

Going vego

Being a vegetarian means not eating meat. While all vegetarians have this in common, there are different ways of being vegetarian. Some vegetarians eat no foods from animals at all, which means no meat, chicken, fish, eggs, milk, cheese or yoghurt. Some others, while not eating meat, also eat fish and/or eggs, milk, cheese and yoghurt.

Why do some people become vegetarian?

Reasons include:

- » concerns about animal welfare
- » concern for the environment
- » beliefs about health
- » preferring the taste of vegetarian food, and/or disliking the taste of meat
- » religious beliefs
- » high cost of meat.

A healthy vego diet

Whatever type of vego diet you eat, you need to get the nutrients that you used to get from meat, fish, eggs and/or milk and cheese from other foods.

Protein

You need protein to build and maintain muscles. You can get plenty of protein from eggs, milk, cheese, yoghurt and soy products (tofu), as well as plant foods such as baked beans, chickpeas, lentils, kidney beans, nuts, peanut butter and seeds. Eat a variety of these foods every day to get enough protein.

Calcium and Vitamin D

You need calcium and Vitamin D to keep your bones healthy and strong. Milk, cheese and yoghurt are excellent sources of calcium, as are calcium fortified soy milk, almonds, dried figs and apricots, soybeans and tofu. You may need a supplement if you don't eat enough of these foods.

You can get Vitamin D from being out in the sun. Some foods may also have added Vitamin D. If you are low in Vitamin D, your doctor may prescribe a supplement.

Iron

It is important to get enough iron, so your blood can carry oxygen around your body and give you energy. If you don't eat meat, you need to get the iron from other foods. You can get some iron from dried fruit (e.g. sultanas), nuts, leafy green vegetables, seeds, and dried beans and chickpeas. Some breakfast cereals have iron added to them. Adding Milo® and Sustagen® to milk will also help.

To absorb more iron from your vego foods, eat vegetables and fruit high in Vitamin C at the same meal. For example, add capsicums, tomatoes or broccoli, and/or some strawberries, kiwi fruit or orange to your meal. Avoid drinking tea at meals, as this reduces iron absorption. *Yhunger fact sheet 'Iron out tiredness'* has more information.

Zinc

Zinc helps to heal wounds and strengthens the immune system. Plant sources of zinc include nuts, dried beans and chickpeas, wheat germ and wholegrain breads and cereals.

Vitamin B12

Vitamin B 12 is found only in meat and dairy foods. It is needed to produce blood and to keep your nervous system healthy. To get enough Vitamin B12 on a vego diet, eat soy products (soy milk, tofu and tempeh) that have added Vitamin B12. If you don't eat soy products, you may need a Vitamin B12 supplement. Speak to your doctor, pharmacist or dietitian to find one that is right for you.



Vego meal ideas

Breakfast

- » Porridge or breakfast cereal with milk or soy milk
- » Eggs on wholegrain toast
- » Muesli with yoghurt/soy yoghurt
- » Baked beans and grated cheese on toast.

Lunch

- » Sandwiches or wraps with fillings that include avocado or cheese
- » Baked beans on a toastie
- » Vegetable and bean soup with crusty bread
- » Veggie burger.

Dinner

- » Ratatouille (eggplant, capsicum, tomato and zucchini) with pasta
- » Tofu and vegetable stir fry with rice
- » Chickpea and vegetable curry with couscous
- » Dhal with rice
- » Lentil soup with bread
- » Vegetarian lasagne
- » Baked potato with bean filling.

Snacks

- » Yoghurt and fruit
- » Nuts, seeds and dried fruit mix
- » Banana smoothie
- » Fruit bread or muffin with ricotta cheese
- » Cheese and tomato on crackers.



Need more information on vegetarian and vegan diets?

Health advice on vegetarian diets at the Dietitians Australia website <https://dietitiansaustralia.org.au>

Vegetarian and vegan eating at the Better Health Channel www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Food ideas and FAQs from the University of Newcastle <https://nomoneynotime.com.au/>

Talk to your GP or youth health nurse before taking supplements

This fact sheet has been developed by Youthblock Youth Health Service, Sydney Local Health District for the Yhungers program.