

Veganism in a Nutshell

What is a 'Vegan'?

Vegetarians do not eat meat, poultry, fish or seafood. Vegans, in addition to being vegetarian, do not eat or use other animal products and by-products such as eggs, dairy products, honey, leather, fur, silk, wool, cosmetics, and soaps derived from animal products.

Why Veganism?

Most people choose to be vegan for health, environmental, and/or ethical reasons. For example, some vegans feel that by consuming eggs and dairy products one is promoting the meat industry. That is, once dairy cows or egg-laying chickens are too old to be productive, they are often sold for meat. Also, since male calves do not produce milk, they usually are raised for veal or other products; similarly, as male chickens do not produce eggs they are killed not long after birth. Some people also avoid these items because of conditions associated with their production.

Many vegans choose this lifestyle to promote a more humane and caring world. They know they are not perfect, but believe they have a responsibility to try to do their best to live a compassionate and considerate life.

Vegan Nutrition

The key to a nutritionally sound vegan diet is variety. A healthy and varied vegan diet includes fruits, vegetables, plenty of leafy greens, whole grain products, nuts, seeds, and legumes. This is not as 'boring' as it sounds due to the wide range of meat alternatives, non-dairy milks, soy-based yogurts and ice-creams, biscuits, chocolates etc. available these days that are completely free of animal products.

Protein

It is quite easy for a vegan diet to meet the recommendations for protein as long as calorie intake is adequate. Strict protein planning or combining is not necessary. The key is to eat a varied diet.

Almost all foods except for alcohol, sugar, and fats contain protein. Vegan sources include: potatoes, whole meal bread, rice, broccoli, spinach, almonds, peas, chickpeas, peanut butter, tofu, soy milk, lentils and many of the meat alternatives available...

For example, if part of a day's menu included the following foods, you would meet the Recommended Dietary Intake (RDI) for protein for an adult male:

1 cup oatmeal, 1 cup soy milk, 2 slices whole meal bread, 1 bagel, 2 tablespoons peanut butter, 1 cup baked beans, 100 grams tofu, 2 tablespoons of almonds, 1 cup broccoli, and 1 cup brown rice.

Fats

Vegan diets are completely free of cholesterol and are generally low in fat. Thus eating a vegan diet makes it easy to conform to recommendations given to reduce the risk of major chronic diseases such as heart disease and cancer. High-fat foods, which should be used sparingly, include oils, margarine, nuts, nut butters, seed butters, avocado, and coconut.

Vitamin D

Vitamin D is not found in the vegan diet but can be synthesized in the body from exposure to sunlight. At least ten to fifteen minutes of summer sun on hands and face two to three times a week is recommended for adults so that vitamin D production can occur.

Calcium

Calcium is needed for strong bones and teeth. It is found in dark green vegetables, tofu processed with calcium sulfate, almonds, soymilk (fortified), molasses, tahini, sesame seeds, soybeans, figs, tempeh, broccoli, bok choy... and many other foods commonly eaten by vegans. Most fortified soy milks (and other non-dairy milks) contain similar quantities of calcium to cow's milk.

Calcium requirements for those on lower protein, plant-based protein diets may be somewhat lower than requirements for those eating a higher protein, flesh-based diet. However, it is important for vegans to eat foods high in calcium and/or take a vegan calcium supplement.

It appears that oxalic acid, which is found in spinach, rhubarb, chard, and beet greens, binds with calcium and reduces calcium absorption, however, calcium is well absorbed from other dark green vegetables.

Zinc

Vegan diets can provide zinc at levels close to or even higher than the RDI. Zinc is found in grains, legumes, and nuts.

Iron

Dried beans and dark green vegetables are especially good sources of iron, better on a per calorie basis than meat. Iron absorption is increased markedly by eating foods containing vitamin C along with foods containing iron.

Some good sources of iron include soybeans, lentils, blackstrap molasses, kidney beans, chickpeas, black-eyed peas, seitan, tempeh, black beans, prune juice, leafy greens, tahini, peas, figs, bulghur, raisins, millet...

Vitamin B12

Although the requirement for vitamin B12 is very low, it is a very important nutrient. It is especially important for pregnant and lactating women, infants, and children.

Tempeh, miso, spirulina, mushrooms and seaweed are often labeled as having large amounts of vitamin B12. However, these products contain analogues of the vitamin which the body cannot use. It is recommended for vegans to regularly consume a B12 supplement, or regularly consume B12-fortified foods. Vegetarians who are not vegan can obtain some vitamin B12 from dairy products and eggs, although they still may be low in this vitamin.

Common Vegan Foods

Oatmeal, stir-fried vegetables, cereal, toast, orange juice, peanut butter on whole meal bread, frozen fruit desserts, vegetable soups, dates, apples, macaroni, fruit smoothies, popcorn, spaghetti, baked beans, guacamole, chili...

Vegans Also Eat...

Tofu lasagna, homemade pancakes, hummus, egg-less cookies and cakes, soy ice-cream, tempeh, soy yogurt, rice pudding, banana muffins, spinach pies, oat nut burgers, falafel, corn fritters, French toast made with soy milk, soy hot dogs, vegetable burgers, pumpkin casserole, scrambled tofu, seitan...

Most non-vegetarian and non-vegan foods can be modified for vegans.

When Eating Out Try These Foods

Pizza without cheese, Chinese vegetable stir fries, Indian curries and dahl, bean tacos without the cheese, Middle Eastern falafel with hummus and tabouli, Ethiopian injera (flat bread) and lentil stew, Thai vegetable curries...

Egg Replacers

Depending on the recipe, substitute each egg (as a binder) with:

- 1/4 cup soft tofu blended with the liquid ingredients of the recipe, or
- 1 small banana, mashed, or
- 1/4 cup applesauce, or
- 2 tablespoons cornstarch or arrowroot powder
- Or use a commercial egg alternative – Egg Replacer, Egg Like, or No Egg that are found in most supermarkets and health food stores.

Dairy Product Replacers

The following can be used to substitute dairy products:

- Soy milk, rice milk, grain milk, nut milk, or water (in some recipes)
- Buttermilk can be replaced with soured soy or rice milk. For each cup of buttermilk, use 1 cup soymilk plus 1 tablespoon of vinegar.
- Soy cheese available in health food stores. (Be aware that many soy cheeses contain casein (milk protein).)
- Crumbled tofu can be substituted for cottage cheese or ricotta cheese in lasagna and similar dishes.
- Several brands of non-dairy cream cheese are available in some supermarkets and kosher stores (e.g. Blue Lotus, Tofutti or Kingland).
- Commercial soy mayonnaise (e.g. Kingland) is also available (be aware that some contain egg).

Source: <http://www.vrg.org/nutshell/vegan.htm>