



Patient & Family Guide
2021

Vegetarian Variety



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Vegetarian Variety

Variety is important when eating vegetarian. A well-planned vegetarian diet can meet your nutrition needs and has many health benefits. Eating plant-based foods is also more sustainable for the environment.

Most people think that being a vegetarian means you cannot eat meat, fish, or poultry. But there are many types of eating plans that can be called vegetarian.

Types of vegetarian eating

- **Vegan:** focuses on plant-based foods (like fruits and vegetables, whole grains, legumes, soy, nuts, and seeds) and avoids animal products.
- **Lacto-vegetarian:** similar to vegan, but can also include milk and milk products.
- **Lacto-ovo vegetarian:** similar to vegan, but can also include milk, milk products, and eggs.
- **Pescatarian:** similar to vegan, but can also include milk, milk products, eggs, and fish.
- **Flexitarian:** focuses on plant-based foods, but can also include meat every once in a while.

No matter what type of vegetarian eating you choose, eating a wide variety of plant-based foods will help you meet your nutrition needs.

Make sure you get enough of the following nutrients:

- › Protein
- › Iron
- › Zinc
- › Calcium
- › Vitamin D
- › Vitamin B12
- › Omega 3 fats

Talk to your primary health care provider or dietitian to find out if you need any supplements.

Protein

- Your body uses protein to build and repair cells, help with healing, build muscle, and fight infections.
- Choose a variety of protein foods at each meal and snack.
- **Plant-based protein sources include:**
 - › Soy and soy products (like fortified soy drinks, tofu*, edamame*, tempeh*, textured vegetable protein (TVP)*, plant-based burgers, and other meat substitutes). Fortified means made stronger by adding one or more extra ingredients.
 - › Legumes (like dried or canned beans, lentils, and chickpeas)
 - › Grains (like quinoa, bulgur, brown rice, and oatmeal)

- › Nuts and seeds (like almonds, walnuts, cashews, peanuts, nut butters, sesame seeds, sunflower seeds, and flax seeds)
- **Non-plant-based protein sources include:**
 - › Milk, cheese, yogurt, kefir*, eggs, meat, poultry, and fish

*See page 8 for more information about these foods.

Iron

- You need iron to carry oxygen to all parts of your body. Iron from plant foods is not absorbed by your body as well as iron from animal foods. If you do not eat animal foods, you will need to eat almost twice as much plant-based sources of iron.
- **Plant-based sources of iron include:**
 - › Legumes (like dried or canned beans, lentils, and chickpeas)
 - › Soy and soy products (like fortified soy drinks, tofu, edamame, tempeh, TVP, plant-based burgers, and other meat substitutes)
 - › Whole grains and grain products made with iron-enriched flour
 - › Dried fruit
 - › Dark green, leafy vegetables
 - › Nuts and seeds

- Iron is better absorbed when eaten with foods rich in vitamin C, like: oranges, grapefruit, tomatoes, fruit juice, strawberries, peppers, and broccoli.
- Tea and coffee can affect how much iron your body absorbs. Wait at least 1 hour after a meal or snack to drink tea or coffee.
- Cook in cast iron cookware to increase iron in your food.

Zinc

- Your body needs zinc for a healthy immune system, brain health, and wound healing.
- **Plant-based sources of zinc include:**
 - › Legumes (like dried or canned beans, lentils, and chickpeas)
 - › Soy and soy products (like fortified soy drinks, tofu, edamame, tempeh, TVP, plant-based burgers, and other meat substitutes)
 - › Nuts and seeds (like peanuts, peanut butter, sesame seeds, tahini*, pumpkin seeds, and cashews)
 - › Whole grains, wild rice, wheat germ, and fortified cereals

- **Non-plant-based sources of zinc include:**
 - › Milk and milk products (like cheese, kefir, and yogurt)
 - › Eggs, meat, poultry, and fish

Calcium

- Your body needs calcium for healthy bones and teeth, blood clotting, and muscle, nerve, and heart health.
- Milk and milk products (like cheese, kefir, and yogurt), sardines, and canned salmon with bones are excellent sources of calcium.
- **Plant-based sources of calcium include:**
 - › Fortified soy drinks, soy yogurt, soy beans, calcium fortified tofu
 - › Fortified almond or rice drinks
 - › Legumes (like dried or canned beans, lentils, and chickpeas)
 - › Dark green vegetables (like broccoli, kale, and spinach)
 - › Almonds and almond butter
 - › Sesame seeds and tahini
 - › Blackstrap molasses
 - › Figs
 - › Fortified orange juice

Vitamin D

- Your body needs vitamin D for a healthy immune system. It also helps your body absorb calcium for strong bones and teeth.
- You need more vitamin D as you get older.
- **Plant-based sources of vitamin D include:**
 - › Fortified soy, rice, and almond drinks
 - › Non-hydrogenated soft margarines
- **Non-plant-based sources of vitamin D include:**
 - › Fortified milk
 - › Fatty fish (like salmon, mackerel, herring, and sardines)
 - › Eggs
- You may need a vitamin D supplement, as it is often hard to get enough vitamin D from food. Vitamin D is measured in international units (IU).
- Health Canada recommends that people over the age of 50 take 400 IU of vitamin D every day.

Vitamin B12

- Vitamin B12 helps your body make red blood cells and keeps your nervous system healthy.
- Vitamin B12 is found naturally only in animal foods (like meat, fish, poultry, eggs, milk, cheese, kefir, and yogurt).

- **Plant-based sources of vitamin B12 include:**
 - › Fortified soy, almond, and rice drinks
 - › Fortified nutritional yeast
 - › Fortified TVP and meat substitutes
- Low levels of Vitamin B12 can cause anemia (low red blood cells).
- If you do not eat any animal products, you will need to eat foods fortified with vitamin B12. You may also need a vitamin B12 supplement.
- Adults over the age of 50 years do not absorb vitamin B12 well. If you are over 50 years old, you will need to eat foods fortified with vitamin B12. You may also need a vitamin B12 supplement.

Omega 3 fats

- Your body must have omega 3 fats for heart, eye, and brain health.
- Fish is the best source of omega 3 fat.
- **Plant-based sources of omega 3 fat include:**
 - › Canola, flaxseed, walnut, and soybean oils
 - › Soybeans, tofu, and walnuts
 - › Ground flax, chia, and hemp seeds
- Some soy drinks, 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. This makes it an excellent protein source. Tofu can be soft, firm, or extra firm. It takes on the flavour of whatever it is cooked with.
- **Edamame** are green soybeans, either shelled or still in the pod. Shelled edamame is great in salads or added to rice dishes.
- **Tempeh** is cooked, fermented soybeans formed into a patty. Try adding it to a stir fry, or crumble it into soups or chili.
- **Textured vegetable protein (TVP)** is made from soy flour. Because it is dehydrated (all of the liquid is removed), you must cook it with a liquid for 10 minutes or more. It takes on the flavour of whatever food it is cooked with. When cooked, it has a similar texture to ground meat. 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 as an ingredient in hummus.

Canada's Food Guide

- Canada's Food Guide recommends eating a variety of healthy foods each day. Have plenty of vegetables and fruits. Eat plant-based protein foods more often. Choose whole grain foods. Make water your drink of choice.
- To help you plan healthy vegetarian meals, visit:
 - › <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>

Shopping List

Vegetables and fruit:

- Choose a variety of fresh, frozen, or canned fruits and vegetables.
 - › Dark green, leafy vegetables
 - › Garlic and onions
 - › Vegetables and fruit in season
 - › Tomato sauce and paste, canned tomatoes
 - › Dried fruit
 - › Avocados
- Choose fruit and vegetable juices less often.

Protein foods:

- Legumes and soybean products
 - › Dried or canned navy beans, chickpeas, kidney beans, lentils, black beans, lima beans, etc.
 - › Tofu
 - › Tempeh
 - › Legume products (like hummus, soups, and falafel)
 - › TVP
 - › Edamame
- Nuts, seeds and butters
 - › Nuts (like almonds, walnuts, peanuts, and cashews)
 - › Nut butters (like almond and peanut) and seed butters (like pumpkin seed, tahini, and sesame)
 - › Seeds (like sesame, pumpkin, sunflower, flax, hemp, and chia)
- Milk and milk alternatives
 - › Milk
 - › Fortified soy drinks
 - › Cheese (made from milk or soy)
 - › Yogurt (made from milk or soy)
 - › Kefir

- Other sources of protein
 - › Store-bought meat substitutes (like plant-based burgers, hotdogs, and sausages). Check the nutrition labels, as these are often high in sodium, sugar, or saturated fat.
 - › Eggs, meat, fish, and poultry

Whole and enriched grains:

- › Flour (whole wheat, buckwheat, spelt, barley, etc.)
- › Rice (brown, wild, basmati, parboiled, etc.)
- › Cereals
- › Rolled oats
- › Whole grain breads, pitas, bagels, and tortillas
- › Whole grain crackers
- › Enriched pasta (spaghetti, macaroni, etc.)
- › Quinoa, bulgur, couscous, barley, and other grains
- › Wheat germ and natural bran

Other foods:

- › Nutritional yeast (choose fortified with vitamin B12)
 - › Blackstrap molasses
 - › Oils made from canola, olive, soybean, or flaxseed
 - › Non-hydrogenated margarine
 - › Tofunaise or mayonnaise
 - › Fortified almond or other non-dairy drinks, non-dairy cheese, and non-dairy yogurt.
- Note:** Unless these are made from soy, they are not good sources of protein.

For recipes and more information:

User Friendly Pulses: Preparing Dried Beans, Peas & Lentils

- › www.nshealth.ca/sites/nshealth.ca/files/patientinformation/0565.pdf

Canada's Food Guide

- › <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>

UnlockFood.ca™ - Brought to you by Dietitians of Canada

- › www.unlockfood.ca/en/Articles/Vegetarian-and-Vegan-Diets/

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For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

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Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit <http://ns.211.ca>

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Prepared by: Nutrition and Food Services

Designed by: Nova Scotia Health Library Services

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LC85-0510 © October 2021 Nova Scotia Health Authority

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