

## Pros and Cons of a Vegetarian Diet

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Most individuals who have adopted a vegetarian lifestyle at some point in their lives (who were not born into it), have done so following some form of perceived enlightenment, or after the realization that consuming animal products is either anti-religious, anti-earth (to save the planet), against animal rights, or that meat is simply unhealthy. Contrary to vegan-based reviews or commentaries, people following a strict vegetarian diet are not healthier than their omnivorous counterparts. In fact, based on clinical records, they suffer from just as many or more medical problems as compared to non-vegetarian individuals, who include meat or eggs in their diet.

There is absolutely no question that the average individual does best health-wise by consuming a mixed diet that is as fresh, and hopefully as unprocessed as possible. Beyond that, an individual assessment is required to provide the necessary information to help make a decision of whether one's diet should be adjusted with greater emphasis toward: specific food groups, a change in the carb, protein, or fat content of a meal, or toward a more vegetarian or non-vegetarian diet to achieve a more optimal approach to health.

There are no vegetarian sources of Vitamin B12, which is why herbivores (e.g. rabbits) meet their Vit B12 requirements by eating plants that are infested with insects, or by eating their own feces, while in ruminants (sheep, cows), the microbes fermenting and digesting plant material in the rumen (the first stomach) incorporate cobalt into Vitamin B12, which is subsequently absorbed and utilized. (see also "Nickel & Cobalt"). Vit B12 liver reserves in adults may last for several years before becoming depleted as a result of switching to a strict vegan or vegetarian diet, however Vitamin B12 deficiency in vegetarian children is much more serious since symptoms do not always become obvious or acute until some damage has resulted. While it is recommended to supplement extra amounts of Vitamin B12 with vegetarian adults, it is mandatory with vegan or vegetarian children! Because of improved sanitation, this is much more important in Western societies, since in lesser developed parts of the world, insect or feces-contaminated fruits or vegetables have generally been sources of Vit B12 for those growing up in a predominantly vegetarian environment or culture. It may also be advisable to supplement a very small amount (DRI / RDA) of the active form of Vitamin B6 (pyridoxal-5-phosphate), since vegetarian sources of Vit B6 only supply the inactive form (pyridoxine), which will have to be converted to the active form by the liver, however the efficiency of the liver to do so may be compromised with certain types of liver diseases. Ideally, when supplementing Vitamin B6 as pyridoxine, a brand should be purchased that supplies a small percentage of Vitamin B6 as pyridoxal-5-phosphate (P5P) as well.

### References:

1. Position of the American Dietetic Association and Dietitians of Canada: Vegetarian diets, *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, American Dietetic Association and Dietitians of Canada, 2003, vol 103, issue 6, pp. 748–65. doi:10.1053/jada.2003.50142 PMID 12778049
2. "Position of the American Dietetic Association: Vegetarian diets". July 2009. Retrieved November 18, 2012.