

Veg or Vegan Nutrition for Total Health & Happiness ©

Savvy Vegetarian takes a holistic view of nutrition. I talk about specific nutritional values in context, but you won't find the usual lists of vitamins and minerals, the foods that contain them, and the rules that go with them.

Instead, I give general guidelines, with a step-by step approach toward achieving a high quality, balanced, varied vegetarian or vegan diet, from which good nutrition naturally flows.

This report is intended as a practical guide, not as a guarantee of good health, or as medical advice. If you have health challenges, consult your medical advisors before any change of diet.

Suffering Isn't Necessary:

Most of us want good health. And we are aware of the connection between health and diet. Most also think that healthy eating means throwing pleasure out the window. Become vegetarian or vegan, and it's 'brown rice, seaweed, and skip the hot dog', to paraphrase Bob Dylan.

Not true. The people who suffer are those who eat meat, potatoes and iceberg lettuce or frozen peas day after day, year after year, and never know what they're missing.

Getting What We Want:

You can be a well-nourished hedonist. The same features that make a vegetarian or vegan diet nutritious also make it delicious.

We are creatures of habit, and tend to settle on a few favorite and familiar foods. Becoming vegetarian or vegan is your chance to break out of your ruts and dull routines. With a plant food diet, you can literally not eat the same dish twice for a year. You may not want to go that far, but the more varied your veg diet, the better the nutrition, and the more you'll enjoy it.

Make this change an adventure - fun, exciting and amazing. Open your mind to trying new things. Explore the wide variety of fresh vegetables and fruits that

we are fortunate to have readily available. Learn all the different ways to prepare them. Try the many kinds of legumes and grains, nuts and seeds. Experiment with some of the hundreds of possible combinations of all these foods.

You may need to make a few changes in your life to support your vegetarian diet, but you don't have to stress yourself out to eat well. The negative effects would then cancel out the good effects.

Take stock of the advantages and limitations of your situation, learn the basics of vegetarian nutrition, and then feed yourself the best possible diet that you can, with maximum pleasure, and least disruption of your life.

Making Time:

What I hear most from people about changing their diet is, "I don't have time." How sad! If it's important to you, then give yourself time, however you can.

If we could expand our boundaries, change our ways of thinking and acting overnight, wouldn't it be wonderful? Yes! But not real. Evolution takes time, so be patient. Every step that we make toward our goals is good. (But of course, we want to be perfect vegetarians NOW.)

Here are a few timely tips for establishing a delicious, nourishing vegetarian diet, in an easy unhurried way, without unnecessary stress.

1. Accept that a vegetarian or vegan diet, if you're serious about it, is going to take up more of your time than eating previously did, until it becomes familiar.
2. Make eating well a priority. Whatever we make our top priority is what happens in our lives, because that's where our attention is focused.
3. Adjust your daily and weekly routine, so that there's some time for learning, shopping, and cooking, with enjoyment, pleasure, happiness, etc.

Things You Should Know:

These aren't hard and fast rules, more like suggestions, based on the principle that food is to enjoy. I'm leaving out a lot of information, but if you

follow these guidelines, even loosely, it'll be easier for you to have balanced, complete vegetarian nutrition.

Basics of vegetarian nutrition:

1. **Sorry to say**, vegetarian and vegan fast food and processed food, even when organic, aren't much better for you than an omnivorous diet. Processed food, including 'natural food' generally has the life processed right out of it, and is full of preservatives, artificial coloring and flavoring, hydrogenated oil, GE ingredients, etc. Read the labels.
2. **Who can be good all the time?** It's very human to eat things that are bad for you, once in a while. Obviously you shouldn't make dietary staples of pizza, chocolate and ice cream. When you indulge, be discriminating – buy organic, or make your own.
3. **Go for organic food**, as much as possible. Both taste and nutrition are generally superior, not to mention the lack of pesticides and herbicides. Organic food costs more, because organic farmers don't get agricultural subsidies, and organic farming is usually done on a smaller scale. But it's worth the extra cost.
4. **Buy locally grown**, fresh picked vegetables and fruit, as much as you can. The less time between picking and eating, the more taste and nutrients in the food.
5. **Consciousness, love, and pleasure in the making:** These give subtle qualities to food, which nourish just as much or more than the quantifiable nutrients.
6. **Cook your own food**, from scratch, whenever possible. It's fresher, you know what's in it, and you can make it just as you like. Plus, it costs less.
7. **Use leftovers with caution.** For many of us, eating leftovers is a fact of life, if not a way of life. The ideal is to use fresh ingredients, eat immediately, and try not to have leftovers. Not always possible, I know, but something to keep in mind.

Be aware that due to oxidation, vitamins and enzymes are lost in storage, taste and color are also affected, and there can be food safety issues.

Refrigerate or freeze leftover food immediately after eating. You can put hot food into the fridge. Use tightly sealed shallow containers or bags to store food, with as little air included as possible. Keep your fridge & freezer cold.

Eat leftovers from the fridge within two days at the most. Freeze leftovers for storage if you need to keep them longer.

When In Doubt, Throw It Out! That especially includes any food that has sat around at room temperature for several hours, or less if the weather is hot.

8. **Nutrient robbers:** Refined sugar, salt and flour, hydrogenated fat, carbonated beverages, food preservatives, tobacco, alcohol, recreational drugs – those all add extra calories but no added nutrition, so they are nutrition robbers. Most, if not all of the calories you put in your body should count, nutritionally.

9. **Vegetarian and vegan diets should consist mainly of vegetables and whole grains.** This may seem obvious, but takes some effort to accept and put into practice, when you're used to a meat-based diet. The tendency is to substitute cheese or soy protein for meat, and keep may even lead to malnutrition.

When planning meals, think vegetable, grain, and protein, in combination. Too much of anything isn't a good thing, so don't feel you have to eat All Whole Grains All the Time.

10. **Carbohydrates:** The idea that carbohydrates are bad for you *has no basis in fact*, even though it has become widespread. It's true that eating lots of refined carbohydrates, and simple carbohydrates (like white sugar) isn't good, because they have lost most of their nutrients through processing. Organic whole grains supply a huge number of essential nutrients, as well as energy.

11. **Protein:** You must have enough protein to maintain and build your body, but in my opinion, you don't need nearly the amount of protein in the RDA. The amount you need varies with your body type, your size, your activities, and your age. There really is no set amount that works for everybody. Aim to have several protein sources in each meal, and try to include protein in snacks, too. Plant protein and iron digest better when eaten with a Vitamin C rich food. [More Plant Based Protein Info](#)
12. **Protein and calcium** are found in almost all vegetables, fruits, whole grains, nuts, seeds, legumes, herbs and spices, as well as long lists of other vitamins, minerals, and enzymes.
13. **Protein and carbohydrates** aren't really separate food categories for vegetarians. Because most veg protein is plant based, all the food you eat put together is your protein. Some plant foods are denser in protein than others, but plant food isn't protein on one side, carbs on the other side, veggies in the middle. You don't need to worry about exact combinations and proportions, and it isn't necessary to eat dairy and eggs to get enough protein or calcium. As long as you eat a wide variety of vegetables, fruits, legumes, nuts and seeds AND enough calories, you'll get all the protein you need.
14. **Calcium:** Good sources of calcium are green leafy vegetables, herbs such as nettle leaf, legumes (beans and lentils), sesame seeds (ground), almonds, seaweed, figs, oranges and amaranth. Contrary to common knowledge, dairy products aren't the only, or even the best source of calcium.

Calcium in dairy isn't as easy to absorb, because it's bound up with the protein in the milk. Goat and sheep milk are a little easier to digest for lactose intolerant people. Yogurt, buttermilk, and kefir have beneficial digestive enzymes. Soft fresh cheeses such as ricotta, cottage cheese, and panir, are much more digestible than hard cheese. But you don't need dairy to get plenty of calcium.
15. **Herbs and spices:** Use liberally. Besides making food tastier and easier to digest, herbs and spices are packed with nutrients, and most have healing properties.

16. **Fat:** You need fat in your diet to help digest your food, lubricate your body, provide essential nutrients, and calories for energy. All of the fat we need can be found in whole foods. ALL extracted oil is basically 120 empty calories per tablespoon, and high in saturated fat.

Excess calories are stored as excess pounds, so be careful how much oil you add to your diet. Stick with non-hydrogenated, organic, unprocessed cold pressed oils or ghee for lacto vegetarians. Ghee is butter cooked down & clarified to pure butterfat, without milk solids, so lactose intolerant people can usually eat it.

17. **How much to eat:** A portion size averages ½ cup, or a slice of bread, or a tortilla. Serving size for nuts is a handful, or 2 – 4 Tbsp. Nutritionists recommend 5 – 12 servings per day of grains, 5 – 10 servings of fruit and vegetables, 4 - 6 servings of protein, including dairy. If you eat more than you need, your body will store excess calories as fat. So, if you're overweight, first eliminate the empty calories (sugar), the junk food, fast food, and processed food, then reduce portion sizes slightly, and exercise a little more. Consult a doctor or nutritionist if you are more than a little overweight, before launching into a diet.

18. **Nutrients that vegetarians and vegans need to watch** – along with all the omnivores - are zinc, Omega 3s, iron, Vitamin D and Vitamin B12.

If your digestion is good, and you eat a varied, high quality, organic, ovo-lacto-vegetarian diet, and get enough calories, you should be able to get most of everything you need from your food.

Doctors and dietitians recommend a B-12 supplement, or B12 enriched dairy substitutes for vegetarians, vegans or anybody over 50. Vitamin B12 is made by bacteria, abundant in animal foods, but not so abundant in other foods, since our soils are so depleted, and we're so hygienic. We only need minute amounts, but we must have it. B12 deficiency can cause irreversible damage to the nervous system.

Vit D: Our bodies synthesize Vit D from ultra-violet rays. Short periods (10 – 30 minutes depending on tolerance) of regular sun exposure is the best

source of Vit D. If you can't get sun exposure regularly, then take a supplement. How much to take is debatable - it should be at least the RDA, but not more than 5000 IU per day. Apparently too much Vit D can be toxic. Get your Vit D levels tested (along with B12 levels) when you have a physical checkup.

There is plenty of iron in plants, but it is not as readily absorbed as heme iron from red meat. Iron from plants is best absorbed in the presence of Vit. C. That is easily done by adding a squirt of lemon or lime juice to your meals, and eating vegetables and fruits that are high in Vit. C. Luckily that's true of a large number of fruit & veg.

Zinc is plentiful in whole grains, legumes and nuts, so eat a nice variety of those whole foods.

Omega 3's should balance Omega 6's in your diet, so include some walnuts, flax seeds (ground), chia seeds, hemp seeds (ground) in your diet. Canola oil is a source of Omega 3's, but difficult to grow organically because of GMO contamination. Omega 3 fatty acids are also found in tiny amounts in green leafy veggies and whole grains. Again, we need only small amounts of essential fatty acids, and you can get them by eating a wide variety of whole foods.

19. **Recommended Daily Allowances, or RDA:** These nutrition tables are geared to the average American who eats poorly, and absorbs a small percentage of the nutrients in food. They are also slanted in favor of a diet based heavily on meat and dairy, and supplementation. To get the RDA of many nutrients, you either have to eat enough for six people, or use supplements, which mostly benefit the vitamin makers and sellers.

20. **Supplements:**

- Nutrition is subtle, complex and synergistic, i.e. everything you eat affects digestion and absorption of everything else you eat.
- You shouldn't need much dietary supplementation, unless you are ill, recovering from illness, run-down, or stressed. (Sadly, that describes many of us).
- Supplement if you need to, but try to find supplements that are as close as possible to whole food, rather than isolated nutrients.

21. **Don't dose yourself with vitamins:** Get testing and advice from a trusted health professional, knowledgeable and experienced in vegetarian nutrition. Allopathic doctors can test you for specific nutritional deficiencies, but most of them have limited nutritional knowledge, and think that vegetarian or vegan diets are dangerous.

Suggestions for Good Digestion:

If your digestion is poor, you won't absorb nutrients well. Here are some general points for good digestion. Much of this comes from Ayurveda, the ancient Vedic health system from India. Emphasis is on *general* – please don't take the following as hard and fast rules. Remember, it's not good for you if you're not enjoying it!

These suggestions apply if you are in good health. If you have a health problem, check with your doctor or health care consultant *before* changing your diet.

- Liquids: Drink plenty of water, especially first thing in the morning. 2 quarts a day is good. If you use distilled or filtered water, add mineral drops. In addition to water, favor herbal teas, and fruit juice. Avoid cold drinks, carbonated drinks, caffeine, and alcohol.
- Avoid or reduce: White sugar, fried food, fast food and processed food.
- Eat plenty of fresh vegetables, including green leafy, fruit, both fresh and dried, and whole grains.
- Eat three meals a day, and eat only when you're hungry. Don't overeat – you should feel that you could eat a bit more at the end of a meal.
- Eat your main meal between 11:00 A.M. and 1:00 P.M. According to Ayurveda, that's when your digestive fire is strongest. Eat breakfast before 9:00 A.M., and supper before 9:00 P.M. Before 6:00 P.M. is even better.
- Let your digestive system rest for twelve hours a day. If you're hungry at bedtime, or during the night, try a cup of water, herbal tea, warm milk, or a piece of fruit.
- If you are hungry at night, you may not be getting enough to eat during the day.

- Don't gulp a lot of liquid with your meals – it puts out the digestive fire. Sip warm water or tea before and after.
- Get enough rest, and avoid eating when you're upset or angry. Stress and fatigue are very hard on digestion.
- Your digestive system needs a regular routine to function well.
- Avoid extreme fasting and cleansing, and prolonged low-calorie or fat free diets. Fasting and cleansing are dehydrating, and disruptive. Good fats are essential to digestion in vegetarian diets.
- Exercise: Daily walks in the fresh air are great for digestion, and so is yoga.

A Few Tips for Getting Started:

1. Analyze your diet:

- Keep a diary of everything you eat and drink for a week or two.
- Use a small notebook that you can carry in a pocket or bag.
- Note the time of day, portion sizes, where and when.
- Count servings per day of whole grains, and non- whole grains, vegetables, fats, and protein (include nuts, seeds, legumes, dairy, eggs, as well as meat, chicken or fish if you're still eating them)
- Just guesstimate; don't try to be exact.
- Try to get a rough idea of your calorie intake, using a calorie counter book, or going online to the USDA site.

2. Decide what improvements can be made quickly and easily, and which can be worked on gradually:

- Are you getting the right amount of calories for your height, weight and activities? Some adjustments may be necessary. Problems usually come from too much, or too little fat and whole grains.
- Look at recommended portion sizes in the nutrition charts and compare that to what you're eating.
- Figure out where you can easily substitute or add to make your diet more nutritious, as well as more vegetarian.

- Be sure there is protein in each meal. Aim to reduce your dependence on dairy and eggs, if those are your main protein sources. For maximum nutrition, you also need legumes, nuts and seeds.
- Make note of foods you want to try out over the coming weeks and months to see if they work for you. Keep in mind that it may take quite a few trials to get comfortable with new foods.

3. Find out where and how to get the best quality food in your area - locally grown, organic, and bulk food:

- Where is the nearest whole foods store or co-op? These should be listed in the phone book, or online.
- Is there an established food-buying club in the area? Check out [Green People](#) for listings. There are a few big wholesale co-ops in the U.S., which sell to whole foods stores and buying clubs. They'll give you contact information for buying clubs in your area, or they can help you start one.
- It's fun to gather a few friends or family, and check out local farmers market. Each has a unique flavor, and often they are major community social events. They may be advertised in local newspapers, or on community bulletin boards, or the local chamber of commerce will know.
- Join a CSA and have fresh local food delivered to you weekly during the growing season. Check [Green People](#) to find CSA's in your area.
- Do your local supermarkets stock organic food, or natural foods? They will if there's enough demand, so let them know that's what you want. Get friends and family involved, gang up on them, vote with your wallet.

4. Is food grown year-round in your area?

If winter is long where you live, and fresh food is scarce or comes from far away, you may need to fall back on frozen, dried or canned to some extent. Here are other ways to raise the quality of your diet in the winter months:

- Sprout seeds and grains
- Grow fresh herbs in pots
- Grow wheat or barley grass for juicing
- Keep a garden and can, freeze or dry your extra produce
- Extend the growing season with a cold frame or simple hoop house

- Drink infusions of nutritious dried herbs¹
- Use dried seaweed²

5. **What is the cost of food in your area?**

Organic food is usually more expensive & harder to get. It might be worth making an occasional day trip to stock up in a nearby city. Research what's available, shop around and compare prices. Online sources are an option, and there are numerous sites, but shop around.

6. **Research:** Is there a good library and/or bookstore nearby for free browsing?

Public libraries lend magazines on an amazing variety of subjects, including alternative health and vegetarian diet. Often they have interlibrary loan. You can order used books economically online through Amazon, half.com, and e-bay. The internet has more information about vegetarianism than you could possibly believe, some real, some not.

Check savvyvegetarian.com resource guide for recommendations.

7. **Can you grow some of your own food?** is there space and sunlight for any

size garden, or a few patio pots? It makes you feel so smug to zip out and grab a few greens and herbs that you've grown yourself.

8. **Do you know other vegetarians?** It's lonely and hard to make progress, if you're the only one. You can meet people, network, learn, and make friends online, in the personal ads of newspapers and magazines, at the whole food store, or farmers market, or through a buying club. Don't be shy – vegetarians are everywhere.

Fulfill Your Desire For The Ultimate Vegetarian Diet:

Take Your Time: We're back to that. Obviously all these dietary changes and activities take time. Remember that you don't need to hurry, or push yourself. Think long term, and transform your diet at a comfortable pace.

If it's not fun, don't do it: If you feel deprived, restricted, frustrated, isolated, or guilty, ease up. Good nutrition doesn't mean you have to eat food you don't

¹ An infusion, distinct from a tea, is made with a larger quantity of herbs and steeped for several hours or overnight in freshly boiled water, for maximum nutritional value. Susun Weed's books offer numerous recipes, good for both women and men. One that my husband and I both like is ¼ cup nettle leaf, with 1 tsp. licorice root, and 1 tsp. fennel seed, in two quarts boiling water.

² There are several different kinds of seaweed. It can be used in soups and soup stocks (Kombu), toasted and sprinkled on grains, (Nori), used as a wrap for Sushi, sprinkled on food as a condiment (dulse flakes).

like. You do need lots of variety, but fortunately there's a lot of choice in a vegetarian diet.

Keep your eye on the big picture: Celebrate each positive step you take. And find your own comfort level for changing your diet. Even if all you do is give up red meat, eat more veggies, and add organic foods to your diet, that's a huge improvement. If 20% of us did only that, it could save the rain forests.

eBooks:

[Holiday Menus & Recipes](#)

[Easy Healthy Quinoa Recipes](#)

[Easy Healthy Tofu Recipes](#)

[How to Get Enough Protein in a Veg or Vegan Diet](#)

Nutrition Books:

I recommend the following books as balanced, complete, detailed nutrition references. They are clear, well written, and packed with necessary nutrition information - well worth owning as references:

[The New Becoming Vegetarian, by Melina, Davis and Harrison](#)

[Becoming Vegan, by Melina and Davis](#)

[Becoming Raw, by Melina and Davis](#)

[Raising Vegetarian Children, by Stepaniak and Melina](#)

[Vegan for Life, by Messina and Norris](#)

Cookbooks:

[Savvy Vegetarian's Favorite Cookbooks](#)

These are teaching cookbooks, by experienced vegetarian and vegan cooks who happen to write well, with a wide variety of excellent well-tested recipes, and plenty of valuable info on ingredients, cooking techniques and veg nutrition.

[Savvy Vegetarian Cookbook Reviews](#)

Cooking your own food is the cheapest, easiest way to eat healthy & tasty! All you need are a few good cookbooks to expand your veggie horizons. We only review the cookbooks we like, and we like these ones a LOT!

Useful SV Links:

[Complete Protein Sample Menus for Vegetarian or Vegan Diet](#)

[Getting Enough Iron In Your Vegetarian or Vegan Diet](#)

[How To Be Happy, Healthy And Vegetarian While Pregnant Or Breastfeeding'](#)

[How To Get The Right Balance of Omega 3 & Omega 6 In Your Diet](#)

[Magnesium is Critically Important to Your Vegetarian Health](#)

['Organic Food: What Is It and Why Should We Eat It?'](#)

[Protein and Calories In A Vegetarian or Vegan Diet](#)

['Seeds of Deception' By Jeffrey M. Smith, 'Exposing Industry and Government Lies About the Safety of Genetically Engineered Foods'](#)

[Vegetarians, Are You Getting Enough Vitamin B12](#)

[Vitamin D: What Is It, Why We Need It, How To Get It](#)

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Happy Vegging!

Judith Kingsbury, Savvy Vegetarian

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