

Alberta Healthy Living Program (Diversity, Mandarin, and Cantonese)

Plant – Based Style of Eating

(1) Overview: Plant-Based Style of Eating

Vegetarian meals are gaining a large popularity over the last few years and even among regular meat-eaters. As more and more individuals reduce their meat intake for many reasons, one essential question remains: Is vegetarian diet healthy? The short answer is yes.

In fact, the latest version of [Canada's Food Guide](#) recommends choosing protein foods that come from plants more often. This does not mean you need to become exclusively (or strictly) vegetarian or vegan, it simply means that including more plant-based meals and snacks into your diet will benefit your overall health and well-being.

Today, we are going to spend some time to discuss:

- (i) How to adapt a healthy Plant-Based style of eating?
- (ii) Examples of plant-based proteins?
- (iii) What are the benefits of eating more Plant-Based foods?
- (iv) What are the common nutrients concern for vegetarians?

The most important take home message is choosing plant-based foods and proteins more often is good for your health and helps prevent diseases like type 2 diabetes. By eating a balanced diet and choosing a variety of plant-based foods, you can get all the nutrients your body needs. Well-planned vegetarian diets can be healthy for people of all ages and can provide you with all the nutrients you need for good health. Taking the time to plan is key!

Speak with a registered dietitian to discuss different plant-based style of eating to help achieve your health-related goals.

(2) Vegetarian diet are those that exclude some or all animal products such meat, poultry, or fish. I am practicing a vegetarian diet even though I consume eggs, yogurt, cheese and butter.

Are you aware that there are many different types of eating plans that could be labelled vegetarian as well?

The most common vegetarian diets include:

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- (i) **Semi-vegetarian:** may include some fish, and maybe even a small amounts of meat or poultry which may occur at irregular intervals (not continuous or steady frequency);
- (ii) **Lacto-ovo;** include eggs, dairy products such as milk, yogurt, butter, cream;
- (iii) **Lacto;** include dairy products such as milk, yogurt, butter, cream;
- (iv) **Vegan;** excludes all foods of animal-based products such as meats, eggs, dairy products, honey. It consists of 100% plant-based foods such as fruits, vegetables, soy, legumes, nuts and nut butters, plant-based dairy alternatives, sprouted or fermented plant foods and whole grains.

(3) I heard that one of the most common vegetarian diet is the *Lacto-Ovo*. Can you explain what would a *Lacto-Ovo* eating plan looks like if I like to follow one?

Lacto-ovo vegetarians do not eat meat, poultry and fish, but do eat milk products and eggs, vegetables, fruits, grains, legumes, nuts and seeds.

A simple sample Lacto-Ovo menu plan for a lunch meal can include:

At least 1 cup of cooked vegetables such as eggplants, bitter melon, Chinese cabbage, gailan; beans, kidney beans);

1 cup of grains + starches such as brown / wild rice, noodles;

You may also add a fruit and a cup of milk, soy beverage or even water to complete the meal.

(4) I like to start practicing a vegetarian diet, can you provide me with some tips to adapt a healthy vegetarian eating plan?

Top 7 vegetarian basic tips to consider including:

1. Use Canada's Food Guide to make vegetarian choices.
2. The Canada's food groups consist of (i) **protein foods** which include soy or dairy milk along with (ii) **whole grains** and (iii) **fruits, vegetables**.
3. Depending on the type of vegetarian diet you are adapting, you can also include eggs and fish.
4. Choose whole grains, unrefined foods (non-highly processed) often.
5. If you eat milk products, choose ones that are lower in fat more often. For example, 1% milk over homogenized milk.

6. Limit foods high in fat, simple sugar and salt.
7. If you are not able to eat many different kinds of vegetarian foods from Canada's Food Guide, you may need a vitamin and mineral supplement. Before starting a supplement, talk to your healthcare provider because more does not mean better.

(5) Is there a specific age range which I can start following a vegetarian style of eating? I heard that if I am over the age of 50, it is not recommended?

Healthy vegetarian style of eating is suitable for people in any stage of life: infants, children, adolescents, adults, and pregnant and breastfeeding mothers.

Being 50 years and older, you will need a little more calcium, vitamin D and vitamin B12. If you feel that you are not getting enough in your diet, you may want to talk to your family physician, dietitian about supplements.

(6) I heard that the benefits to following a vegetarian style of eating may lower risk of heart disease? Are there other benefits?

Many research studies have shown that a well-planned plant-based (vegetarian) diet can help us reduce our risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, certain types of cancers (colon, prostate) and help control our body weight.

A healthy vegetarian diet provides enough important nutrients such as protein, iron, zinc, calcium, vitamin D, vitamin B12 and omega-3 fats. Hence it can be part of a healthy, active lifestyle. The key is taking the time to plan.

(7) Is it true that "because something is being labelled vegetarian, it means that it is a healthier food choice?"

This is a common myth. Being a vegetarian does not guarantee good health or equal to healthy eating.

A vegetarian eating plan can provide all the nutrients you need but this does require some planning.

For example, if you eat mostly fried food (e.g. vegetables tempura, banana, and egg), high-fat cheese, highly refined starches (e.g. white breads, noodles, pasta, and potato chips), sweets and very little vegetables and protein, you may be missing some key nutrients. And with any eating plan, sweet, fatty or salty foods, such as chips and baked goods, should be limited.

(8) What are the common nutrients of concern for vegetarians which I need to be aware of before following a vegetarian eating plan?

The nutrients of concern for vegetarians include *protein, calcium and vitamin D, iron, zinc, vitamin B12 and finally Omega-3-fats.*

Protein foods: growth and repair of our body tissues and to help fight infections. Typically a variety of plant-based foods eaten over the day gives you adequate protein to meet your body needs. Sources include soy products, legumes, grains, nuts and seeds.

Calcium and vitamin D foods: keep our bones and teeth healthy. Sources include milk, yogurt, fortified soy beverage (check food labels).

Iron is needed to make red blood cells, which carry oxygen in our body while *zinc* helps to body to heal and fight infection. Food sources of iron and food that contribute zinc include whole grains, legumes, tofu, eggs, nuts and seeds.

Vitamin B12 helps make healthy cells and red blood cells. It is found naturally only in animal products and hence all vegetarians should eat 2 to 3 servings of vitamin B12 rich foods every day. Sources include fortified soy beverage, yogurt, eggs, fortified meat substitutes (check food labels).

Omega-3 fat helps reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke, it is also important for eye, nerve and brain development. The common foods with Omega-3 fat are fatty fish (salmon, herring, sardine), walnuts, flaxseed oil, tofu, seaweed, omega-3 enriched eggs.

(9) Will I get enough protein if I follow a plant-based style of eating?

You may be surprised at how quickly protein can add up during the day! In fact you do not need to eat large amounts of protein food to meet your nutritional needs. By including a protein food at every meal and making sure to eat a variety of foods, you will have no trouble getting enough protein.

Include a variety of plant-based foods such as nuts, seeds, legumes, whole grains, soy products and fortified soy beverages are important for those individuals who exclude all animal products to help provide all essential amino acids, which cannot be made by our bodies.

(10) Eating soy foods increase risk of breast cancer concern (to specify if you are not already diagnosed with a hormone-based cancer because there is a limit in regard to soy food products)

In fact, the latest research shows that high intake of soy (not soy supplements) from food sources may help reduce the risk of breast cancer. Furthermore, soy foods have not been found to increase the risk of breast cancer returning.

Choose unprocessed soy foods more often, like soybeans, edamame and tofu. Always read and compare food labels of other soy-based foods and choose the ones with lower sodium, added sugar and saturated fat.

Many myths still surround the health implications of a vegetarian diet and hence it is important to learn the facts when it comes to plant-based diets.

(11) How can Alberta Healthy Living Program support the Chinese in the community?

- ✓ AHS AHLP provide one-on-one advice via phone, Zoom or in person meeting in both Mandarin and Cantonese.
- ✓ We also provide nutrition related health education classes such as Eating for Good Health, Eating Well with Pre-Diabetes and Diabetes and Heart Healthy Eating in both Mandarin and Cantonese.
- ✓ All classes take place virtually using the platform Zoom or via telephone.
- ✓ These services have no charge and are covered by Alberta Health. You do not need a referral from a health care provider - you can just call to book appointment
- ✓ All of our programs and services can be accessed through one toll-free number: 1-844-527-1160. Please write this number down.
- ✓ You can also register free nutrition related classes online by clicking on the class title that interests you in our Class Schedule Guide or our Class Description Handbook at [AHS.ca/ AHLP](https://www.ahs.ca/AHLP).