

Veganism and Disordered Eating

This resource is for people with disordered eating or an eating disorder who are following a vegan pattern of eating. It will help you understand how to get the right nutrition while recovering from eating issues.

What is a veganism?

Veganism is a way of living based on avoiding foods and products which are derived from animals.

Why do people adopt veganism?

People may choose a vegan lifestyle for one or more of the following reasons:

- Animal welfare
- Taste preferences
- Environmental concerns
- Weight or health concerns
- Family views
- Religious or other beliefs

Veganism and disordered eating:

Veganism can mask eating disorder thoughts and behaviours because it is socially acceptable. It is important to consider why you are choosing vegan eating. Ask yourself, “why am I avoiding animal products?” “Is it weight, or shape driven?” If you are unsure, think about if you started excluding animal products before or after the onset of your eating disorder? Your treating team will explore this with you and your loved ones. If you and your team decide you will continue a vegan pattern of eating, it is important to ensure you are getting the right balance of nutrition.

Recovering from disordered eating with a vegan eating pattern:

- Getting enough nutrition to help recovery with a vegan pattern of eating can be very difficult.
- Many vegan foods are low in energy, so you might need to eat larger amounts to meet your nutrition needs.
- Many vegan foods are high in fibre, which can increase feeling full and uncomfortable after eating, while your body is recovering.
- You may need to include animal products during part of your treatment, to help recovery. If this is the case, following non-food ethical vegan principles (e.g., cruelty-free cosmetics, environmentally friendly products) can help align with your values.
- Hospitals and intensive treatment programs are unable to facilitate veganism because of how critical the illness is when you need this level of care.
- The Vegan Society's definition of vegan states "Veganism is a philosophy and way of living that seeks to exclude – as far as is possible and practical – all forms of exploitation of and cruelty to, animals for foods, clothing, or any other purpose...." The Vegan Society also does not recommend avoiding medication prescribed by your health professional. At critical stages in your treatment nutrition is considered medication and achieving nutritional goals is required for treatment progression.

Vegan nutritional needs

Getting the right balance of foods while following a vegan pattern of eating can be difficult. If you are following vegan eating, you will need to work with an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD). The nutrients that are most at risk in a vegan eating pattern are outlined below:

At-risk nutrient		Vegan food sources
Protein	<p>Protein is needed for muscles, nerves and the immune system to work. Most non-animal proteins do not contain all the essential amino acids our bodies need. It is therefore recommended to eat a wide range of the suggested foods every day.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lentils and other legumes (e.g., chickpeas, red kidney beans, black beans etc) • Tofu, tempeh and soy products (e.g., edamame) • Dairy alternatives (e.g., calcium fortified soy milk, soy ice cream). Other milk alternatives (e.g., oat/rice/almond milk) are low in protein so not recommended. • Nuts and seeds • Vegan meat alternatives
Iron	<p>Iron is important to transport oxygen around the body.</p> <p>Non-animal sources of iron are typically less efficiently absorbed by the body than animal sources.</p> <p>It is therefore recommended to eat a wide range of the suggested foods every day.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lentils and other legumes (e.g., chickpeas, red kidney beans, black beans etc) • Tofu, tempeh and soy products (e.g., edamame) • Nuts and seeds • Cooked dark leafy greens (e.g., spinach, Swiss chard, kale) • Wholegrains (e.g., wholegrain bread/wraps, cereals etc) <p>Increase absorption of iron by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Including vitamin C (orange fruit/juice, tomatoes, broccoli, capsicum, berries) or vinegar at meals • Avoid drinking tea or coffee with meals
Calcium	<p>Calcium is needed for bone strength, and nerves and muscles to work.</p>	<p>High calcium foods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calcium-fortified soy milk • Calcium-fortified tofu <p>Other sources with smaller amounts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Almonds • Unhulled tahini (sesame seed paste), kale, broccoli, Brussel sprouts and bok choi are the better absorbed vegetable calcium sources.

Essential fatty acids	Essential fatty acids cannot be made by our body and must be provided from the foods we eat. They have many health benefits.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linseeds/flaxseeds • Walnuts • Chia/hemp seeds • Soybean /canola oil
Vitamin B12	<p>Vitamin B12 is needed for making red blood cells and for the nervous system.</p> <p>Vitamin B12 is only found naturally in animal products, so you must eat foods fortified with vitamin B12 or receive vitamin B12 supplementation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • B12 fortified soy milks (e.g., So Good, Vitasoy) • B12 fortified meat alternatives (e.g., Vegie Delights range) <p>Talk to your doctor or dietitian about whether you require a B12 supplement.</p>

Summary:

- Eating enough nourishing foods to recover from eating issues while following a vegan pattern of eating can be difficult.
- You may need to include animal products in your meal plan for part of your treatment, to help your recovery.
- Work with your treating team to explore how best to nourish your body during this important time.

For further information, contact your dietitian _____
