



## Important Nutritional Requirements for Vegans and Vegetarians

This factsheet provides important information for nutritional considerations if you or someone you care about would like to adhere to a vegan or vegetarian diet in recovery from an eating disorder.

### Important nutritional requirements to be aware of:

Foods derived from animals provide some essential nutrients that are much lower and even sometimes completely lacking in vegan or vegetarian diets.

To stay healthy, vegans and vegetarians need to be aware of these and make sure there is an element of planning or consideration that goes in to the foods they choose to eat, and in some cases, decide to take supplements. People who eat a vegan diet have more to consider as they abstain from more foods (such as eggs and dairy).

Nutrients to be aware of and containing foods are:

- Vitamin B12** – An essential vitamin required for life (used in DNA, blood, brain) and the only containing food sources are animal products. If no animal foods are consumed (including dairy and eggs) a person must take a B12 supplement or eat foods that are fortified with B12 (such as soy milk or bread).
- Iron** – Required in the body for energy, memory and nerve function. Plant foods do contain iron but it can be more difficult for the body to absorb. Foods to eat include beans and legumes, tofu, nuts, seeds, wholegrains, dried fruit and dark leafy vegetables. Some cereals are fortified with iron and a supplement can be taken if necessary.
- Calcium** – Needed for bone health and in muscles and nerves. The best source of calcium in the diet is dairy foods so if these are not eaten it is important to include other calcium-rich foods. Some examples are tofu, almonds, tahini and fortified almond or soy milk.
- Omega 3s** – Also referred to as essential fatty acids or DHA and EPA. Required for brain and immune system function. The best food source of omega-3s are marine products so if all fish and seafood are excluded from the diet it is important to eat other plant sources. Some examples are flaxseeds and oil, walnuts and chia seeds. Vegan omega-3 supplements are also available.
- Complete Proteins** – Human bodies require adequate amounts of 9 different essential amino acids that when combined form complete proteins. These proteins are vital to every bodily function from structure of tissues and organs to hormones, the immune system and DNA. Most animal foods provide all 9 amino acids (complete proteins) as a single food source, whilst plant foods tend to contain only some.

Therefore, if you do not eat animal foods it is important that you eat a wide variety/ different combinations of plant foods to ensure adequate amounts of all 9 essential amino acids. Some examples of combinations of plant foods that provide all 9 essential amino acids are - black beans with rice, peanut butter on wholegrain bread or hummus with pita bread.

### Learn more

For more information about vegan, vegetarian and plant-based diets and eating disorder recovery, please see our factsheet '**Eating Disorders and Vegan, Vegetarian and Plant-Based Diets**'.