

NUTRITION FACTS ABOUT a VEGETARIAN LIFESTYLE

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WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU STOP EATING MEAT?

Less Inflammation

It may be hard; but ditching those crispy pieces of bacon is better for you in the long run. Research shows both processed and red meats are high in saturated fat and can lead to ongoing inflammation. This could raise your chances of getting cancer and other diseases. Processed meat includes bacon, deli meat, and hot dogs. Red meat includes beef, pork, and lamb.

Better Gut Health

Research shows eating lots of processed food and refined grains can negatively affect your gut health. But a plant-based diet helps boost healthy gut bacteria. Fiber-rich foods especially trigger growth of good bacteria, which lower inflammation and your risk of inflammatory diseases.

Energy Loss

You may feel tired and weak if you cut meat out of your diet. That's because you're missing an important source of protein and iron, both of which give you energy. The body absorbs more iron from meat than other foods, but it's not your only choice. You can also find it in green, leafy veggies like spinach, as well as iron-rich cereal, bread, and pasta. Look for protein in eggs, beans, peas, lentils, nuts, seeds, and soy products.

More Trips to the Bathroom

Less meat and more fiber from whole grains, raw fruit, and veggies may mean extra time on the toilet. Fiber makes it easier to poop by pulling water into your colon. This makes your stools softer.

Lower Risk of Diabetes

Researchers have linked red and processed meat with a higher chance of type 2 diabetes. One study found that eating a half serving of red meat (one serving is the size of a deck of cards) a day boosts your odds of getting the disease by 48%.

Lower Cholesterol

Limiting foods with saturated fat, including meat, can lower “bad” or LDL cholesterol in your blood. Experts say saturated fats should make up less than 10% of your calories every day. If you still crave meat, try leaner, skinless cuts.

You Save Money

High-protein foods like beans, peas, lentils, and eggs are a cheaper alternative to meat. And buying in-season fruits and veggies can save you even more money. Data shows one person on a 2,000-calorie diet can eat enough fruit and veggies for less than \$3 a day.

You Help the Environment

Replacing meat with plant-based foods lowers carbon and other greenhouse emissions. It takes more land to raise livestock than it does to grow food. Growing food also uses less water.

You May Need Supplements

When you follow a meatless or limited plant-based diet, you might miss out on important vitamins and minerals. Supplements can boost your levels of vitamin B12 (only found in animal-based foods), iron, calcium, and vitamins A, B, and D. Talk to your doctor about which supplements are best for you.

You May Lose Weight

Researchers reviewed 15 studies on how a vegetarian diet affects your weight. People who switched to a plant-based diet lost about 10 pounds, and those who were heavier lost more weight.

FOODS WITH MORE PROTEIN THAN AN EGG

Chickpeas

With about 6 grams of protein apiece, eggs are an excellent source of this vital nutrient. But lots of other foods offer as much or more. For example, chickpeas (also known as garbanzo beans) provide nearly 8 grams of protein per 1/2 cup. People have enjoyed them since the days of ancient Egypt. They're best known these days as the base for hummus. Toss a handful on a salad; or cook them into a hearty soup.

Lentils

A half-cup of these legumes gives you 8 grams of protein, about as much as you'd get from 1 ounce of lean steak. They come in lots of colors -- brown, green, black, yellow, red, and orange. They cook up faster than beans. And you don't even need to soak them first. Try the brown ones in veggie burgers, the green ones in salads, and the red ones in a spicy curry.

Pumpkin Seeds

Don't toss these after you carve the jack-o'-lantern. (An easier route is to buy the already roasted type at the store.) An ounce of shelled ones has 8 1/2 grams of protein. They're also a good source of zinc, iron, copper, magnesium, potassium, and selenium. Eat a handful with an apple for a filling snack. Or stir them into oatmeal, granola, or homemade bread dough.

Cottage Cheese

This nutritious source of protein, with nearly 12 grams in a half-cup, plays well with others. That's because it doesn't have a strong flavor on its own. Make a healthy snack by pairing cottage cheese with most any kind of fruit. Or use it as a protein-boosting secret ingredient in pancakes. Go with low-fat cottage cheese to keep it healthy.

Almond Butter

This creamy spread isn't as well-known as its peanutty cousin. But with 7 grams of protein in 2 tablespoons, it should be. With plenty of heart-healthy fats, it's a great way to fuel up before a workout. You can even make it at home -- all you need is almonds and a blender. Spice it up with cinnamon, nutmeg, vanilla extract, or curry powder if that's how you roll.

Health Benefits of Almonds

- One ounce of almonds packs around 165 calories, 6 grams protein, 6 grams of carbohydrates, and 3.5 grams fiber. Plus, its 14 grams of fat is 80% monounsaturated fat -- a healthy fat that helps lower your risk of heart disease while filling you up. Almonds come packed with plant sterols, which are compounds that prevent your body from absorbing cholesterol. Of all the nuts, almonds have the most calcium, at about 75 milligrams per ounce. Calcium is key for bone building, blood clotting, healthy muscles, and a strong heart.
- Noshing on almonds helps you feel fuller, which can curb your cravings. Even with their high calorie count, almonds don't pack on pounds. In fact, some studies show almonds can help boost your metabolism and bring on weight loss.
- The unsaturated fat in almonds boosts your serotonin levels during the day. Serotonin is a chemical in your brain that helps control your sleep/wake cycles. Higher levels during the day mean better sleep at night.
- Almonds come stocked with vitamin E, an antioxidant that helps build up your cells to better withstand damage. Studies show getting more vitamin E can help prevent heart disease, Alzheimer's, and cancer.
- Almonds can help feed healthy gut bacteria like bifidobacteria and lactobacillus. These bacteria help you digest fiber, prevent infections, and put out important healthy chemicals.

Quinoa

This whole grain (actually an edible seed) packs about 7 1/2 grams of protein per cup. It's a good source of fiber, too. Naturally gluten-free, quinoa is as easy to prepare as rice. Because it tastes rather bland on its own, add it to salads or grain bowls. You can also eat it as a hot cereal, or even pop it like popcorn.

Hemp Seeds

They won't get you high -- they're from a different type of cannabis plant than marijuana. But these nutty-tasting seeds (sometimes called hemp hearts) do pack a powerful jolt of protein. Three tablespoons give you 9 1/2 grams, along with lots of heart-healthy fats. They're tasty blended into smoothies. Try some hemp milk on your morning cereal.

HEALTH BENEFITS OF SPINACH

Boosts Hydration

You might think sipping water and other drinks are the only way to hydrate. But food can help you reach that goal, too. Spinach is a vegetable that's nearly all water. Add it to your meals and snacks throughout the day for extra H₂O.

Curbs Appetite

Studies suggest thylakoid extracts from plants like spinach may reduce your appetite. This happens because they lower levels of a hunger hormone and raise hormones that make you feel full. Thylakoids can also make your stomach empty later.

Helps Prevent Osteoporosis

Spinach has calcium, manganese, and vitamin K, which are important for healthy bones. Your body is always getting rid of and rebuilding bone tissue. Osteoporosis -- a condition that makes your bones weak and break easily -- happens when the amount of new bone isn't replacing enough of the bone that's broken down. If you don't get enough calcium throughout your life, your chances of getting osteoporosis are higher.

Cuts Risk of Iron Deficiency Anemia

Spinach is a vegetarian source of iron, a mineral you need to help red blood cells bring oxygen to different areas of your body. When you have too little iron, you get iron deficiency anemia. This condition might make you feel weak, dizzy, and have trouble breathing.

Strengthens the Immune System

Spinach has vitamins and minerals like vitamin E and magnesium that support your immune system. This system keeps you safe from viruses and bacteria that cause disease. It also defends your body from other things that can hurt you, like toxins.

Assists Baby Development

There is a lot of folate in spinach. This vitamin prevents neural tube birth defects like spina bifida in babies. That's why your doctor might tell you to take a supplement with folic acid (the man-made version of folate) if you're

pregnant. You also get vitamin B6 from spinach, which is important for your baby's brain to develop in your womb and after birth.

Keeps Eyes Healthy

Lutein and zeaxanthin are carotenoids in spinach that lower your chances of having long-term eye conditions. For example, like vitamin C, they lower your odds of getting cataracts. You also get tons of vitamin A from spinach, which supports good vision.

Supports Cardiovascular Health

Spinach is a source of inorganic nitrate, which studies suggest may lower your chance of getting heart disease. Research shows it can lower your blood pressure and make your arteries less stiff, among other benefits. You also get potassium from spinach, which helps keep your heart working right.

Anti-inflammatory

Inflammation is part of how your body mends itself after you get hurt or come into contact with a dangerous substance. But long-term inflammation can be unhealthy. Eating foods like spinach that have anti-inflammation perks is a way you can reduce the inflammation in your body.

Wound Recovery

The vitamin C in spinach has many benefits, including helping your body make collagen, which it needs to repair injuries. Vitamin C also helps your body increase the amount of iron it absorbs from plant-based foods, which supports the healing process, too.

Offers Variety

You can eat this versatile vegetable many ways and gain its health advantages. Enjoy spinach raw in a salad or blended into a smoothie for its folate content. You can also sauté spinach or steam it without worrying about losing too many of its nutrients. Frozen spinach is another option for soups, stews, and egg dishes. Just defrost and squeeze out the extra water.

TIPS for TASTY MEALS

Spices

A vegetarian diet doesn't have to equal bland. Amp up your flavors with fresh and dried spices and herbs. Versatile players include:

Garlic. This pungent mainstay perks up soups, marinades, salad dressing, and stews.

Basil. Toss the fragrant leaves onto tomato-based sauces, stir-fry dishes, salads, and pizzas.

Cayenne pepper. Add a dash to Mexican dishes and any food that needs a little heat.

Curry powder. This sweet and savory flavor works well in soups, stews, sauces, and even eggs.

Buy green beans, mangos, and other veggies and fruits frozen. They're packed at the peak of nutrition and often have more vitamins and minerals than the fresh versions.

Say Yes to Yeast

Many vegetarians are familiar with the benefits of nutritional yeast. These nutty yellow flakes are deactivated yeast grown in molasses. They add an earthy, cheesy taste to pasta, popcorn, and vegetables. But what you might not know is that nutritional yeast is loaded with protein. Just 2 tablespoons pack 9 grams. That's more protein than you get in 1 ounce of beef or chicken.

Tamp Down Gas

Beans are the centerpiece of many vegetarian recipes. They're also known triggers for gas. Soak dried beans overnight before cooking to help banish gas. The water leaches away the sugars that cause it. Or go with canned beans. Other foods with gas-producing carbohydrates to watch for include whole grains and veggies like cabbage, onions, broccoli, and cauliflower.