

Why Choose a Vegetarian/Vegan-Style Eating Pattern?

A vegetarian or vegan eating pattern is one way to eat heart-healthy. Eating a vegetarian or vegan-style food pattern can help decrease your LDL ("bad") cholesterol levels and reduce your blood pressure. In fact, research studies have shown that vegetarians have an overall lower risk for heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, and some types of cancer.

The Basics of Vegetarian Eating Patterns

A heart-healthy vegetarian or vegan eating pattern includes vegetables, fruits, and whole grains, and low-fat (1%) or fat-free dairy products or dairy alternatives. Legumes, lentils, and soy foods provide protein. Choose healthy vegetable oils and other foods high in healthy fats, and limit sugary foods and sugar-sweetened drinks. Some people only eat plant-based foods (vegans). Other people choose to eat eggs and low-fat dairy with their plant-based foods (lacto-ovo vegetarians). Still other people eat fish with their plant-based eating pattern (pescetarians). Choosing which type of vegetarian eating pattern to follow is up to each person.

Tips for Eating More Plant-Based Foods

Eat lots of vegetables. Fill at least $\frac{1}{2}$ your plate with a variety of brightly colored vegetables ... think colors of the rainbow.

Choose plant-based protein. Fill $\frac{1}{4}$ of your plate with soy (tofu, edamame, textured soy protein) or legumes (kidney, pinto, and black beans) and lentils. Choose a soy burger or veggie burger instead of a hamburger or turkey burger. Use beans and lentils in casseroles, pasta dishes, soups, and salads instead of meat.

Accent foods with healthy fats, like extra-virgin olive oil in cooking and with salads, avocado slices on salads or tofu wraps, and 1 oz. a day of many kinds of unsalted nuts or seeds with meals and as snacks.



Choose fiber-rich whole grains.

Fill $\frac{1}{4}$ of your plate with brown and wild rice, barley, bulgur, quinoa, other whole grains, or starchy vegetables, like green peas, sweet potatoes, yams, corn, and winter squash. Choose whole-grain breads and cereals, including oats.

Choose many kinds of fruits,

like fresh and frozen fruits with no added sugar or dried fruit for dessert.

Choose healthy dairy alternatives,

like fortified soy, rice, or almond milk with no added sugar instead of cow's milk. Replace cheese with soy cheese.

Vegetarian/Vegan Meal Ideas

There are many ways to make vegetarian meals. Some ideas are:

- **Breakfast:** Oatmeal, whole-wheat toast with almond butter, and berries; soy milk with no added sugar; coffee or tea with no sugar; and water to drink.
- **Lunch:** Baked tofu in a whole-wheat wrap with arugula, olives, mustard, and cucumber; navy bean soup; fresh apple; and water or other calorie-free beverage to drink.
- **Snacks:** Raw almonds and seeds; fresh, raw cut-up vegetables; fresh fruit; and water to drink.
- **Dinner:** Vegan pumpkin and black bean chili with onions, low-sodium diced tomatoes and spices, whole-grain roll, seasonal fresh fruit, and fortified almond milk with no added sugar or water to drink.

A registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) can help you make a heart-healthy meal plan that works best for your lifestyle and support you in your nutrition journey. Talk with an RDN for the answers to your nutrition questions.