

Family Friendly Factsheets

Vegetarianism



A vegetarian is someone who does not eat meat, fish, poultry or any slaughterhouse product such as gelatine found in some sweets. Vegetarians live on a diet of grains, pulses, nuts, seeds, vegetables and fruit, with or without eggs, milk and milk products.

The term vegetarianism is complex as there are many different types and each one cuts out different or all animal products. Below is a list of the different vegetarian terms.

- **Vegan:** exclude all animal and fish products, dairy products and eggs and all products derived from animals or fish such as gelatin. They also exclude animal products from their lives such as leather, wool and silk.
- **Lacto-Vegetarians:** exclude animal and fish products or derivatives and eggs but eat dairy produce.
- **Lacto-Ovo-Vegetarians:** exclude animal and fish products and derivatives but include dairy products and eggs in the diet.
- **Pesco-Vegetarians:** exclude meat products and derivatives but include fish and fish products, dairy products and eggs into their diet.
- **Pollo-Vegetarians:** include poultry (e.g. chicken, turkey, and duck), dairy products and eggs into their diet but exclude red meat products.

Why do people become vegetarians?

There are a number of reasons why people chose to become vegetarians such as...

They do not like the taste of meat

- Ethical reasons due to the way animals are treated and slaughtered.
- Religious beliefs – many people are born into vegetarianism.
- Health benefits – such as a lower in cholesterol diet, and can help aid in weight loss.

When eating a vegetarian diet it is important to eat a range of foods to ensure all the vitamins and minerals missed from animal, fish or dairy products are still consumed. The main nutrients a vegetarian diet is seen to lack in are iron, calcium, protein, vitamin B12 and zinc. Below is a list

highlighting the key functions of these vitamins and vegetarian alternatives.

- **Iron** – vegetarians should eat a selection of green leafy vegetables to increase their iron intake, it is important for them to remember not to consume a large number of iron inhibitors such as fibre, tea and coffee. Vitamin C aids the absorption of non haem sources of iron in the body and therefore should be consumed with iron rich foods in the form of fruit juices, potatoes, vegetables and fruits. Iron is essential in the body and plays a vital part in the transportation of oxygen throughout the body.
- **Calcium** – vegetarians such as vegans, pescos and pollo who do not eat dairy products can get their sources of calcium from no dairy products such as soya and rice milk based products. Green leafy vegetables such as broccoli and cabbage are also a good source of calcium. Calcium's role in the body is to keep teeth and bones strong and is essential in early life to prevent the onset of bone related diseases such as osteoporosis.
- **Protein** – it is important that vegetarians consume a range of vegetarian protein friendly sources such as pulses, nuts and seeds, beans, soya, quorn and tofu. Protein is needed in the body for the growth and repair of our muscles, skin, hair and internal organs. Protein helps our bodies fight against infection, and aids in the repair of muscles. Protein is essential in children as it is needed for growth.
- **Vitamin B12** – this does not occur naturally in any none animal products so it is important to consume foods fortified with this vitamin such as soya milk, breakfast cereals and bread. Vitamin B12 is essential for brain functioning and the nervous system and is involved in the metabolism of every cell in the body.
- **Zinc** – is needed for cell growth and division. It is involved in the metabolism of energy, protein, carbohydrates and lipids. Vegetarians should consume foods such as soybeans, cashew nuts and sunflower oil which are all great sources of zinc.

If a vegetarian eats a healthy balanced diet that provides all the nutrients needed for healthy bodily functions then the diet and lifestyle can be just as healthy and nutritious as that of a meat eater.