

# Choosing a Plant-Based Diet: Part Two

## Vital Nutrients:

Eating more foods that come from plants is an excellent way to promote health. However, a plant-based vegan diet that avoids animal products isn't *automatically* healthful. To build a healthful plant-based diet, choose a variety of foods, emphasizing the ones that contain essential nutrients.

## 5 Tips for a Healthful Vegan Diet:

Include **protein** with most meals and snacks. Plant foods that are highest in protein include nuts, seeds, nut butters, legumes, and soy foods like tempeh, tofu, and edamame. Choose a variety of different types of protein foods throughout the day.

Focus on foods that contain **iron**, an essential nutrient that carries oxygen in our bloodstream. Iron sources for vegetarians and vegans include iron-fortified breakfast cereals, spinach, kidney beans, black-eyed peas, lentils, turnip greens, molasses, whole wheat breads, peas, and some dried fruits like apricots, prunes, and raisins (1).

Choose foods high in **calcium** to maintain strong bones and teeth. Vegan sources of calcium include calcium-fortified beverages and breakfast cereals, tofu made with calcium sulfate, and some dark-green leafy vegetables like collard greens, turnip greens, etc.

**Zinc** is an essential mineral for a healthy immune system. Eat white beans, kidney beans, and chickpeas, then look for zinc-fortified breakfast cereals. You can also



sprinkle wheat germ onto salads and snack on pumpkin seeds.

**Vitamin B12** is found only in animal products, and a consistently low intake of B12 can lead to anemia and damage to your nervous system. Buy breakfast cereals with added B12, along with veggie burgers, nutritional yeast, and fortified milks like soy, almond, and rice milk (2).

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## References

1. Tips for vegetarians. <http://www.choosemyplate.gov/healthy-eating-tips/tips-for-vegetarian.html> Accessed 10-20-13.
2. How prevalent is vitamin B(12) deficiency among vegetarians? Pawlak R, Parrott SJ, Raj S, Cullum-Dugan D, Lucas D. *Nutr Rev.* 2013 Feb;71(2):110-7.

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