



What is a vegan diet?

Vegans do not eat any animal products – meat, fish, eggs, dairy, honey – and only eat plant based foods.

Why go on a vegan diet?

There could be many reasons. Some people feel it is immoral to eat any animal products at all. Others believe that a vegan diet is the healthiest diet for them. Some very ill people may do best on a vegan diet.

How healthy is it?

That depends on what the vegan eats. It is possible to be a vegan and be very unhealthy, just as it is to be a vegan and be in very good health. There are some big pitfalls, which, if not managed well, can lead to disease or problems. These include the lack of vitamin B12 in a vegan diet, which if not supplemented, can lead to anaemia and peripheral neuropathy which is irreversible.

Another problem is insufficient protein. Vegans have to take care to combine plant sources of protein to ensure complete proteins are synthesised. They also have to watch their intake of calcium, iodine, iron and essential fatty acids to ensure adequate levels. Some sun exposure is also needed to make enough vitamin D. Vegans who've done their homework and monitor their health can thrive on this diet.



Can't you get vitamin B12 from mushrooms?

A popular misconception. Any B12 found on mushrooms is probably contamination. There is none in them.

What's good about a vegan diet?

If it's a good vegan diet, then it is high in fibre, antioxidants and micronutrients, as well as having adequate macronutrients (protein, carbs, fats). Most vegans are not overweight, and a well balanced vegan diet is good for heart health, avoiding diabetes and serious illnesses.

How about eating out?

Probably the hardest thing is to overcome ignorance. There are still restaurants that believe that a vegetarian meal is the same meal as for a meat eater, minus the protein. Some of them have never heard of vegans either, but there are some vegan-friendly restaurants. Call ahead and check out the menus, explain clearly to the waiter and see what happens. You could even make up a brief sheet explaining what you can't eat and give it to the chef.



Supplements are pretty safe for vegans then?

Not necessarily. Some supplements, for example digestive enzymes, may be of porcine origin. Some fillers and binders may also not qualify for vegans. The patient and the practitioner have to read labels carefully and continually be reminded of this.

Are vegan diets good for kids?

Not necessarily. Some studies show that a strict vegan diet may not be good for children or pregnant women, and there is disagreement on the subject.

Where do I get more info?

These books are available from booksellers. Also search in your local library.

Nava Atlas: *Vegan Express*. Broadway Books, 2008

Eva Batt: *Vegan Cooking. Recipes for beginners*. Thorsons, 2002

Websites:

<http://www.vegansociety.com/>

<http://www.vegan.org/>

<http://www.veganaustralia.net/>





What to eat:

Protein sources: Whole grains (eg. whole wheat flour, bread and pasta, brown rice, oats, rye), nuts (eg. hazels, cashews, brazils, almonds), seeds (sunflower, sesame, pumpkin), legumes/pulses (peas, beans, lentils), soy products (flour, soy milk, tofu, tempeh).

Carbohydrate sources: Whole grains (e.g. wheat, oats, barley, rice), whole-wheat bread, pasta and other flour products, lentils, beans, potatoes, dried and fresh fruit.

Good fats sources: Nuts and seeds, avocados, cold-pressed nut and seed oils including flaxseed, walnut and olive.

General advice:

Learn to combine proteins well – nuts with seeds, legumes with grains or seeds – in order to make complete proteins for best nutrition. Eat some complete protein at every meal.

Check that your vitamin supplements contain adequate levels of calcium, magnesium, zinc, iodine, iron and B vitamins.

Use plenty of herbs and spices in cooking for variety and trace nutrients.

Watch that you don't use refined sugars; prefer stevia or maple syrup.

Read labels carefully and educate yourself about nutrition and veganism.



Meal suggestions

Breakfasts

Soy yoghurt, fruit and LSA

Millet or oat porridge with stewed fruit and LSA

Oats soaked in water overnight, with soy yoghurt, banana, maple syrup and dried fruit

Tofu cooked with onions, herbs and tomatoes

Muesli or wholewheat biscuits with soymilk and dried or fresh fruit

Brown rice with stewed fruit and spices

Lunches

Salad sandwich or wrap in flatbread

Salad with falafel, hommous and avocado

Tofu burger with salad

Home made veg soup with miso

Rice cakes with hommous or avocado spread

Lentil stew or dahl



Dinners

Stirfried veg with tempeh and brown rice

Pasta with tofu and tomato sauce

Vegetable lasagne or canelloni

Mushroom and bean pie with salad

Soup with barley or rice

Spinach, chilli and tofu pies

Drinks

Herb teas, green or black tea, soymilk (fortified with calcium), water, fruit juices and whips, vegetable juices, vegan-friendly protein powder drinks

