit, clementines, fruit juice, strawberries, peppers and broccoli.
Tea and coffee can interfere with how much iron is absorbed, so wait at least one hour after a meal to drink tea or coffee. Using cast iron cookware will increase iron in your diet.

› Zinc

Zinc is needed for wound healing, growth, and a healthy immune system.

Food sources of zinc include:

- Pulses like beans, dried peas, lentils and chickpeas
- Soy and soy products such as fortified soy beverages, tofu, edamame, tempeh, textured vegetable protein (TVP), veggie burgers and other meat substitutes
- Nuts and seeds like peanuts, peanut butter, sesame seeds, tahini*, pumpkin seeds, and cashews
- Grain products such as wild rice, wheat germ, whole grains, and fortified cereals
- Milk and milk products such as cheese, kefir and yogurt
- Eggs
Calcium
Calcium is needed for healthy bones and teeth, blood clotting, and muscle, nerve, and heart health.
Milk and milk products such as cheese, kefir, and yogurt are excellent sources of calcium. Sardines and canned salmon with bones are also excellent food sources.

Other sources of calcium include:

• Fortified soy beverages, soy yogurt, soy beans, calcium fortified tofu
• Fortified almond milk or rice milk (be sure to check label for the word ‘fortified’)
• Pulses like kidney beans, baked beans, navy beans
• Almonds and almond butter
• Sesame seeds, tahini
• Blackstrap molasses
• Cooked dark green leafy vegetables: kale, collard greens, beet greens, Swiss chard and turnip greens
• Broccoli, bok choy, okra, kale, brussels sprouts
• Figs
• Fortified orange juice
› **Vitamin D**
Vitamin D helps the body absorb calcium for strong bones and teeth. It may be hard to get enough Vitamin D from the diet.

Food sources of Vitamin D are fortified milk, fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel, herring and sardines, fortified soy, rice and almond beverages, eggs, and non-hydrogenated soft margarines.

Canada’s Food Guide states that everyone over age 50 should take a vitamin D supplement of 400IU each day.

› **Vitamin B12**
Vitamin B12 helps make red blood cells and keep your nervous system healthy.

Vitamin B12 is found naturally only in animal foods (such as meat, fish, eggs, milk, cheese, kefir, yogurt) and in fortified foods such as:

- Fortified soy, almond, rice beverages
- Red Star T6635 nutritional yeast
- Fortified meat alternatives: TVP, meat substitutes such as veggie burgers

Low levels of Vitamin B12 can cause anemia (low red blood cell count). Vegetarians who do not eat any animal products may be at risk.
Adults over age 50 do not absorb Vitamin B12 well and need to eat foods fortified with Vitamin B12 or take a Vitamin B12 supplement.

› **Omega 3 Fats**

Omega 3 fats are important for heart, eye, nerve and brain health. Fish is an excellent source of omega 3 fat.

**Other sources of omega 3 fat are:**

- Canola, flax seed, walnut and soybean oils
- Soybeans, tofu, walnuts
- Ground flax, chia and hemp seeds

Some soy beverages, bread, orange juice, eggs and soft margarine may be fortified with omega 3. Check the label.
What are these foods?

› **Kefir** is a fermented milk product.

› **Tofu**, or bean curd, is made from soy milk. Tofu can be soft, firm, or extra firm. It takes on the flavour of whatever is cooked with it.

› **Edamame** is green soybeans either shelled or still in the pod. Shelled edamame is great in salads or added to rice dishes.

› **Tempeh** is made from cooked, fermented soybeans and formed into a patty, similar to a very firm veggie burger. Try adding some to a stir fry, or crumble into soups or chili.

› **Textured Vegetable Protein (TVP)** is dehydrated and made from soy flour. It takes on the flavour of whatever recipe it is added to. When cooked it has a similar texture to ground meat and it works well in casseroles, pasta sauces, soups, taco filling and chili.

› **Tahini** is a paste made from sesame seeds. It is used as a dip and is an ingredient in hummus.

If you have any questions, please ask.
We are here to help you.
Canada’s Food Guide can help you plan healthy vegetarian meals. Choose a variety of foods from the following food groups every day to meet your nutrition needs. See this website for more information: www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide

Vegetables and fruit: 7-10 servings a day
Examples of 1 serving:
• 1 medium vegetable or fruit (such as sweet potato or potato with the skin on, tomato, carrot, apple, banana, orange, peach)
• 2 small fruit (such as apricot or plum)
• 1/2 cup (125 ml) vegetable or fruit, fresh, frozen or cooked
• 1/2 cup (125 ml) vegetable or fruit juice
• 1 cup (250 ml) salad
Eat at least one dark green (kale, spinach, broccoli) and one orange (winter squash, sweet potato, carrots) vegetable each day. Choose vegetables and fruit prepared with little or no added fat, sugar or salt. Have vegetables and fruit more often than juice.
Grain products: 6-8 servings a day
Examples of 1 serving:
- 1 slice (35 g) of bread
- 3/4 cup (30 g) fortified cereals
- 1/2 cup (125 ml) cooked rice, pasta, couscous, bulgur, or quinoa
- 1 (30-40 g) roll, pita bread, tortilla, chapati, roti, bannock, scone, hamburger or hot dog bun
- 1 small or 1/2 large pancake, waffle or muffin
- 2 to 6 (30 g) crackers
Choose whole grains more often. Be sure to choose grain products that are lower in fat, sugar or salt.

Milk and alternatives: 2-3 servings a day
Examples of 1 serving:
- 1 cup (250 ml) milk or fortified soy beverage
- 3/4 cup (175 g) yogurt
- 1 1/2 oz (50 g) cheese
- 3/4 cup (175 ml) Kefir
Select lower fat milk and alternatives.
Meat alternatives: 2-3 servings a day
Examples of 1 serving:
• 3/4 cup (175 ml) cooked legumes
• 3/4 cup (150 g or 175 ml) tofu
• 2 eggs or 4 egg whites
• 2 tbsp (30 ml) peanut or nut butter
• 1/4 cup (60 ml) shelled nuts and seeds
• ½ cup (75 g / 2 ½ oz ) cooked fish, shellfish or poultry

Oils and fats
Include a small amount (2-3 tablespoons or 30-45 ml) of unsaturated fat each day. This includes oil used for cooking, salad dressings, margarine and mayonnaise.
Use vegetable oils such as canola, olive and soybean. Choose soft margarines that are low in saturated and trans fats. Limit butter, hard margarine, and shortening.
Vegetarian Shopping List

Grains
- Flour (whole wheat, buckwheat, spelt, barley, etc.)
- Rice (brown, basmati, instant, etc.)
- Dry cereal
- Oatmeal
- Mixed grains (often available in bulk)
- Whole grain breads, pitas, bagels, tortillas
- Whole grain crackers, crisps, rusks
- Enriched pasta (shells, spaghetti, macaroni, etc.)
- Quinoa

Vegetables and fruit
- Fresh greens
- Garlic and onions
- Seasonal vegetables and fruit
- Tomato sauce or paste, canned tomatoes
- Canned fruits
- Dried fruits
- Frozen fruits and vegetables
- Fruit and vegetable juices
Pulses (legumes and bean products)
Dried or canned varieties of navy beans, chick peas, kidney beans, lentils, split peas, lima beans, pinto beans, black eyed peas, romano beans

☐ Tofu (firm or soft)
☐ Tempeh
☐ Instant dried legume dishes (hummus, soups, and falafel)
☐ Textured vegetable protein (TVP)

Nuts, seeds and butters

☐ Nuts such as almonds, walnuts, pecans, peanuts, cashews

☐ Nut butters (almond and peanut) and seed butters (pumpkin seed, tahini, and sesame butter)

☐ Seeds such as sesame, pumpkin, sunflower, flax, hemp

Other meat alternatives

☐ Meat substitutes like vegetarian burger patties, wiener, sausages (usually found in the produce section of the grocery store)

☐ Eggs

☐ Fish, poultry (if semi-vegetarian)
Milk and alternatives

☐ Milks (non-dairy or low fat dairy)
☐ Cheese (non-dairy or dairy)
☐ Yogurt (soy or dairy)
☐ Kefir

Miscellaneous

☐ Nutritional yeast (Red Star T-6635)
☐ Blackstrap molasses
☐ Oils made from canola, olive, soybean or flaxseed
☐ Non-hydrogenated margarine
☐ Tofunaise or mayonnaise

Some larger grocery store chains (such as Sobeys and Atlantic Superstore) have registered dietitians who can help you choose nutritious foods for any type of vegetarian diet.
For recipes and for more information:

*User Friendly Pulses: Preparing Dried Beans, Peas & Lentils* (Nova Scotia Health Authority)
www.cdha.nshealth.ca/patientinformation/nshealthnet/0565.pdf

*The New Becoming Vegetarian: The Essential Guide to a Healthy Vegetarian Diet* by Vesanto Melina, MSc RD and Brenda Davis, RD

The Vegetarian Resource Group:
› www.vrg.org

VegWeb for many vegetarian recipes:
› www.vegweb.com

Dietitians.ca for information and recipes:
› www.dietitians.ca

Looking for more health information?
Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.
For more information go to http://library.novascotia.ca

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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.