



# MDwise

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## Pregnancy: Vegetarian Diet

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### Overview

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A balanced vegetarian diet can provide all the nutrients you need for a healthy pregnancy. If you eat a vegetarian diet, pay special attention to getting enough protein, vitamin B12, calcium, vitamin D, zinc, and iron while you are pregnant. These nutrients are vital to your baby's cell growth, brain and organ development, and weight gain.

Think about working with a registered dietitian to be sure you are eating a balanced diet. This is even more important if you plan to eat a plant food-only vegan diet.

- Get enough protein.
  - A vegetarian diet that includes eggs and dairy provides quality protein.
  - A vegan diet requires careful planning. A variety of plant-based protein sources (such as soy, nuts, and grains) must be included in your diet.
- Pay attention to vitamin B12.
  - Vitamin B12 is found only in foods from animal sources, such as milk, eggs, and meat.
  - If you follow a vegan diet, be sure to eat foods fortified with vitamin B12 (such as fortified soy milk) or take a supplement that contains vitamin B12.
- Increase your iron intake.
  - You need twice as much iron in your second and third trimesters as you did before pregnancy.
  - Include nuts, beans, raisins, leafy green vegetables, and fortified cereals in your diet.
  - Iron from plant foods is not absorbed as well as iron from meats. Eat foods that contain vitamin C to help your body absorb iron from a meal.
- Get plenty of calcium.
  - If you don't use milk or other dairy products, be sure to get calcium from other sources.
  - Good sources of calcium include calcium-fortified products such as orange juice, soy milk, and tofu.
  - Other non-dairy sources include corn tortillas made with lime (calcium carbonate) and green vegetables such as turnip greens, collard greens, kale, bok choy, and broccoli.
- Get enough zinc.
  - Zinc from plant foods is poorly absorbed by the body, so make an effort to get enough zinc in your diet.

- Good sources of zinc include leavened whole grains (such as whole wheat bread), legumes (beans and lentils), soy foods, vegetables, and milk and yogurt.
- Get enough vitamin D.
  - If you don't use milk or milk products, be sure to get enough vitamin D from other sources. Soy milk and cereals are often fortified with vitamin D.
  - Your body can produce vitamin D when exposed to sunlight on a regular basis. You may need a supplement if you don't consume enough vitamin D or don't get enough sunlight.
- Take prenatal vitamins.
  - This can help ensure that you get the extra iron and other vitamins and minerals you need for a healthy pregnancy.

## Credits

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Note: The "printer friendly" document will not contain all the information available in the online document. Some information (e.g. cross-references to other topics, definitions or medical illustrations) is only available in the online version.

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