

Vegan Guide to Good Nutrition

Vegans who eat a balanced diet don't lack any of the nutrients that their bodies require. In fact, a diet totally free of animal products can be healthier because it contains lots of fruits and vegetables and little saturated fat.


People who eat a diet free of animal products are called vegans. Vegans follow a completely plant-based diet and do not eat anything that comes from an animal, including meat, fish, eggs, dairy products and honey. Vegetarians don't eat meat or fish, but may eat eggs, dairy products or honey.

Protein

Important for growth and repair of the body's cells and tissues; for making strong bones and muscles; and for maintaining the immune system.

- Foods made from soya (e.g. tofu and sausages made from soya)
- Pulses (e.g. beans, lentils, chickpeas, peas)
- Peanuts
- Wholegrain cereals
- Nuts • Quinoa

DID YOU KNOW? Vegans should try to eat a variety of plant proteins to ensure that they get all the required amino acids the body needs. Soya is a 'high quality protein' which contains a good balance of all the required amino acids.





Fats

Having some fat in our diet helps the body absorb some vitamins. Fat is a good source of energy and it provides essential fatty acids that the body can't make itself. There are two main types of fat found in food - saturated and unsaturated.

Unsaturated fats:

- Olive oil (healthiest oil)
- Rapeseed oil (canola)
- Corn oil
- Sunflower oil
- Soya oil

DID YOU KNOW? Eating a diet that is high in saturated fat can raise the level of cholesterol in your blood, so it's a good idea to eat foods that are rich in unsaturated fat instead. The good news is that a vegan diet is low in saturated fats. Vegetarian foods containing saturated fats include butter, cream, cheese, and butter ghee - so you should avoid eating too much of these. It's also best to avoid hydrogenated vegetable fat, as this contains trans fats, which, like saturated fat, raise blood cholesterol.


Carbohydrate

Carbohydrate is the main source of energy for the human body. There are three main types: simple sugars (found in fruit and table sugar and sweets), complex carbohydrates (or starchy foods) and dietary fibre - see section below on fibre.

Complex carbohydrates:

- Wholegrain cereals (e.g. wheat, oats, rice)
- Potatoes
- Pulses • Quinoa

DID YOU KNOW? Complex carbohydrates should make up 50% - 70% of all the calories (or energy) that you consume. The skins are the most nutrient-rich part of the potato, so when cooking potatoes, it's best not to peel them first.






Omega 3 Fatty Acids

The omega 3 fats ALA, EPA and DHA are thought to be important for brain development and for protecting the body's cardiovascular system. EPA and DHA omega 3 fatty acids are not commonly found in vegetarian and vegan diets. Within the body however, ALA omega 3 can be converted into EPA and DHA omega 3 - the important nutrients commonly found in fish oil.

Omega 3 (ALA sources):

- Flaxseed oil (culinary linseed oil)
- Hemp seed oil
- Ground flaxseeds and hulled hemp seeds
- Rapeseed oil
- Chia seeds • Walnuts

DID YOU KNOW? EPA and DHA omega 3 fatty acids are created by small algae that live in the sea. Ocean fish are a rich source of these nutrients because they consume the algae and concentrate the nutrients. However, oily fish are not the only source of omega 3 acids. Flaxseed oil is the richest vegan or plant-based food source of ALA omega 3. To obtain its food value, it's best not to cook with it, but instead add it to a salad dressing or mix it into a fruit smoothie.





Fibre

Good for healthy bowels and also to help lower blood cholesterol levels, which is important for reducing the risk of heart disease. It may also help prevent some types of cancer.

- Wholegrain cereals
- Fruit
- Nuts • Pulses • Vegetables

DID YOU KNOW? Meat, fish, eggs and dairy products contain no fibre at all. High-fibre foods can help fill you up, which is why they're such a great choice if you want to lose weight.



Minerals...

Iron

Important for healthy blood.

- Pulses (e.g. beans, lentils, chickpeas)
- Soya foods
- Green leafy veg
- Wholegrain cereals
- Nuts & seeds • Dried fruit (figs and apricots)

DID YOU KNOW? Vegan soya mince typically contains more iron than beef mince. Vitamin C increases iron absorption, so it's a good idea to eat foods that are rich in iron and rich in vitamin C at the same time.




Calcium

Important for strong bones and teeth.

- Calcium-set tofu
- Pulses
- Green leafy veg such as broccoli, cabbage and kale
- Dried fruit
- Almonds • Sesame seeds
- Fortified plant milks
- Fortified bread

DID YOU KNOW? Fortified plant milks contain as much calcium as dairy milk. An average portion of calcium-set tofu contains more calcium than an average portion of cheddar cheese.




Zinc

Important for healthy-looking skin, hair and nails, and essential for a healthy immune system and resistance to infection.

- Pulses (beans, lentils, chickpeas)
- Walnuts
- Wholemeal bread
- Cashew nuts
- Quinoa
- Seeds (hemp seeds, pumpkin seeds & sesame seeds)

DID YOU KNOW? Foods such as leavening bread, sprouting beans, chickpeas and lentils may help to increase zinc absorption.




Selenium

An antioxidant that helps you maintain a healthy immune system and fight disease.

- Brazil nuts (are by far the best source of selenium)
- Green and brown lentils
- Tofu
- Wholegrains
- Sunflower seeds
- Sesame seeds

DID YOU KNOW? It's a good idea to eat a couple of brazil nuts most days to ensure you get a good supply of selenium.





Iodine

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

- Seaweeds such as kelp (kombu) and nori

Some vegans feel that a supplement is the most reliable way of meeting their body's need for iodine.

DID YOU KNOW? Powdered seaweed can easily be added to dishes such as soups, curry, chilli, pasta sauce or baked beans, when cooking.



Magnesium

Important for bones, nerves and muscles. It also helps turn the food we eat into energy.

- Nuts (particularly almonds & cashew nuts)
- Green leafy veg (particularly broccoli & spinach)
- Wholegrain cereals
- Soya products
- Pumpkin seeds • Green beans

DID YOU KNOW? Pumpkin seeds are delicious lightly roasted in the oven. By roasting them for a short time at a low temperature you can help to preserve their healthy oils.






Vitamins...

Vitamin A

Powerful antioxidant that is important for healthy skin, resistance to infection, healing wounds and protecting the body against disease. Beta-carotene, which gives yellow and orange fruit and vegetables their colour, is turned into vitamin A in the body.

- Carrots (best source)
- Green leafy vegetables (especially spinach and watercress)
- Red and yellow peppers
- Tomatoes
- Dried apricots
- Sweet potatoes
- Romaine lettuce
- Mangoes

DID YOU KNOW? Unlike many other vegetables, carrots are more nutritious when eaten cooked rather than raw (except when they are juiced).






B Vitamins

Important for the proper functioning of the brain, heart and nerves, and for blood formation. They also help maintain healthy skin and muscle tone.

- Wholegrain cereals
- Nuts
- Yeast extract (Marmite)
- Mushrooms
- Bananas
- Peas
- Rice
- Avocados
- Sunflower seeds
- Sesame seeds
- Green leafy vegetables (especially spinach)

DID YOU KNOW? There are eight vitamins in the B group. These are: B1 (thiamine), B2 (riboflavin), B3 (niacin), B5 (pantothenic acid), B6 (pyridoxin), B7 (biotin), B9 (folic acid) and B12 (see below).

Vitamin B12

Important for healthy blood and nerve function, and growth and development in children.

Fortified products including:

- Nutritional yeast flakes such as Engevity
- Plant milks
- Vegan margarines

Some vegans feel that a nutritional supplement is the most reliable way of meeting their body's need for B12.

DID YOU KNOW? Vitamin B12 is not found in any plant foods. Vegans need to eat foods fortified with B12 or take B12 supplements.






Vitamin C

Powerful antioxidant that is important for healthy skin, teeth and gums. Also for resistance to infection, healing wounds and protecting the body against disease. Helps the body to absorb iron.

- Papaya
- Red pepper
- Broccoli
- Blackcurrants
- Strawberries
- Oranges
- Kiwi fruit
- Potatoes

DID YOU KNOW? Scurvy is a disease resulting from a deficiency of vitamin C. Years ago the disease was common among sailors who were aboard ships at sea for longer than perishable fruits and vegetables could be stored.

Vitamin D

Helps your body absorb calcium and form healthy bones and teeth and is important for a healthy immune system.

- Sunlight on the skin

Fortified foods including:

- Plant milks
- Vegan margarines
- Breakfast cereals

DID YOU KNOW? Vitamin D is produced naturally in our bodies when our skin is exposed to sunlight. In the winter, it is a good idea to eat foods fortified with vitamin D to ensure that you are getting enough.




Vitamin E

Powerful antioxidant that is important for healthy skin, resistance to infection, healing wounds and for protecting the body against disease.

- Wheatgerm in cereals
- Sunflower seeds
- Plant oils
- Hazelnuts
- Almonds
- Avocados
- Tomatoes

DID YOU KNOW? Vitamins A, C and E and selenium are all part of the body's antioxidant defence system, preventing damage to cells and tissues.






Vitamin K

Important for blood clotting and healing wounds. It is also thought to have a role in building strong bones.

Green leafy vegetables such as:

- Kale
- Spinach
- Romaine lettuce
- Cabbage
- Brussels sprouts
- Broccoli

DID YOU KNOW? As well as obtaining vitamin K from food, we also get some from our own bodies because it's produced by bacteria in our intestines.

Quick healthy guide:

Pulses

- Beans (baked beans, kidney beans, butter beans, etc)
- Green peas
- Chickpeas
- Lentils

Wholegrain cereals

- Breakfast cereals (such as porridge oats, shredded wheat, Weetabix & muesli)
- Pasta & spaghetti
- Bread
- Rice
- Noodles

Nuts

- Almonds
- Brazil nuts
- Cashew nuts
- Hazelnuts
- Walnuts

Seeds

- Sunflower seeds
- Pumpkin seeds
- Sesame seeds

Soya foods

- Vegan burgers and sausages (made from soya)
- Soya milk
- Tofu
- Soya mince

Green leafy vegetables

- Broccoli
- Okra
- Cabbage
- Spinach
- Watercress




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