



## Vegetarian diet? Get nutrients you need

**My partner used to be a vegetarian, and she wants us to try a vegetarian diet for a few months to see if it helps us feel healthier and possibly drop a few pounds. But aren't there nutrients we won't be getting if we don't eat meat?**

Vegetarian diets can be completely healthful. You can get all the nutrients you need from a vegetarian diet, but you'll have to make sure you eat a wide variety of foods and pay special attention to your intake of protein, iron, calcium, zinc and vitamin B12.

The federal government's nutrition web site, <http://www.nutrition.gov>, offers a wide range of resources that can help. The first thing you'll have to decide is what kind of vegetarian diet you're interested in. There are three major types:

- Vegan, which excludes all meat and animal products.
- Lacto vegetarian, which includes dairy products.
- Lacto-ovo vegetarian, which includes both dairy products and eggs.

Once you decide that, you'll know which foods to choose from to be sure you're getting the proper nutrients. Here are some tips from [MyPyramid.gov](http://MyPyramid.gov):

- Protein sources include eggs, milk and dairy products, beans, nuts, nut butters, peas and soy products, such

as tofu, tempeh and veggie burgers. Years ago, vegetarians were told to be sure to "combine" foods properly in order to obtain all of the amino acids the body needs; however in more recent years, researchers have realized that there's no need to consume those foods in the same meal.

- Sources of iron include iron-fortified breakfast cereals, spinach, kidney beans, black-eyed peas, lentils, turnip greens, molasses, whole wheat breads, peas, and some types of dried fruit, such as dried apricots, prunes and raisins.

- You can get calcium from milk products or fortified breakfast cereals, soy products (tofu, soy-based beverages), calcium-fortified orange juice, and some dark green leafy vegetables (collard greens, turnip greens, bok choy and mustard greens).

- Sources of zinc for vegetarians include many types of beans (white beans, kidney beans and chickpeas, for example), milk products, zinc-fortified breakfast cereals, wheat germ and pumpkin seeds.

- Vitamin B12 is found naturally only in animal products — get it from milk products or eggs, or from foods that are fortified with vitamin B12, including breakfast cereals, soy-based beverages, veggie burgers, and some types of nutritional yeast, which is usually available in natural food stores.

*Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or [filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu).*



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