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*If we could lead happy, healthy lives without harming others, why wouldn't we?"*



This quote sums up why more and more people are looking at ways to eliminate cruelty from their diets. Every meal without animal products is a step in this direction. There is definitely no need to harm others to be happy and healthy.

A vegan diet is based on plant food and so does not include:

- meat of any kind, including chicken
- fish and seafood
- dairy (milk, cheese, cream, etc)

- eggs

The section on *Farm Animals* clearly illustrates the cruelty involved in producing animal products, even milk and eggs. In both these industries, the males are killed at a very young age, and females are killed as soon as their productivity passes its peak. Both the egg and dairy industries still have a close connection with the slaughterhouse.

Apart from refusing to support cruelty, a vegan diet also:

- reduces the risk of chronic health problems which are common in our meat-eating society, including heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, obesity, cancer and diabetes. See [Vegan Health](#) (link not yet done) for more information.
- has a much lower environmental footprint, producing far less greenhouse gases and involving much lower land use and land clearing. See ....

**A vegan diet is better for us, for the animals and for the environment.** If you would like to read more about reasons for becoming vegan, see the article

[Eating Animals](#)

by Pam Ahern, who runs the farm animal sanctuary

[Edgar's Mission](#)

in Victoria.

But what do you eat?

Anyone who thinks vegans eat lettuce leaves and celery sticks has no idea of the huge variety of plant food available. As an example, have a look at the [Vegan Pantry](#) for a run down of just some vegan foods you could use to prepare tasty, nutritious meals. The vast range of fruits, vegetables, grains, legumes, nuts and seeds provides a well-balanced and interesting diet.

In its 2009 [position paper on vegetarian diets](#) , the American Dietetic Association wrote: *“It is the position of the American Dietetic Association that appropriately planned vegetarian diets, including total vegetarian or vegan diets, are healthful, nutritionally adequate, and may provide health benefits in the prevention and treatment of certain diseases*

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Dieticians have prepared a [Vegan Food Pyramid](#) . The base of the pyramid, what you should eat most of, is grain, whether as bread, cereal, pasta, rice or any of the many other grains. The next level is fruit and vegetables and above that a level of foods high in protein, calcium and other minerals. These foods include the legumes, nuts, tofu and other soy products, as well as green vegetables high in calcium such as broccoli and kale. At the top of the pyramid are foods required in small quantities to supply vitamin B12, vitamin D and omega-3. Supplements are the most reliable source of B12 in the vegan diet if fortified foods aren't eaten regularly. The Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine in the US has presented an eating plant based on [Four Food Groups](#) .

**Carbohydrates** are our main source of energy. The World Health Organisation recommends that 55-75% of our daily calorie intake comes from carbohydrates. Vegan are usually right in this desirable range, whereas meat eaters are often too low. Carbs come from cereals, legumes, vegetables and fruit which also supply the fibre needed to maintain bowel health, and which is often low in a meat eater's diet.

**Protein** is plentiful in plant food, although it is a common misconception that vegos miss out on protein.



Nutritionists recommend that 10-15% of calories should come from protein, and many plant foods contain this level of protein. Higher levels are found in tofu and other soy products, legumes and nuts. See [Vegetarian Sources of Protein](#), written by a body builder, for further descriptions.

As the American Dietetic Association stated in its position paper: "*Plant protein can meet protein requirements when a variety of plant food is consumed and energy needs are met. Research indicates that an assortment of plant foods eaten over the course of a day can provide all essential amino acids and ensure adequate nitrogen retention and use in healthy adults: that is, complementary proteins do not need to be consumed at the same meal.*" People who claim they aren't getting enough protein on a vegan diet just don't know what they should eat and how to prepare it.

**Fat** in a vegan diet is less likely to be the unhealthy saturated kind found in meat and other animal products. Good fats are found in olives, nuts, avocados and soy products. Flaxseeds are particularly high in omega-3 fatty acid.

**Calcium** is associated in many people's minds with dairy food, but as dieticians point out in *Becoming Vegan* (make link to shop): "*Throughout our evolution, consuming calcium in suspension, via cow's milk, has not been the cornerstone of the diet of most humans*". Early humans managed to have strong bones without dairy and still today in many societies people do not consume dairy because they are lactose intolerant. Calcium is found in leafy green vegetables, broccoli, legumes, almonds, oranges, figs and tofu set with calcium. Spinach and silver beet are not good sources of calcium because they are high in oxalates which inhibit absorption. To absorb calcium into the bones you also need vitamin D (half an hour of sun on the skin each day) and weight bearing exercise.

**Iron** is plentiful in plant foods, and studies show that vegans are not more likely to be iron deficient than meat eaters. Iron is high in legumes, dried apricots, mushrooms, bean sprouts, broccoli, and kale (a leafy cabbage vegetable). The absorption of iron is increased up to 4 times by vitamin C (in fruit and veg), but is decreased by dairy products and the tannin in coffee and especially tea. Iron is easier to absorb when beans are sprouted or fermented, as in tempeh.

**Zinc** is found in germinating plant parts, such as grains, legumes, nuts and seeds. As with iron, absorption is increased by sprouting, fermenting, or yeasting bread.



What if you're a vegetarian? You can still get B12 (use fortified foods or a supplement), and you can find more questions and answers on vegetarianism to [Australian Vegetarian Society](#).