

Vegetarian Diet: A Healthy Lifestyle

What Is A Vegetarian Diet?

A vegetarian diet relies primarily on plant-based foods such as beans, legumes, grains, vegetables, fruits, nuts & seeds. There are different types of vegetarian diets - each with a unique stance surrounding the consumption of milk & eggs.

Types of Vegetarianism

- Lacto-ovo-vegetarian diet: permits the consumption of milk & eggs
- Lacto-vegetarian diet: permits the consumption of milk, but not eggs
- Vegan: focuses on plant-based foods only, avoiding all animal-based products, cow's milk & eggs included.

Benefits of Vegetarianism

- Vegetarian diets are low in saturated fat, rich in fiber & packed with disease-fighting antioxidants.
- Vegetarian diets help manage glucose levels & prevent type 2 diabetes by improving insulin sensitivity.
- Plant-based foods help fight the inflammation responsible for heart disease, diabetes, & certain forms of cancer. Research shows that those consuming vegetarian diets experience a 32% reduction in risk for cardiovascular diseases compared to those consuming non-vegetarian diets. Eating a vegetarian diet has also been shown to reduce the risk of breast cancer development in menopausal women by up to 62%.
- A vegetarian diet not only aids in chronic disease prevention, but also benefits our environment. Animal agriculture is responsible for 18% of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, more than the combined exhaust from all transportation. Eating diets that are mostly plant-based reduces environmental pollution, animal waste & GHG emissions.
- Based on global estimations, eating a plant-based diet spares the lives of 105 animals per person each year, & helps combat world hunger too. We feed 36 percent of crop calories to animals, yet only 12 percent of those calories make it to humans when they eat animal products.

What To Look For

- Beans, legumes, nuts, seeds & whole grains are high-quality sources of vegetarian protein - critical for healthy bones, muscles, skin & hair.
- For those consuming little to no animal products, vitamin B12 supplementation or regular intake of vitamin B12-fortified milks, tofu, yeasts & supplements is critical.
- Those avoiding cow's milk can benefit from plant-based options such as vitamin D & calcium-fortified soy or pea milks.
- Vegetarian & vegan individuals should regularly consume healthy fats such as flax seeds, chia seeds, walnuts, hemp seeds & other omega-3 precursors, & may want to consider an algae-based DHA supplement for optimal cognitive health.

Summary

A vegetarian diet consists of plant-based foods like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, legumes, nuts & seeds. Vegetarianism has been associated with a reduction in risk for heart disease, diabetes, & cancer, & is an environmentally sustainable eating pattern. A well-planned vegetarian diet can provide adequate nutrition & support healthy living at all ages, as well as support thriving ecosystems & a greener planet.