

# Vegan nutrition

A well-planned vegan diet can provide all the nutrients that people need to stay strong and healthy. In fact, studies have shown that people who eat a mainly wholefood, plant-based diet are healthier than those who eat a lot of animal products. <sup>1</sup>

## Sources of food nutrients

### Protein

**For the growth and repair of muscles and bones and for fighting infection.**

Plant foods can provide all the essential amino acids, the building blocks of protein, that your body needs.

The best sources are pulses such as beans, lentils, chickpeas and peanuts, and foods made from soya beans such as tofu, soya milk and yoghurt. Other soya foods such as veggie burgers, sausages and mince, as well as nuts (especially cashew nuts), seeds (such as pumpkin seeds), buckwheat, quinoa, green vegetables (broccoli and spinach) and wholegrains (bread, pasta, rice, oats) are also rich sources.

Did you know that half a can of baked beans contains more protein than a standard beef burger?

### Minerals

#### Iron

**For healthy blood.**

Good plant sources of iron include pulses (beans, lentils, chickpeas), soya foods such as tofu, green leafy vegetables (such as broccoli, watercress, kale), nuts (especially cashew nuts), seeds (such as pumpkin seeds), dried fruit (apricots, dates, figs, raisins), and quinoa. Vitamin C helps us to absorb iron from food, so it's a good idea to eat foods that are high in iron and foods that are rich in vitamin C at the same time.

#### Calcium

**For healthy teeth and bones**

Best sources are calcium-set tofu\*, calcium-fortified plant milks and yoghurts, and bread fortified with calcium. Other good sources include some green leafy vegetables (broccoli, cabbage, kale, watercress), okra, nuts (especially Brazils and almonds), pulses, seeds (especially sesame seeds) and dried fruit (especially figs).

(\* tofu prepared using calcium)



#### Iodine

**Important for production of thyroid hormones, which ensure a healthy metabolism.**

People who don't eat fish or dairy products can obtain iodine from seaweed such as kelp (kombu) or nori. Powdered seaweed can be added to all sorts of dishes such as curry, stir-fry, chilli or baked beans. If you don't eat seaweed regularly, it's a good idea to take a daily iodine vitamin supplement.

### Vitamins

#### Vitamin B12

**Helps maintain healthy blood and nerve function.**

Foods such as yeast extract (e.g. Marmite), nutritional yeast flakes (e.g. Engevita), plant milks and non-dairy margarines are often fortified with B12. It is recommended that vegans take a daily B12 vitamin supplement.

#### Vitamin D

**Helps your body absorb calcium and form healthy bones.**

Most vitamin D is obtained from sunlight on our skin in the summer months. Vegans can obtain vitamin D (in the animal-free form D2 and vegan-derived D3), from fortified foods such as plant milks, dairy-free margarine and breakfast cereals. In the winter, it is advisable to take a vegan vitamin D supplement.

#### Omega 3

**Important for a healthy heart and for brain development.**

Animal-free sources include flaxseed oil, ground linseed, hemp seeds and walnuts (3 whole, or 6 halves, each day). Using vegetable (rapeseed) oil as your main cooking oil will also help you to get enough omega-3 fat.

# Vegan Eatwell Guide

The Eatwell Guide shows what types of food we should eat and in what quantities to achieve a healthy, balanced diet.

## 1. Fruit and vegetables

Fruit and veg should make up at least a third of the food you eat, so aim for at least five portions every day. Eat a variety of different fruits and vegetables, preferably fresh. These foods supply the protective vitamins, minerals and fibre which are essential for good health. Try them raw in salads, steamed, baked, roasted, stir-fried and mixed into main meal dishes such as curries, chilli, stews, pies and soups. Green leafy vegetables are particularly good for you.

## 2. Carbohydrates

Starchy carbohydrates should make up around a third of the food we eat. The foods in this group provide energy and dietary fibre along with vitamins, minerals and protein. Choosing wholegrain varieties such as wholewheat pasta, wholemeal bread, brown rice, wholegrain breakfast cereal, or simply leaving skins on potatoes, will help to keep your digestive system and heart healthy.

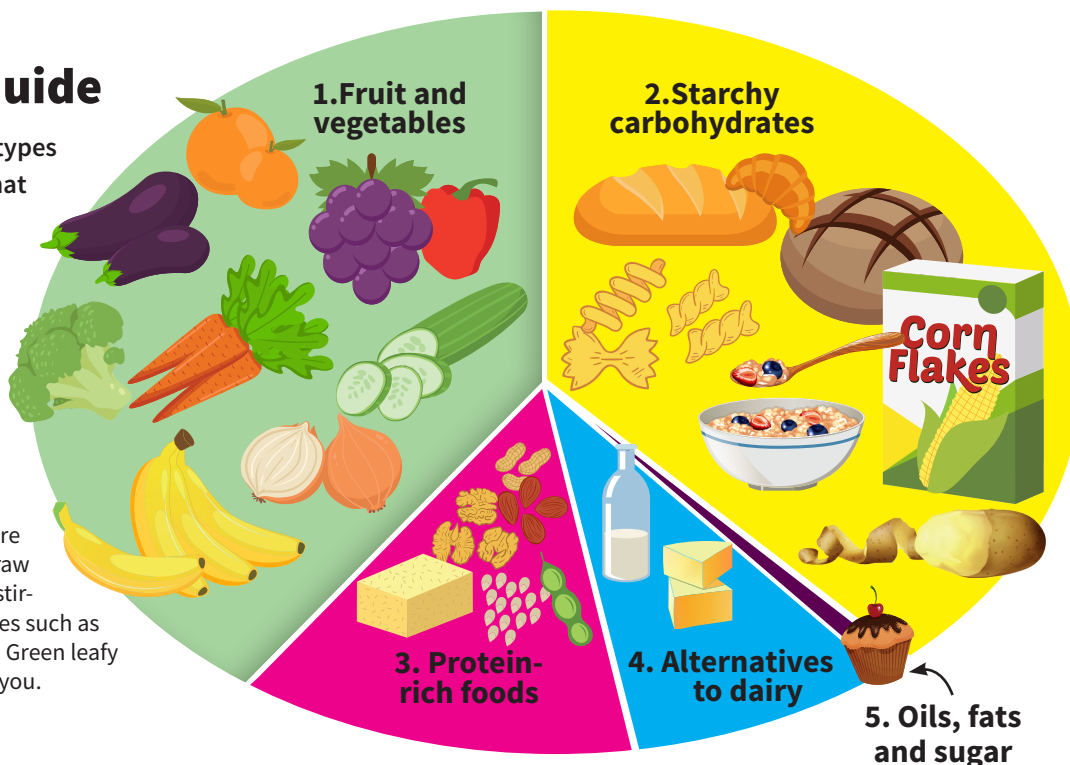
## 3. Protein-rich foods

Foods in this group include pulses (beans, foods made from soya beans, lentils, peas and peanuts), vegan Quorn (mycoprotein), nuts and seeds.

Pulses are a good alternative protein source to meat because they are lower in fat and higher in fibre. As well as being good sources of protein and fibre, pulses are rich in vitamins, such as the B vitamins, and minerals, such as iron. They also count towards your 5-a-day.

## 4. Alternatives to dairy

Vegan dairy-free alternative foods often contain as much calcium as dairy products, and are usually lower in fat.



Fortified plant milks, such as soya milk, contain as much calcium as dairy milk and an average portion of calcium-set tofu\* contains more calcium than an average portion of cheddar cheese.

(\* tofu prepared using calcium)

## 5. Oils and fats

We need to eat some fat to give us energy and to help our bodies absorb certain vitamins, but remember all types of fat are high in energy (calories) and should be eaten sparingly. Unsaturated

fats are healthier, while hydrogenated vegetable fats and saturated animal fats are unhealthy. The best oils for vegans to use are rapeseed oil and olive oil. Everyone needs small amounts of certain essential fats such as omega-3. Flaxseed oil is a good source of omega-3 fatty acids for vegans.

## Sugars

Foods high in sugar such as chocolate, cakes, biscuits, sugary soft drinks and ice cream are high in energy (calories) and should be eaten sparingly. Although it has no nutritional value, sugar can provide a useful short-term source of energy when doing strenuous exercise.

### Summary

- Eat a variety of fruit and vegetables (a third of your daily diet)
- Choose higher fibre carbohydrates (a third of your daily diet)
- Include good sources of protein in most meals
- Eat nuts and seeds daily
- Eat calcium-rich foods daily
- Check that you are getting enough vitamins B12 and D, zinc, selenium and omega-3 fats

## What you can do

- Visit our website to order a free Go Vegan pack.
- Ask your teacher if someone from Animal Aid can come to your school to give a talk on veganism in a lesson and/or do a vegan cookery demonstration in your food technology class.
- Contact us for free recipes, nutrition wall charts, stickers, leaflets and posters - email [youth@animalaid.co.uk](mailto:youth@animalaid.co.uk)



For more information on animal issues, please contact: Animal Aid, The Old Chapel, Bradford St, Tonbridge, TN9 1AW  
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(For the references, see the Vegan nutrition factsheet on our website)