

Planning to reduce your meat consumption? Here's what you need to know

by **Lori Clayton Pereyra, MFCS, RD, CDN**

Moving toward a more plant-based diet is not difficult! The key is to remember that animal products are an entire food group, and when an entire food group is eliminated, you need to find other foods to replace the missing nutrients. Animal products are good sources of many necessary nutrients such as protein, fat, iron, zinc, calcium, and vitamins D and B-12. So when you eat less meat you need to eat more whole grains, beans, nuts, and soy foods like tofu or tempeh.

The entire family can benefit from eating less meat, especially when the meat is replaced with whole grains, legumes, vegetables, and fruits. Eating more plant foods can help prevent heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, and possibly some cancers. Teens can help the family eat less meat by finding meatless recipes and helping cook the meals.

What should I eat?

Beans! Try kidney beans, black beans, pinto beans and chick peas. Beans are great sources of protein, iron, zinc, plus lots of healthy fiber. Try them in soups, casseroles, salads, and pasta dishes.

Soy foods! Soy beans can be prepared in lots of different ways – tofu, tempeh, soy “hot dogs,” soy “burgers,” and soy “lunch meat.” Soy can be baked, grilled, or stir-fried. It soaks up the flavors of the foods it is cooked with.

Low-fat dairy foods! Milk, yogurt and cheese are great sources of calcium and other nutrients growing teens need for bone development and health. Try low-fat milk in cereal, low-fat yogurt in smoothies, and cheese in veggie pizza, veggie lasagna, and cheese quesadillas.

How can I be sure I'm still getting all the nutrition my body needs?

If you eat a variety of foods in healthy quantities and you still eat eggs and dairy foods such as milk, yogurt and cheese, you can be sure you are getting all the nutrients you need. If your diet does not include eggs and dairy, good planning can assure that you get all of nutrients your body needs from plant foods. Eat a variety of foods daily from each food group. The vegetarian food guide pyramid on the other side of this page shows how much of each food group you need. If you think your diet is lacking in some nutrients, talk to your doctor to

see if you need to take a vitamin or mineral supplement.

Did you know?

- Vegetarians easily get enough protein in their diet by eating beans, nuts, soy, whole grains, and vegetables.
- Most vegetarians follow a lacto-ovo vegetarian diet (they consume eggs and milk, but no meat).
- Vitamin B-12 is an important nutrient found only in animal products. Vegans, who consume no meat or dairy products, need to supplement their diet with vitamin B-12 or eat foods fortified with vitamin B-12.
- Consuming foods high in vitamin C with a meal will increase the body's absorption of the iron in the meal.
- The rates of anemia (low blood iron) are no higher among vegetarians than among nonvegetarians.

Where can I get more information?

Magazines

Vegetarian Times
Eating Well

Books

The Moosewood Restaurant cookbooks (various titles and authors)
The Whole Soy Cookbook (Patricia Greenburg, Helen Newton Hartung)
The Vegetarian Way (Mark Messina, Virginia Messina)
The Complete Idiot's Guide to Being Vegetarian (Suzanne Havala)
Becoming Vegetarian: The Complete Guide to Adopting a Healthy Vegetarian Diet (Vesanto Melina, Brenda Davis, Victoria Harrison)

Web sites

Vegetarian Resource Group: www.vrg.org
American Dietetic Association: www.eatright.org
International Vegetarian Union: www.ivu.org

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