No meat, but still complete?

Whether you already choose a vegetarian diet, are thinking about it, or are cooking for someone who does, this leaflet is for you. It aims to provide tips and ideas to help you eat well and get everything you need from your food.

A meat-free diet can provide you with all the essential nutrients your body needs. Remember to eat a balanced diet and try not to have too much of the same foods.

What are the alternatives?

Simply avoiding eating meat and fish is not all there is to choosing a vegetarian diet. Meat and fish provide protein and iron, as well as other important vitamins and minerals, so they must be replaced. Just having the potatoes and vegetables is not enough. Nuts, pulses, seeds, eggs and alternative products (tofu, Quorn® and soya mince) should be used, although the iron content is not as high as meat. You don’t have to survive on brown rice and lettuce leaves, so try something new to provide exciting and nutritious meals.

Can it be quick and simple?

Preparing vegetarian food doesn’t have to be long and complicated, even when you’re cooking from scratch. You can easily cook wholesome vegetarian meals in under half an hour. Pulses can be bought dried or canned; when canned they can be used immediately, however dried ones will need soaking. Follow the instructions on the pack then freeze in convenient portions.

What could you be missing out on?

Calcium
If you have 2-3 portions of milk, cheese or yoghurt each day then you should be getting enough calcium. If not, or if you follow a vegan diet, you could increase your intake by eating:
- Bread
- Baked beans
- Calcium-fortified soya products (milk/yoghurts)
- Green leafy vegetables
- Dried fruit
- Nuts and seeds

Did you know? Skimmed milk contains more calcium than full cream milk.

Iron
Iron is found in pulses, wholemeal bread, fortified breakfast cereals and dried fruit. However, it is not as easily absorbed in these forms as iron from meat sources. Iron is better absorbed with vitamin C, so try having a glass of fresh fruit juice at mealtimes.

Tea stops us using the iron in our food, so avoid drinking tea with your meals, try water as an excellent alternative.

But aren’t nuts fattening?
No, not if they are part of a balanced diet (try to choose the unsalted ones too). Some nuts are high in fat but this usually only becomes a problem when they are eaten as a snack too often!

Vitamin B2 and B12
Vitamin B12 is only found in animal products, such as eggs, milk and in fortified products such as yeast extract and breakfast cereals. If you avoid most of these foods, you may need to take a supplement, ask your health professional for advice.
Missing out?
Not with these tasty meal ideas!

Try to eat a balanced meal and avoid filling up on crisps, sweets, cakes and biscuits.

Smoked tofu slices with salad and wholemeal bread roll.
Pasta with a bean and tomato sauce, and salad.
Porridge, made with milk, dried fruit and nuts.
Rich chestnut casserole with peppers and new potatoes.
Hummus with pitta bread and raw vegetable sticks.

Mixed fruit compote with yoghurt and wholemeal toast.
Jacket potato with baked beans and vegetarian cheese.
Tofu and vegetable stir fry with basmati rice.
Tahini on toast with cherry tomatoes.
Spaghetti with lentil bolognese.
Quorn chilli with brown rice.
Bean and vegetable soup with a granary roll.

What about fat, sugar & salt?

Salt
Eating too much salt can cause high blood pressure, which increases your risk of coronary heart disease and stroke. Adults should not have more than 6 grams per day (just 1 teaspoonful) and children should have less. Don’t forget that its not only the salt that we add during cooking and at the table, most processed foods such as bread and sauces have salt added too.

Sugar
Eating too many sugary foods can make it harder to manage our weight, and consuming them between meals can be damaging to our teeth. Fresh fruit and vegetables make great tooth-friendly snacks!

Fat
Too much fat in our diet is linked with a higher risk of heart disease and can make weight management difficult. Saturated fat is found in all animal products, including meat, cheese and butter, and is particularly damaging for our hearts. Unsaturated fats are made from plant sources, such as olive oil and vegetable spreads. These contain just as much energy (calories) but are better for heart health.

How much is too much?
Look at the nutrition information on labels per 100g:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per 100g</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sugar</td>
<td>5g or less</td>
<td>5.1 - 15g</td>
<td>More than 15g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fat</td>
<td>3g or less</td>
<td>3.1 - 15g</td>
<td>More than 20g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturates</td>
<td>1.5g or less</td>
<td>1.6 - 5g</td>
<td>More than 5g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salt</td>
<td>0.3g or less</td>
<td>0.31 - 1.5g</td>
<td>More than 1.5g</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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