



Are you thinking about becoming a Vegetarian? - November 2010

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Definition of a Vegetarian - A vegetarian is someone who eats no meat or fish or (often) any animal products and lives on a diet consisting of grains, pulses, nuts, seeds, vegetables and fruits.

What is a Vegetarian?

Vegetarians live on a diet of grains, pulses, nuts, seeds, vegetables and fruit, with or without free-range eggs, milk and milk products.

They do not eat meat - beef, chicken, pork or fish, or any slaughterhouse by-product such as gelatine, and Vegans are vegetarians that do not eat anything containing any dairy products or eggs.

There are different Types of vegetarian diets.

When people think about a vegetarian diet, they typically think about a diet that doesn't include meat, poultry or fish. But vegetarian diets can be further categorized:

- **Vegan diets** avoid eating any animal products. Vegans do not eat any meat products, milk, cheese, eggs, honey, or gelatin. Many vegans choose not to wear clothes containing animal products, such as leather, wool, or silk, or wear makeup tested on animals.
- **Lacto-vegetarian** diets exclude meat, fish, poultry and eggs, as well as foods that contain them. But dairy products, such as milk, cheese, yogurt and butter, are allowed in a lacto-vegetarian diet.
- **Lacto-ovo** vegetarian diets exclude meat, fish and poultry, but allow eggs and dairy products.

- **Flexitarian diet** - semi-vegetarian diet, which is primarily a plant-based diet but includes meat, dairy, eggs, poultry and fish on occasion or in small quantities.

Why become a Vegetarian

There are as many reasons for becoming a vegetarian; it is often a highly personal and individual decision to make.

Often people give up meat and fish because they did not morally approve of killing animals, or because they object to the ways in which animals are kept, treated and killed for food.

Many people give up meat on the grounds of health, maybe for a low fat and high fibre diet.

It maybe concerns to do with the environment, as people become more aware of the effects raising animals for their meat is having on the environment.

Or you may be concerned about wasting world food resources by using land to raise animals for meat instead of growing crops that can feed more people directly.

Why give up Meat and become a Vegetarian

Meat is high in Protein and many vitamins/mineral. Protein is broken down into smaller units called (amino acids) and the protein in meat is more available to the body than the protein in plants. Protein provides the building blocks for the body, which is vital to make hormones, enzymes, antibodies, neuro-transmitters and also help to transport substances around the body. Some 25 different amino acids are pieced together in varying combinations to make different kinds of proteins, which then form the material for our cells and organs. From the eight basic amino acids most of the remaining seventeen can be made. These eight are called essential amino acids and the body is unable to make them and therefore is unable to function without them:

- **Lysine** - sources include green beans, lentils, soybean, spinach and amaranth.
- **Leucine** - found in cottage cheese, sesame seeds, peanuts, dry lentils, chicken, and fish.
- **Isoleucine** - found in eggs, fish, lentils, poultry, beef, seeds, soy, wheat, almonds and dairy.
- **Valine** - dietary sources include dairy products, grain, meat, mushrooms, peanuts, and soy proteins.
- **Threonine** - dietary sources include dairy, beef, poultry, eggs, beans, nuts, and seeds.
- **Methionine** - found in fish, whole grains, and dairy.
- **Phenylalanine** - food sources or phenylalanine are dairy, almonds, avocados, lima beans, peanuts, and seeds
- **Tryptophan** - found in chocolate, oats, bananas, dried dates, milk, cottage cheese, meat, fish, turkey and peanuts.

Proteins from animal sources contain the full range of essential amino acids needed for an adult's diet: Red meat, poultry, fish, shellfish, eggs, milk and cheese. These foods are a good source of amino acids but unfortunately contain harmful fat called saturated fats. So should be consumed in moderation.

Based on their content of amino acids, foods are often classified as complete such as (meat), or incomplete protein sources (plants).

Therefore a vegetarian diet usually requires a little extra attention when eating only vegetable proteins - grains, pulses, nuts, seeds, vegetables and fruits.

Are vegetarian diets healthy?

Vegetarian diets can be very healthy but challenging, due to the elimination of certain foods from their diet, they often need to work much harder to add foods into their diet that will provide the nutrients that are normally found in meat products. By eating a variety of foods including fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, you can get nutrients you need from non-meat sources. Vegans need to pay special attention to getting enough iron, calcium, vitamin D, and vitamin B12.

What You Should Eat Every Day on a Vegetarian Diet

3 or 4 servings of cereals/grains or potatoes

4 or 5 servings of fruit and vegetables

2 or 3 servings of pulses, nuts & seeds

2 servings of milk, cheese, eggs or soya products

A small amount of extra virgin olive oil or vegetable oil

Some yeast extract such as Marmite, fortified with vitamin B12

Simple tips to becoming a Healthy Vegetarian

- Start gradually and replace meats with beans, nuts, and meat substitutes (textured proteins) for shepherd's pie, Casseroles or lasagna with lots of seasoning
- Buy vegetarian cheeses, Stilton or Brie now available in many supermarkets
- Buy pulses, forget the dried variety if you find them difficult to prepare - go for the tinned variety of kidney beans, chickpeas, etc.
- Tofu is a by-product of soya beans; it is incredibly versatile and easy to use. And if you use the plain variety, don't think that you've done something wrong when it appears tasteless in the finished recipe - it's meant to absorb the flavour of other ingredients. Or you can buy the smoked or marinated versions.
- Eat a wide variety of fruits and vegetables, preferably organic
- Replace highly processed breads, rice and pastas with whole grain versions such as whole grain bread, brown rice and spinach or brown rice pasta.