

NUTRITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS WHEN GOING VEGAN



You'll find yourself with a robust immune system, better cholesterol levels and reduced risk for type-2 diabetes by changing to a vegan diet! Plant based diets are associated with anti-cancer properties as well, so eating this way keeps your body healthy from the inside out. To take advantage of all these benefits though, it is important you consume a full range of nutrients in order to avoid health issues like anaemia or osteoporosis.

People are often worried that they won't be able to get all the nutrients they need when switching over to a vegan diet, but many of these concerns are unfounded. Those who want to eat a vegan diet need to educate themselves on basic nutrition. The biggest drawbacks are pretty easy to overcome once you know which nutrients you need and where to find them in order to keep yourself in your best health.

Protein

The biggest common concern is making sure you're getting enough protein. It is important that we have all of the essential amino acids in our diet. They are referred to as essential because a) we need them to build and repair muscle and b) the body cannot make them itself so they must be in the food you eat. Quinoa fits the bill as it has all nine essential amino acids (1). It is also gluten free. Hemp is another plant protein which has these essential amino acids (2).

Soy is a vegan staple and also contains all those important amino acids. As one of the main go-to foods for vegans, soy comes in many forms. These include tofu, miso and tempeh, along with soy milk. Soy has been shown to help reduce health problems linked to female hormones such as hot flashes and even breast cancer (3).

So which vegan foods can give me enough protein? There are many plant foods that have a decent amount of protein in them. The grams of protein per 100g of some of the best sources are:

Soy Beans: 36.5g

Hemp seeds: 31.6g

Pumpkins seeds: 30.2g

Seitan: 24.7g (this is a wheat based protein used to make 'fake' meat style foods for vegans. These include sausages and bacon (4).

Lentils: 24.6g

Quinoa: 14.1g

Other vegan sources include tofu and tempeh, spinach, broccoli, cauliflower, walnuts and cashew nuts. (5)

Iron

A common issue that arises when people 'go vegan' is iron deficiency. To help your body absorb the mineral more efficiently it is important to eat vitamin C rich foods, such as oranges, at the same time as iron rich foods. Better still eat foods that contain both nutrients - namely broccoli and bok choy. Lentils, tofu and spinach are three of the top four sources of iron in a vegan diet. The top source is actually blackstrap molasses which may come as a surprise. (6)

Blackstrap molasses can be used as a supplement as it can be added to lots of recipes. For vegan children that struggle to eat their greens it can be used as a supplement, added to hot water, to make a delicious drink. It is an often

overlooked source of iron in a vegan diet (7). Iron supplements are also an option, but they should only be taken as a last resort. Eating a whole food diet is much healthier.

Fat and Omega 3

In addition to protein and iron intake, it's important that your diet contains enough fat. Nuts and seeds are a great way to get healthy fat (and fat soluble vitamins) into your body, but it's important that you eat them in moderation. Although they are healthy, they do contain lots of calories. Olive and avocado are also full of healthy fats. While we are talking about fat there is a specific kind of fat that the body needs. Known as Omega 3 fatty acids these are important as they are anti-inflammatory. In other words, they reduce inflammation that is responsible for many diseases in the body. They are also incredibly important for the optimal function of the brain, heart and other organs in the body.

Vegan foods that contain omega 3 are flaxseeds, chia seeds, legumes such as kidney and soy beans; edamame and walnuts. (8)

Vitamin B12

Vitamin B12 is another nutrient that some vegans struggle to include in their diet. That is because it is not found in plant foods. Vitamin B12 is necessary for nerve function and to keep our blood healthy (9.) You can take a vitamin B12 supplement. Indeed, some people (even meat eaters) are given a regular dose of B12 every few weeks by their GP. Because B12 deficiency is such a big issue, many foods are fortified. Thankfully these are vegan and include soy milk, cereals, meat substitutes and nutritional yeast (10). Vegan spreads such as Marmite also contain Vitamin B12 (11).

Calcium

As you don't eat or drink dairy products on a vegan diet, not getting enough calcium can be a concern. Necessary for strong bones and teeth, dairy is not the only source of calcium. Foods such as kale and other leafy vegetables, broccoli, almonds, figs, broccoli, tahini and sesame seeds are all rich in calcium (12).

Vitamin D

Vitamin D is also important for strong bones because it helps the body absorb calcium more effectively. The best source of this is sunlight exposure; hence its nickname the sunshine vitamin. However, during winter or if you tend to be indoors for the majority of the time, you can also get this vitamin from fortified foods. Soy, almond and hemp milks are great sources along with vegan yogurts which contain this important nutrient too. (13)

A natural source of Vitamin D is mushrooms, fresh oranges and their juice (14). Alternatively, you can get Vitamin D as a supplement but if you are eating a full range of whole foods on a vegan diet this is not necessary.

In conclusion, getting the correct nutrition on a vegan diet can be a problem, but by using your common sense and doing your research there should be no issues.

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