

## VEGETARIAN DIETS

### What is a vegetarian diet?

Some people choose to follow a "vegetarian" diet, but there is no single vegetarian eating pattern. The vegan (VE'gn) or total vegetarian diet is only foods of plant origin: fruits, vegetables, legumes (LEG'úmz) (dried beans and peas), grains, seeds and nuts. The lactovegetarian (LAK'to-veg"eh-TAIR'e-en) diet is plant foods plus cheese and other dairy products. The ovo-lactovegetarian (or lacto-ovovegetarian) diet also includes eggs. Semi-vegetarians don't eat red meat but include chicken and fish with plant foods, dairy products and eggs.

### Are vegetarian diets healthful?

According to The American Dietetic Association, "Vegetarian diets that are low in animal products are typically lower than nonvegetarian diets in total fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol..." Vegetarians appear in many studies to have a lower risk of obesity, coronary heart disease (which causes heart attack), high blood pressure, diabetes mellitus (di"ah-BE'teez or di"ah-BE'tis meh-LI'tis), and some forms of cancer.

**It is the position of The American Dietetic Association that vegetarian diets are healthful and nutritionally adequate when appropriately planned.**

### What are the nutrients to consider in a vegetarian diet?

- Protein: You don't need to eat animal products to have enough protein in your diet. Plant proteins alone can provide enough of the essential and non-essential amino acids, as long as sources of dietary protein are varied and caloric intake is high enough to meet energy needs.
- Whole grains, legumes, vegetables, seeds and nuts all contain both essential and non-essential amino acids. **You do not need to consciously combine these foods ("complementary proteins") within a given meal.**
- Soy protein has been shown to be equal to proteins of animal origin. It can be the sole protein source if desired.
- Iron: Vegetarians may have a greater risk of iron deficiency than nonvegetarians. The richest sources of iron are red meat, liver and egg yolk -- all high in cholesterol. Dried beans, spinach, enriched products, brewer's yeast and dried fruits are all good plant sources of iron.

- Vitamin B-12: Comes naturally from animal sources only. Vegans need a reliable source of vitamin B-12, which can be found in some **fortified** (not enriched) breakfast cereals, fortified soy beverages, some brands of nutritional (brewer's) yeast and other foods (check the labels), as well as vitamin supplements.
- Vitamin D: Vegans should have a reliable source of vitamin D. A supplement may be needed for vegans who get little sunlight.
- Calcium: Studies have shown that vegetarians absorb and retain more calcium from foods than do nonvegetarians. Vegetable greens such as spinach, kale and broccoli, and some legumes and soybean products are good sources of calcium from plants.
- Zinc: Zinc is needed for growth and development. Good plant sources include grains, nuts and legumes. Shellfish are an excellent source of zinc. Care should be taken in selecting supplements containing no more than 15-18 mg zinc because supplements containing 50 mg or more may lower HDL ("good") cholesterol in some people.

### **What meal plans are recommended?**

**Vegetarian diets of any type should include a wide variety of foods and enough calories to meet your energy needs.**

- Keep your intake of sweets and fatty foods to a minimum. These foods are low in nutrient density.
- Choose whole or unrefined grain products when possible, or use fortified or enriched cereal products.
- Use a variety of fruits and vegetables, including foods that are good sources of vitamins A and C.
- If you use milk or dairy products, choose fat-free, low-fat or nonfat varieties.
- Because eggs have a high cholesterol content (213 mg per yolk), monitor your use of eggs and limit your cholesterol intake to no more than 300 mg per day.