

Protein needs are easily met on a vegetarian or vegan diet. Most plant foods contain protein – in fact, it would be very difficult to design a vegetarian or vegan diet that is lacking in protein. It is now thought that one of the benefits of a vegetarian diet is that it contains adequate but not excessive protein as too much protein, especially animal protein, can lead to serious health problems.



COURTESY OF PHYSICIANS COMMITTEE FOR RESPONSIBLE MEDICINE / PHOTO BY JOHN KELLY

What does protein do?

Proteins are necessary for maintaining tissues and for sustaining growth. They are also used to make hormones and other physiologically active substances. The building blocks of protein are amino acids – 20 in total. Most amino acids are made in the body, but nine amino acids can only be obtained from food.

How much protein do we need?

Recommended daily protein intake (NZ Ministry of Health)

Age	Amount required
Infants/children	
0-12 months	10-14g
1-3 years	14g
4-8 years	20g
Boys	
9-13 years	40g
14-18 years	65g
Girls	
9-13 years	35g
14-18 years	45g
Men	
19-70 years	64g
Over 70 years	81g
Women	
19-70 years	46g
Over 70 years	57g
During pregnancy	extra 14g/day
Breast feeding 0-6mths	extra 19g/day

Plant protein sources

“But where do you get your protein?” must be one of the most common questions asked of vegetarians and vegans. The answer is “Everywhere!” Simply by eating a normal range of foods, our bodies are getting all the protein needed and that protein doesn’t come laden with saturated fats, as it does when it comes from meat and dairy.

Examples of plant-based protein rich sources:

- Almonds (1/2 cup) 14.8g
- Baked beans (1/2 can) 10.8g
- Broccoli (1cup) 2.6g
- Brown rice, cooked (1cup) 9g
- Cashews (1/2 cup) 10.4g
- Chick peas, cooked (1 cup) 14.5g
- Kidney beans, cooked, (1 cup) 15.4g
- Lentils, cooked (1 cup) 17.9g
- Potato, 1 baked, 2.8g
- Pumpkin seeds (1/2 cup) 17g
- Quinoa, cooked (3/4 cup) 6g
- Oats, cooked (1 cup) 6g
- Wholemeal bread, 1 slice, 2.7g
- Soya milk (1 cup) 5-9g (depending on brand)
- Tofu, firm (1/2 cup) 19.9g
- Vegetarians who eat free range eggs, milk and cheese can also find high protein amounts in these foods.

Sample menu

Breakfast: porridge, fruit and rice milk

Lunch: hummus and salad filled roll, fruit

Dinner: nachos with refried beans, guacamole, green salad, fruit and soy ice cream

Snacks: handful of nuts, pottle of soy yogurt

Total protein intake: 68g

Is combining proteins necessary?

It was once thought that protein foods should be combined at each meal in order to obtain all amino acids. Recent research has indicated that this is not necessary as most foods have all amino acids in adequate amounts for human health¹. However, make sure you eat from a variety of foods to ensure balance and enjoyment.

Is there enough protein for growing children?

Yes, research shows that children are healthy, grow normally and thrive on a vegan or vegetarian diet².

Protein: too much of a good thing?

Most non-vegetarians consume more protein than recommended. Excessive intakes of animal proteins may damage kidneys and bones and are a risk factor for heart disease and some cancers^{3,4}. Diet books advocating high (animal) protein and low carb diets ignore the associated chronic health risks of such diets and the proven contribution of vegetarian and vegan diets for managing weight and reducing disease risks.

References

^{1, 3} Davis, B. et al (2000) *Becoming Vegan*

² Fulton, J.R. et al (1980) 'Preschool vegetarian children' *J.AmDietAssoc*

⁴ Walsh, S. (2003) *Plant Based Nutrition and Health*.

Further information

Leaflet sets available from the NZ Vegetarian Society

Vegetarian families set
Reasons for vegetarianism set
Vegetarian nutrition set:

- Overview
- Iron
- Protein
- Vitamin B12
- Calcium and Vitamin D

Each set contains 5 information leaflets

The New Zealand Vegetarian Society

PO Box 26664, Auckland
ph/fax: 09 523 4686
email: info@vegetarian.org.nz

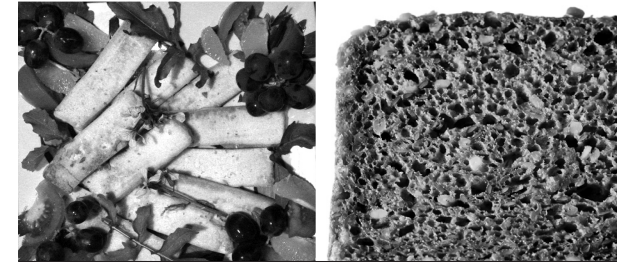
Websites

www.vegetarian.org.nz
www.vegan.org.nz
www.vegansociety.com
www.vrg.org
www.viva.org.uk

Well planned vegan and other types of vegetarian diets are appropriate for all stages of the life cycle, including during pregnancy, lactation, infancy, childhood, and adolescence. From: *Position of the American Dietetic Association and Dieticians of Canada: Vegetarian Diets*. 2003. Endorsed by the New Zealand Dietetic Association.

This information was produced by the New Zealand Vegetarian Society
Written by Yolanda Soryl

PROTEIN



VEGETARIAN NUTRITION



New Zealand Vegetarian Society