

# NUTRIFAX<sup>©</sup>

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## The Vegetarian Agenda

**V**egitarianism is becoming more notable in today's diet practices for ethical, cultural and/or health reasons.

**Vegetarian** is a general term used to describe one who omits animal sources from the diet, but there are many classes of vegetarians depending on what foods are excluded from the diet. Some follow a strict diet of protein from vegetables only but others may eat some form of animal product occasionally.

### TYPES OF VEGETARIANS

- **Semi-Vegetarian:** (Pescetarian) Includes fish, and often dairy and eggs in addition to vegan diet.
- **Lacto-Ovo-Vegetarian:** Includes both milk products and eggs in addition to vegan diet.
- **Lacto-Vegetarian:** Includes only milk products in addition to vegan diet.
- **Ovo-Vegetarian:** Includes fish, and often dairy and eggs in addition to vegan diet.
- **Vegan or Total Vegetarian:** Completely omits all animal products from diet, i.e. red meat, poultry, fish, dairy products, eggs, gelatin, honey, etc.

### HEALTH BENEFITS OF VEGETARIAN DIETS

This eating lifestyle is typically low in fat and high in fiber, and may result in the following health benefits:

- lower cholesterol
- lower blood pressure

- decrease mortality from heart disease
- better weight control
- decrease constipation and diverticulitis
- decrease risk of some forms of cancer

### HEALTH RISKS OF A VEGETARIAN DIET

Animal protein is the only source of complete protein with all the essential amino acids. Vegetables may have some of the amino acids but not all. Lack of complete protein may be a health risk especially in periods of body growth.

The more restrictive the diet is in eating animal protein, the greater the health risks. Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> is found naturally in animal protein. Also, animal protein is the major source for calcium, Vitamin D, and iron. A multi-vitamin, as well as nutrient fortified foods, may be necessary should the diet consist of only vegetable proteins.

To avoid deficiencies of vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, vitamin D, calcium, and iron; look for fortified foods. A multivitamin may be needed to supplement intake, especially for vitamin B<sub>12</sub>. Sunshine is a good source of vitamin D. Large servings of cooked dark green leafy vegetables provides significant calcium. Cooked dry beans provide iron. Both calcium and iron can be obtained from tofu and other soy products.

### *Is a vegetarian diet safe for children, pregnant or breast-feeding women and the acutely ill?*

Caution needs to be taken during these high growth and healing situations. The vitamin and mineral intake needs to be carefully monitored. Supplying all essential amino acids for complete protein and adequate calories are essential for growth.

### *How can I make complete proteins out of incomplete vegetable protein?*

Many grains, legumes and seeds are good sources of protein but need to be combined with another to become complete proteins. A grain product, another vegetable or an animal derived protein can provide amino acids that are missing in a vegetable. Examples of complementary combinations are beans and rice, peanut butter and bread, macaroni and cheese.

Supplying adequate protein and sufficient calories is challenging. Eat a variety of foods in several meals and snacks each day.



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