

A Guide for making healthier choices

SECONDARY STRATEGY # 6 – VEGETARIANISM - THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN "MEATS" THE EYE

All joking aside (there's more to it than "meats" the eye...get it?), there is no one single answer to the question "What does it mean to be a vegetarian?"

There can be varying degrees, or "types," of vegetarianism.

- Vegans who consume absolutely no animal products in the foods they eat. They are often described as being "strict" vegetarians.
- Lacto-ovo Vegetarians eat only animal products made without harming or slaughtering an animal. For example, these individuals would consume milk and milk products and eggs. This is where the name "lacto-ovo" comes from – "lacto" meaning milk and "ovo" meaning egg.

Other people who have adopted a vegetarian style of eating may be similar in some ways to these two examples.

Why do people choose vegetarianism?

- **Ethics** – Some vegetarians feel that it's not OK to raise and slaughter animals for food or use them for other products. Some vegetarians extend this idea into other areas of their lives as well. They make sure their clothing, makeup, personal hygiene products (things like shampoo, hand cream, deodorant and so on), and other personal items were not made from animals, or tested on animals. All of the products they consume – food included – are cruelty-free.
- **Environmental reasons** – Do you know how many acres of rainforest are destroyed so that cattle can be raised and then slaughtered – often to make hamburger? One estimate says that it takes approximately 4.9 square metres (about 55 square feet) of rainforest to produce one pound of hamburger! The production of meat involves large amounts of land, water in addition to packaging and transportation costs.
- **Health** – Some people believe that animal-based foods are unhealthy or unsafe. There may be concerns about allergies or toxins, or drugs given to animals as they are raised for meat (such as growth hormones or antibiotics).
- **Cultural, spiritual or religious reasons.**

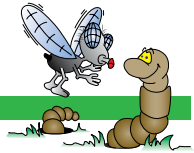
Each person has his or her own reasons for wanting to follow a vegetarian way of eating. The idea here is not to try and analyze why you should or shouldn't be a vegetarian. Instead, the focus will be to look at vegetarianism from the point of view of health and healthy eating.

Is Vegetarianism Healthy?

The answer to this question is - Yes, being a vegetarian can be healthy, but being a healthy vegetarian requires planning, thought and knowledge about nutrition and the nutrients provided by different kinds of foods. Although some of the reasons why people become vegetarian might make sense to you, keep in mind that to be a healthy vegetarian means that you have to learn to feed your body all of the nutrients it needs for good health without consuming any animal products.

You can't just decide to stop eating meat or drinking milk, without figuring out how to replace the nutrients your body gets from these food groups by eating other foods. Instead of eating healthy vegetarian alternatives that contain the same types of nutrients as meat and milk, many people just eliminate meat and milk from their daily eating. To be a healthy vegetarian and have a healthy, balanced way of eating, you have to educate yourself about vegetable or "non-animal" sources of the nutrients that your body would normally get from meats and milk products.

A Guide for making healthier choices



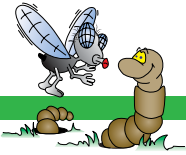
You know that different groups of foods – including the meat and milk groups - provide certain nutrients that are essential for your body to be healthy. A healthy balance of foods from the basic food groups can provide your body with protein, fat, carbohydrates, and all of the different vitamins and minerals it needs.

Foods in the "meat" group (things like beef, pork, chicken and so on) provide nutrients like protein and iron and vitamins like vitamin B12. And you know that foods from the "milk" group (things like milk, yogurt and cheese) provide nutrients like calcium, protein and other vitamins and minerals. These foods are the most common sources of these nutrients in most people's daily eating. These nutrients are also some of the most important ones to a young body that is still growing and developing. If you decide to stop drinking milk or eating meat because you want to be a vegetarian, then you will have to get these nutrients from other foods.

It is quite possible, with the right planning, thought, and effort, to provide your body with enough calcium, iron, Vitamin B12 and all of the other nutrients it needs by eating only vegetable, or "non-animal" foods. Besides the nutrients listed above, protein is another nutrient that is obtained from meat and milk products. It is relatively easy to obtain enough protein without eating meat or milk products, but again, it takes some knowledge and planning. In order to make sure you give your body enough protein, you will need to learn more about "complementing" proteins. In other words, you will need to learn how to combine different types of vegetable protein foods together to make sure that you get the same type of protein found in meat and milk products. Please see LunchBox # 1 at the end of this strategy for more information.

The idea here isn't to discourage vegetarianism, but rather to discourage unhealthy and unbalanced eating. If you are serious about adopting a vegetarian style of eating, take the time to educate yourself and do it right. Talk it over with your doctor and your parents. Get some good books about vegetarian eating from your library or local bookstore. Take responsibility and learn more about healthy and nutritious alternatives to meats, milk and other animal-based foods. Do your research. By just not eating meat or by just not drinking milk, you are not vegetarian and you are definitely not helping your body to be as healthy as it can be.

Choose health. If you choose vegetarianism, be a healthy, and well-informed vegetarian.



A Guide for making healthier choices

Lunchbox # 1 - More about Complementing Proteins – There are many foods that are derived from vegetable or non-animal sources that contain protein. In order to make sure your body gets enough protein and the right balance of protein, you will need to learn how to combine various vegetable sources of protein.

Why do you have to combine proteins?

Proteins are molecules made up of building blocks called amino acids. There are many different amino acids. Some amino acids are essential meaning that we must get them from the food we eat. (The body can then use these essential amino acids to manufacture or make the non-essential amino acids it needs). In order to help it be healthy, your body needs a balance of the various amino acids. Foods like meat, eggs and milk are often described as high-quality proteins because they contain a good balance of the various amino acids needed by the body. The amino acids from these foods are also more readily absorbed by the body. Vegetable sources of protein such as beans, dried peas, lentils, tofu, seeds, nuts, wheat, whole-grain rice, oats and so on are generally not of the same "quality" as meat, milk or eggs. This is mainly because vegetable proteins do not have as good a balance of the essential amino acids; they are also not absorbed as easily. However, you can "make" a high-quality vegetable protein by combining various foods together so that the amino acids from one complement the amino acids from another. In this way, the combination of different vegetable sources of protein makes a higher-quality, more well-balanced protein source. Generally, the easiest way to combine vegetable proteins is to combine a legume with a whole grain. Legumes are things like split peas, navy peas, kidney beans, romano beans, garbanzo beans (a.k.a. chick peas), and lentils. Whole-grains include things like whole wheat, brown rice, whole oats, buckwheat, barley or whole rye (to name a few). An example might be vegetarian chili made with red and white kidney beans and served with whole grain brown rice. Or, maybe a stir-fry made with tofu, vegetables and served with whole-wheat pasta. You can drink ricemilk, soymilk (made from soybeans) or eat tofu (also made from soybeans) that has added calcium in order to replace the calcium lost by not drinking regular milk. But remember, you would need to eat these kinds of vegetable sources everyday, not just once in a while.

Otherwise, strive to eat a balance of foods from all of the basic food groups. However, feel free to experiment with some "meatless" meals or recipes that combine vegetables like kidney beans, lentils or dried peas, nuts or seeds with whole grains. Including some "meatless" meals in your daily eating on a frequent basis can be a nice change and it can also help you satisfy your feelings about "going vegetarian." You just have to be willing to try some new things.