

Vegetarian Sources of Essential Nutrients

While a healthy and well-rounded diet can provide all of the nutrients you need, there are some nutrients that may be more difficult for some vegetarians to get. These include protein, iron, calcium, zinc, and vitamin B12. Listed below are the nutrients, what they do, and what sources vegetarians can expect to find them in.

Protein: is needed for the growth and maintenance of the body. Protein needs can be met by eating variety of plant-based foods. Also, combining proteins (such a grain with a bean) is a useful tool to ensure that you meet your protein needs. Combining different protein sources in the same meal is not necessary, but it might be helpful in the beginning as you get used to being vegetarian.

Sources: beans, nuts, nut butters, peas, and soy products (tofu, tempeh, veggie burgers). Milk products and eggs are also good protein sources of lacto-ovo vegetarians.

Iron: functions primarily as a carrier of oxygen in the blood.

Sources: iron-fortified breakfast cereals, spinach, kidney beans, black-eyed peas, lentils, turnip greens, molasses, whole wheat breads, peas, and some dried fruits (dried apricots, prunes, raisins.)

Calcium: is used for building bones and teeth and in maintaining bone strength.

Sources: breakfast cereals, soy products (tofu, soy-based beverages), calcium-fortified orange juice, and some dark leafy green vegetables (collard greens, turnip greens, bok choy, mustard greens, kale). Milk products are excellent calcium sources for lacto vegetarians.

Zinc: is necessary for many biochemical reactions and also helps the immune system.

Source: beans (white beans, kidney beans, and chickpeas), zinc-fortified breakfast cereals, wheat germ, and pumpkin seeds. Milk products are a zinc source for lacto vegetarians.

Vitamin B12: is necessary for many important reactions in the body and can only be found in animal products and some fortified foods.

Sources: breakfast cereals, soy-based beverages, veggie burgers, and nutritional yeast.

Resources:

1. By : Andrew Zarate, Dietetic Intern Fall 2011
2. Linus Pauling Institute at Oregon State University. Micronutrient Information Center (<http://lpi.oregonstate.edu/infocenter/>)
3. Escott-Stump, Sylvia. *Nutrition and Diagnosis-Related Care*. 6th . Baltimore: Lippincott Williams & wilkins, 2008. 89. Print.