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Veg Out Nutritiously

Many college students have learned the hard way that cutting animal products from their diets is not the magic route to health or weight loss. While plant-based diets are associated with lower risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, certain cancers, and obesity, a poorly executed vegetarian diet can result in vitamin/mineral deficiencies, fatigue, unintentional weight loss (or gain), and overall poor health. If you're planning to make the switch to a vegetarian diet, here are a few things to keep in mind before taking the plant-based plunge.

Don't forget the veggies and fruit. This might seem like a no-brainer, but many vegetarians' diets lack veggies and fruits and instead include nutritionally empty, calorie-dense foods. After all, a diet of pizza, French fries, Oreos, and Pop Tarts is considered vegetarian! The healthiest vegetarian diets have a lot of colorful fruits and vegetables.

Avoid highly processed vegetarian foods. Focus on whole foods and products with short and simple ingredient lists.

Focus on these nutrients. If not well-planned, going vegetarian can result in deficiencies in protein, iron, zinc, omega-3 fatty acids, calcium, and/or

vitamins D and B12. Here are some plant sources of each:

- **Protein:** beans, lentils, nuts, and soy products (i.e. tofu, tempeh). Eggs and dairy foods, if including these foods.
- **Iron:** fortified cereals, oatmeal, beans, spinach, tofu, nuts
- **Zinc:** legumes, soy products, cheese, nuts, grains
- **Omega-3 Fatty Acids:** walnuts, walnut oil, flaxseeds, chia seeds
- **Calcium and Vitamin D:**
 - Calcium: tofu, leafy greens and fortified fruit juices
 - Vitamin D: fortified breakfast cereals
 - Both: fortified dairy products or milk substitutes
- **B12:** naturally found only in animal products (like dairy and eggs, if including). Vegans can get B12 from nutritional yeast, fortified breakfast cereals or soy products.

Like any eating pattern, the key to a healthy vegetarian diet is to include a variety of foods. If you need guidance on a plan that's right for you, meet with a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist like the ones at UA Campus Health!



CAMPUS HEALTH

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Food and nutrition services (including healthy eating, cooking skills, weight management, digestive problems, hormonal and cardiovascular diseases, and eating disorders) are offered year-round at Campus Health. Call (520) 621-6483 to make an appointment.