



VEGETARIAN EATING FOR THE STUDENT-ATHLETE

I have been a vegetarian for two years. With my busy schedule, it can be hard to find convenient vegetarian foods, so I don't eat as frequently as I should and often grab whatever is easiest. I often wonder if I am eating properly to support my training.

How can I remain a vegetarian student-athlete without sacrificing performance?

Consistent, well-planned vegetarian meals can provide adequate nutrition and a variety of health benefits. Vegetarians tend to have a lower intake of saturated fat and cholesterol and a higher intake of fiber and phytochemicals from nutrient-dense fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts and soy. However, eliminating meat and dairy can jeopardize iron, calcium, iodine, zinc, protein, vitamins B12 and D, and energy (calories) levels. Understanding which vegetarian food choices will support peak performance and overall health is important for student-athlete success.

(For what to eat and best practices, turn the page.)



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PRIORITIES FOR PERFORMANCE

Energy. Know your calorie needs and be sure to eat a variety of different foods to fuel your performance. If you need to boost calories, the following can help:

- Make smoothies with real fruit or vegetables.
- Sauté vegetables in olive or canola oil.
- Add nuts, dried fruit or avocado to grains or salads.
- Eat six to eight smaller meals more frequently throughout the day.

Protein. Quality and quantity count. Meet daily needs for protein and essential amino acids by eating a variety of plant-based protein sources in larger quantities.

- Include eggs and dairy for high-quality protein.
- Choose soy foods such as tofu and tempeh for complete proteins.
- Amino-acid supplements do not offer the benefit of whole-food protein sources.

Iron. Many factors increase or decrease absorption of iron from plant sources.

- Look for “iron-enriched” or “fortified” cereals and bread products, as well as fermented soy foods (tofu, miso, tempeh).
- Use cast-iron skillet for cooking.
- Consume foods high in vitamin C (citrus fruits, tomatoes, kiwi) with iron-containing foods.
- Avoid combining high-calcium foods, tea or coffee with iron-containing foods.

Calcium and Vitamin D. Vegan diets often lack these nutrients.

- Choose dairy or calcium- and vitamin D-fortified dairy alternatives.
- Calcium and vitamin D supplements may be needed – talk to your sports Registered Dietician (RD) or doctor (and have your vitamin D level tested).

Vitamin B12. Vitamin B12 is of greatest concern for vegans.

- Choose vitamin B12-containing foods (see chart).
- Talk with your sports RD about vitamin B12 supplementation if you are vegan.

Fat. Eating enough healthy fats, especially omega-3, may be a challenge.

- Aim to consume healthy fats from avocados, nuts, seeds, olives, soy, and olive and canola oils.
- Talk to your sports RD about an omega-3 supplement in addition to food sources.
- Minimize the amount of saturated fat consumed from dairy products by choosing low- or non-fat options.



VEGETARIAN DIETS DEFINED

Vegan: Excludes all animal products, including fish, dairy and eggs

Lactovegetarian: Includes dairy products

Ovolactovegetarian: Includes dairy and eggs

TIPS TO TAKE WITH YOU

- **Avoid food “ruts.”** Eating a variety of foods on a regular basis increases nutrient exposure and decreases risk of deficiency.
- **Use performance as an indicator.** If your energy level is consistently low or performance is suffering, discuss this with your athletic trainer or see a sports dietitian.
- **Supplement if needed.** A daily multivitamin should be considered to decrease risk of nutrient deficiencies. Talk with your physician or a sports dietitian about specific nutrients of concern, such as omega-3 fatty acids, iron, calcium, and vitamins B12 and D.

Nutrient	Recommended Daily Amounts	Plant Food Sources
Protein	1.2-1.7 g/kg	Beans, peas, lentils, tofu, texturized vegetable/soy protein, quinoa, nuts, seitan, seeds, eggs, dairy
Iron	Females: 33 mg (1.8 x RDA*) Males: 14 mg (1.8 x RDA)	Beans, peas, lentils, nuts, seeds, whole and enriched grains, dark-green leafy vegetables, dried fruit
Calcium	1000 to 1500 mg/d	Broccoli, cabbage, kale, collards, mustard and turnip greens, almonds, milk, cheese, yogurt Calcium-fortified: soy, rice or almond milks, juice
Vitamin D	600 IU	Fatty fish (salmon, sardines, mackerel), eggs Vitamin D-fortified: milk, juice, yogurt, mushrooms
Vitamin B-12	2.4 mcg	Dairy products, eggs, nutritional yeast (not baker’s yeast) Vitamin B12-fortified: soy milk, cereals, meat alternatives
ALA (Omega-3 Fatty Acid)	Males: 1.6 g Females: 1.1 g	Walnuts, flaxseed (see Ingredients on food label), canola oil, pistachios
Zinc	Males: 11 mg Females: 8 mg	Beans, peas, lentils, nuts, seeds, whole grains, soy, meat alternatives, hard cheeses, fortified cereals

*RDA = Recommended Daily Allowance

Written by SCAN Registered Dietitians (RDs). For advice on customizing a nutrition plan, consult an RD who specializes in sports, particularly a Board-Certified Specialist in Sports Dietetics (CSSD). Find a SCAN RD at www.scandpg.org.