VEGAN DIETS IN A NUTSHELL

WHAT IS A VEGAN?

Vegetarians do not eat meat, fish, or poultry. Vegans, in addition to being vegetarian, do not use other animal products and by-products such as eggs, dairy products, honey, leather, fur, silk, wool, or cosmetics and soaps derived from animal products.

COMMON VEGAN FOODS

Oatmeal, cereal, toast, orange juice, peanut butter on whole wheat bread, frozen fruit desserts, salad bar items like chickpeas and three bean salad, dates, apples, macaroni, fruit smoothies, popcorn, spaghetti, vegetarian baked beans, lentil soup, guacamole, chili, stir-fried vegetables, burritos...

VEGANS ALSO EAT

Lasagna, homemade pancakes without eggs, hummus, eggless cookies, soy ice cream, tempeh, corn chowder, soy yogurt, rice pudding, fava beans, banana muffins, spinach pies, oat nut burgers, seitan, corn fritters, French toast made with soymilk, soy hotdogs, vegetable burgers, pumpkin casserole, scrambled tofu, falafel...

EATING OUT? TRY THESE FOODS

Vegan pizza, Chinese moo shu vegetables, Indian curries and dal, bean tacos and burritos without the lard and cheese (available from Chipotle, Taco Bell, etc.), hummus and tabouli, Ethiopian injera (bread) and stews, Thai vegetable curries...

VEGAN NUTRITION

The key to a nutritionally sound vegan diet is variety. A healthy and varied vegan diet includes fruits, vegetables, plenty of leafy greens, whole grains, nuts, seeds, and legumes.

PROTEIN

It is easy for a vegan diet to meet the recommendations for protein as long as calorie intake is adequate and a variety of foods are eaten. Strict protein planning or combining is not necessary.

SOURCES OF PROTEIN

Almost all foods except for alcohol, sugar, and fats provide some protein. Vegan sources include: almonds, lentils, chickpeas, tofu, peas, peanut butter, soymilk, rice, spinach, whole wheat bread, potatoes, broccoli, kale...

For example, if part of a day's menu included the following foods, you would meet the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) for protein for an adult male:

1 cup oatmeal, 1 cup soymilk, 1 bagel
2 slices whole wheat bread,
2 Tablespoons peanut butter,
1 cup vegetarian baked beans,
5 ounces tofu, 1 cup broccoli, and
1 cup brown rice

VITAMIN D

Vitamin D can be made by humans following exposure to sunlight. At least ten to fifteen minutes of summer sun on hands and face two to three times a week is recommended for adults so that vitamin D production can occur. Food sources of vitamin D include vitamin D-fortified plant milks and mushrooms that have been commercially exposed to ultraviolet light.

CALCIUM

Calcium is found in dark green leafy vegetables, tofu made with calcium sulfate, calcium-fortified soymilk and orange juice, and many other foods commonly eaten by vegans. Vegans should eat foods that are high in calcium and/or use a calcium supplement.

FAT

Vegan diets are cholesterol free and are generally low in saturated fat. Eating a vegan diet makes it easy to conform to recommendations given to reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as heart disease and cancer. Eat mostly monounsaturated fats from foods like nuts, seeds, olives, avocados, and canola or olive oil.

ZINC

Zinc is found in grains, legumes, and nuts.

IRON

Dried beans and dark green leafy vegetables are especially good sources of iron, better on a per calorie basis than meat. Iron absorption is increased markedly by eating foods containing vitamin C along with foods containing iron. Sources of iron include: soybeans, lentils, blackstrap molasses, kidney beans, chickpeas, black-eyed peas, Swiss chard, tempeh, black beans, tahini, peas, bulghur, bok choy, raisins, watermelon, millet, kale...

OMEGA-3 FATTY ACIDS

In order to maximize production of DHA and EPA (omega-3 fatty acids), vegans should include good sources of alpha-linolenic acid in their diets such as flaxseeds, flaxseed or canola oil, tofu, and walnuts.

VITAMIN B12

The requirement for vitamin B12 is very low but it is an essential nutrient. It is especially important for pregnant and lactating women, infants, and children to have reliable sources of vitamin B12 in their diets. Non-animal sources include cereals, soymilk, rice milk, and meat analogs that have been fortified with vitamin B12. Also, around two teaspoons of Red Star nutritional yeast T6635, often labeled as Vegetarian Support Formula, supplies the adult Recommended Dietary Allowance.

Read labels carefully or contact companies since fortification levels can change. Vitamin B12 supplements are another option. Unless fortified, no plant food contains significant amounts of active vitamin B12.

© The Vegetarian Resource Group; www.vrg.org