

Vegetarian eating can be a challenge. If you're not informed, you could be missing out on a lot of critical nutrients(Protein, Iron, Vitamin B12). These nutrients are needed to keep our bodies functioning properly. Without them, a lot of health problems can follow. However, vegetarian eating is also very healthy! You are consuming less saturated fats, which lowers your cholesterol and the risk of cardiovascular disease.

### **Tips for vegetarian eating:**

- Eat larger protein portions(because meatless products have less protein).
- Eat citrus foods(ie. Tomatoes, peppers, orange juice; sources of vitamin C) with the protein; it increases the absorption of iron.

### **Some nutrients to be concerned about:**

- **PROTEIN:** this nutrient is a building block of all cells in our body. If you don't get the essential amino acids(the state of protein as we absorb it), your body starts to break down protein in muscle to make up for the loss. This makes you gain fat easier by decreasing your metabolism.
  - **Complementary Proteins:** by combining certain foods together, you can get what's called complementary proteins. This means that by combining a protein source with another food source (that contains any of the amino acid the protein source is missing), you have a 'complete' protein. This way you're not missing out. Here's some examples:
    - Add low-fat/non-fat dairy products(yogurt, milk, cheese)or soy products to each meal
    - Cereal & milk
    - Pasta and cheese
    - Bread and cheese
    - Rice and beans
    - Pita and split pea soup
    - Tortillas and beans
    - Cornbread and chili(with kidney beans)
    - Brown bread with baked beans
    - Chick peas and tahini(hummus)
    - Tofu and sesame seeds

If you have a meal/snack that's not a complete protein, make sure you have the 'rest' of the complete protein(ie. Beans ONLY at lunch, have rice at dinner) at some point during that day.

- **IRON:** Iron is responsible for helping with transportation of oxygen in our body. If our levels get too low, we tend to feel lazy, no energy to do anything, and in the worst case scenario, get nerve damage. Vegetarians have a problem with iron because our bodies don't absorb the iron from meatless foods that well. We absorb iron the best from beef and fish. So, to make sure you get enough iron, here's some tips:
  - women need 18 mg/day, and after menopause: 8 mg/day.

- Eat cereals that say iron-enriched or fortified on the label(over 25% of daily value). Have them with a source of vitamin C(a glass of orange juice).
- Using iron skillet pans increase the iron content of the food.
- Drinking coffee or tea with meals interferes with iron absorption. Drinking them an hour before your meal is better than an hour after.
  
- **Good sources of protein:**
  - Tofu and soy products(they also decrease cholesterol and tumor growth!)
  - Low fat peanut butter
  - Nuts(almonds & walnuts have a lot of health benefits) & seeds that are not salted or roasted
  - Low/non-fat dairy(milk, cottage cheese, yogurt, cheese)
  - Protein powder

This is just an overview of vegetarian eating. It might be a good idea to speak to your doctor to make sure you're not deficient in any vitamins or minerals. They can do some blood tests to determine this. Speaking to a registered dietitian can also cover additional areas.

Some good websites:

[www.vrg.org](http://www.vrg.org)

[www.vegweb.com](http://www.vegweb.com)

[www.vegancooking.com](http://www.vegancooking.com)