

South Warwickshire



NHS Foundation Trust

Warwickshire Dietetic Service

Healthy Eating

**Getting the Balance Right
as a Vegan**

This leaflet is designed for those who wish to follow a vegan diet. It can be given out by all health care professionals to interested people.

Getting the Balance Right as a Vegan

What should I eat?

A vegan diet can be very healthy if meals are properly planned. This leaflet explains how to have a balanced diet as a vegan. It gives examples of foods to include in your diet to help you achieve this.

It is important to include a variety of foods from all the food groups in order to meet your nutritional requirements.

Protein sources

The body needs protein and iron for growth and repair. Good vegan choices are:

- Lentils, peas, beans, pulses (e.g. baked beans, chickpeas, black-eye beans).
- Soya, Tofu (and foods made from these, e.g. soya desserts).
- Seeds (e.g. sunflower, pumpkin, sesame).
- Nuts (e.g. brazils, hazels, almonds, cashews).

Iron

This is essential for healthy red blood cells, skin and bones – eat iron-rich foods twice a day to be sure of getting enough. Try:

- ◆ Fortified breakfast cereals.
- ◆ Fortified bread.
- ◆ Beans, peas, lentils, soya (e.g. chickpeas, kidney beans, mung beans, soya beans).
- ◆ Dried fruit, leafy green vegetables.
- ◆ Seeds (e.g. Sesame seeds, sunflower seeds).
- ◆ Nuts (e.g. cashews, pine nuts, almonds, hazelnuts).

To improve the absorption of iron from foods other than meat, you need to have a food or drink rich in Vitamin C at the same meal, for example, green pepper, green vegetables, new potatoes, tomatoes, blackcurrants, kiwi fruit, citrus fruits or fruit juice such as oranges or grapefruit.

Iron absorption is reduced by eating raw bran and drinking tea as they contain tannin, therefore it is better to avoid tea with your meals.

Calcium sources

This mineral is needed for healthy growth and repair of bones and teeth, the nervous system and overall health. Sources include:

- ◆ Fortified soya milk or rice milk. (N.B. Rice milk should not be given to children under 5 years of age).
- ◆ Fortified soya desserts and yoghurt.
- ◆ Fortified vegan cheese (can be bought in health food shops and some supermarkets).
- ◆ White bread, fortified breakfast cereals.
- ◆ Broccoli, parsley, beans (e.g. chickpeas, black-eye beans, kidney beans, soya beans) tofu, curly kale. (N.B. Spinach and tahini are high in calcium but the calcium is not easily absorbed from these).
- ◆ Figs and oranges.

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Carbohydrate sources

These are needed for energy and should ideally be eaten at each meal. It is good to fill up on the high fibre versions, as they are bulky yet low in fat and also provide B vitamins and minerals. Try:

- Bread, rolls, flat breads, fortified wholegrain cereals.
- Potatoes, plantain, yam, sweet potato.
- Couscous, noodles, pasta.
- Rice, barley, oats, maize, cracked wheat, bulgar wheat, quinoa, polenta.

Foods containing sugar

Sugar and sugary foods should be used sparingly – they are high in energy but are not nutritious, e.g. biscuits, cakes. Brown sugar and honey are both pure sugar and contain only the smallest trace of nutrients and should therefore also be kept to a minimum in the diet.

Foods containing fat

Fat is needed in small amounts in the diet to provide the fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E and K and some energy. Omega-3 fatty acids should be included, as they protect the body against heart disease. Try:

- ◆ Nuts and seeds.
- ◆ Sunflower oil, olive oil, rapeseed oil.
- ◆ Vegan margarine (e.g. Pure, Vitaquell Extra).
- ◆ Omega-3 fatty acids – rapeseed oil, nuts (especially walnuts, almonds) seeds (especially flax and linseeds).

N.B. All fats and oils are high in calories – too much of any kind of fat can lead to an increase in weight.

Fruit and vegetables

These are a rich source of vitamins, minerals and fibre. Try:

- ◆ Spinach, cabbage, kale, broccoli, sprouts.
- ◆ Carrots, peppers, tomatoes, onions.
- ◆ Citrus fruits, e.g. oranges, grapefruit, lemons.
- ◆ Apples, pears, plums.
- ◆ Exotic fruit, e.g. mangoes, bananas, kiwi fruit.
- ◆ Strawberries, raspberries, blueberries.
- ◆ Salad.
- ◆ Tinned fruit in natural juice.
- ◆ Fruit juice.
- ◆ Frozen fruits.
- ◆ Frozen vegetables.
- ◆ Dried fruit.

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Tips

- ◆ Using a steamer or microwave are good ways to cook vegetables, as they preserve the vitamin content.
- ◆ Do not soak vegetables, as the vitamins are lost.
- ◆ Do not add salt to cooking water.
- ◆ Fresh fruit and vegetables lose vitamins when stored, so buy new supplies regularly or use frozen vegetables if necessary.

Fibre

Foods in a vegan diet, such as fruits, pulses, wholemeal products and vegetables are usually high in fibre and therefore bulkier than other foods. If you are changing your diet, these foods should be introduced into the diet gradually, to allow the body time to adjust to an increased fibre intake.

Tips

- ◆ When preparing vegan meals try basing them around different grains, such as bulgar wheat or couscous.
- ◆ Add barley, potatoes or oats to dishes to act as thickening agents.
- ◆ Experiment with different beans and lentils – they have different flavours.
- ◆ Make moussaka or lasagne with mushrooms and lentils.
- ◆ Try puréed tofu instead of cream – it is low in fat.

Vitamin B12

Strict vegan diets often lack this vitamin, as it is not found in plant foods. The following foods are good sources and should be included in your diet:

- ◆ Fortified breakfast cereals.
- ◆ Fortified soya milk.
- ◆ Yeast extract, e.g. Marmite or Vegemite.

Foods fortified with B12 should be included 2-3 times every day in order to meet the recommended amount.

Healthy vegan snacks

- ◆ Hummus with bread sticks or raw vegetable sticks.
- ◆ Fresh fruit or vegetables.
- ◆ Mixed nuts or seeds.
- ◆ Crackers, rice cakes or crispbreads.
- ◆ Dried fruit, e.g. raisins, apricots, figs.
- ◆ Plain peanuts, cashews.
- ◆ Plain popcorn or plain biscuits.
- ◆ Breakfast cereals (low sugar varieties), e.g. Weetabix, cornflakes.

Summary

- ◆ Eat three meals a day, based around starchy foods.
- ◆ Eat a wide variety of foods.
- ◆ Eat at least two portions of different protein foods a day.
- ◆ Eat at least five portions of fruit, vegetables or salad a day.
- ◆ Drink plenty of fluids, especially water.
- ◆ Try not to eat too many fatty or sugary foods.

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If you are pregnant

There are no special recommendations if you are following a vegan diet and you are pregnant. It is however important to have plenty of vitamins and minerals such as iron, calcium and folate during pregnancy. If you would like any further information please ask your dietitian or healthcare professional.

Sample Daily Menu Ideas

Breakfast	Fortified breakfast cereal with fortified soya or rice milk Glass of fruit juice Fortified bread toasted, with vegan margarine and yeast extract Soya yoghurt, fresh or dried fruit
Snacks	Hummus with bread sticks or vegetable sticks Mixed nuts or seeds Plain popcorn or biscuits
Light meal	Red pepper soup with fortified bread Salad Fortified bread sandwich made with cashew nut spread Jacket potato with baked beans
Main meal	Lentil Bolognese with pasta Vegan Shepherd's pie made using Soya mince and lentils Sweet potato and bean stew with couscous
Puddings	Soya yoghurt or dessert Tinned fruit in natural juice or fresh fruit

Further useful information is available from:

The Vegan Society
Donald Watson House
21, Hylton Street,
Hockley
Birmingham B18 6HJ
Tel: 0121 523 1730
www.vegansociety.com

PALS

We offer a Patient Advice Liaison Service (PALS). This is a confidential service for patients and their families to help with any questions or concerns about local health services.

You can contact the service by direct telephone line on 01926 600054 or using the phone links which are available in both hospitals or calling in at the office located in the main entrance at Warwick Hospital.

Our information for patients can also be made available in other languages, Braille, audio tape, disc or in large print – please contact our PALS office.

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If you have any queries about your diet, please contact us on 01926 600818, selecting option 3

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Contact No.	01926 600818
Published	November 2015
Review	November 2018
Version No.	1.1
SWH	00784/N.07



Approved by
SWFT Patient
Information
Group