Eating Well

**Vegetarian and vegan eating patterns**

People choose a vegetarian or vegan diet for a variety of reasons. These include health, environment, animal welfare, religious or cultural reasons.

There are many types of vegetarian diets. Lacto-ovo-vegetarians eat plant-based foods and milk and eggs. Lacto-vegetarians include dairy foods. Ovo-vegetarians include eggs. Vegans do not consume any animal products.

With a little planning, vegetarian and vegan eating patterns can provide all the nutrients needed for growth and development.

**The five food groups**

It is important to eat a variety of foods from the five food groups to make sure you get everything your body needs. This is also true when following a vegetarian or vegan eating pattern.

* The five food groups are:
  + **Vegetables and legumes** – vegetables are the leaves and roots of plants and legumes are the fruit or seeds. Aim to eat plenty of vegetables and legumes including different types and colours. Fresh, frozen and canned vegetables (without added salt) are all good options.
  + **Fruits** are the seed containing part of flowering plants. Fresh frozen and canned fruit (go for canned in natural juice rather than syrup) are all good options.Try to eat fruit and drink water, rather than drinking fruit juice.
  + **Grain (cereal) foods** like bread, cereal, pasta, rice, oats, polenta, quinoa and barley. Try to choose mostly wholegrain and high fibre varieties.
  + **Meats and/or meat alternatives,** including legumes and beans.
  + **Milk, yoghurt, cheese** and alternatives. Choose mostly reduced fat varieties. If choosing dairy alternatives such as soy milk, rice milk, oat milk choose one with added calcium (at least 100mg or calcium per 100 mL).

# Getting enough nutrients

There are certain nutrients that can be hard to get enough of while following a vegetarian or vegan diet.

**Protein**

Vegetarian food sources include dairy food and eggs, tofu, legumes, nuts and seeds.

**Iron**

Vegetarian food sources include: legumes, tofu, seeds, nuts, whole grains, dried fruit, leafy green vegetables and iron fortified foods such as breads and cereals.

Eating foods rich in vitamin C such as citrus fruit, strawberries, kiwi fruit, tomatoes and broccoli helps with iron absorption.

**Vitamin B12**

Non-animal sources of B12 are:

* soy milks fortified with vitamin B12
* some ‘meat substitutes’ such as soy-based burgers and sausages with added vitamin B12
* yeast extracts such as Marmite™.

If you are following a vegan eating pattern and don’t eat these foods or eat enough of them regularly, a vitamin B12 supplement may be needed.

**Calcium**

Dairy foods are a good source of calcium. Non-dairy food sources of calcium include milk substitutes (soy, rice oat etc) with calcium added (choose ones with 100 mg per 100 mL), sesame seeds, Asian greens, almonds and Brazil nuts.

**Zinc**

Vegetarian food sources of zinc include legumes, grains, nuts seeds, eggs, cheese, cow’s milk and soy products such as tofu, soy milk and soy yoghurts.

To absorb zinc from food more effectively, eat foods such as sprouted beans, grains and seeds, yeast breads, fruits and vegetables. Soak legumes before cooking (or using canned types) to help with zinc absorption from legumes.