

## Mistakes to Avoid on a Vegetarian Diet



A vegetarian diet is a diet that includes only food from plant sources with or without dairy products and eggs. A well planned and nutritionally balanced plant-based diet confers several health benefits for prevention and management of certain diseases such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease and obesity. But done the wrong way, it can actually lead to weight gain and exacerbate existing health conditions. Avoid the following faux pas in order to reap benefits from a plant-based diet.

**Mistake 1:** Assuming commercial vegetarian dishes are healthier

Commercial vegetarian food products (e.g. vegetarian fried bee hoon, mock meat) are often highly processed and can be higher in calorie, saturated fat and sodium (no thanks to the amount of oil/sauce/flavouring added) compared to non-vegetarian food.

Healthier Option: Limit commercial vegetarian products to once a week or prepare your own vegetarian dish at home using less oil and natural spices.

**Mistake 2:** Overloading on commercial fruit juice or smoothies

Commercial fruit juice or smoothies can end up to be calorie bombs due to their high sugar contents. A cup of fruit juice (250ml) easily contains 150kcal while a cup of smoothie packs between 250-400kcal. Commercial fruit juice

or smoothies is also devoid of dietary fibre which lowers our blood cholesterol level and keeps hunger at bay.

Healthier Option: Choose unsweetened beverages (e.g. unsweetened tea, plain water) and fibre-rich whole fruits to keep your calories intake in check.

**Mistake 3:** Not eating enough protein

Protein is essential for immune system function, growth and repair of tissues and it plays an important role in weight control as it promotes satiety.

Vegetarians need to include a variety of plant proteins (e.g. soy products, legumes, nuts) in their daily diets as plant proteins are 'incomplete proteins' and are not as well absorbed as compared to animal proteins.

Healthier Option: Include plant proteins at every meal/snack to ensure you are getting adequate protein in your diet.

**Mistake 4:** Not taking enough calcium-rich food

Calcium is important for keeping our bones strong and for nervous system function. Vegetarians who avoid dairy products should include calcium rich plant sources (e.g. green leafy vegetables, almonds and figs) and calcium fortified products (e.g. calcium fortified bread, calcium fortified soy products). If necessary, you may require calcium supplements to prevent calcium deficiency.

A well planned and nutritionally balanced vegetarian diet confers several health benefits. Do include plenty of whole foods and take some time to plan out your meal to ensure you get the nutrients you need.