



Vegetarian Eating for Older Adults

With ageing our appetite and energy needs decrease however the requirements for several nutrients increase. To reach these increased requirements it is important for older adults to include nutrient dense foods in their diet. Older adults following a vegetarian diet need to be aware of the key nutrients important for all vegetarians and pay particular attention to calcium, vitamin D and Vitamin B12.

Vegetarian Meal Ideas

Calcium

Calcium requirements increase over the age of 50 for women and 70 for men. Calcium is important for strong bones and teeth, proper nerve and muscle function and blood clotting.

Food Sources: Dairy foods, calcium-fortified foods (soy and rice milks, fruit juices), almonds, brazil nuts, sesame seeds, unhulled tahini (sesame seed paste), amaranth, dried apricots, figs, soybeans, calcium set-tofu, Asian greens, kale, collard greens, broccoli.

Tips to increase absorption of calcium:

- Ensure adequate vitamin D
- Limit salt intake - salt increases calcium excretion
- Limit caffeine intake - caffeine (found in tea, coffee, cola and 'high energy drinks') inhibits calcium absorption

Protein

Protein requirements increase over the age of 70. Protein is important for growth and repair of all body cells, formation of enzymes and hormones, normal functioning of muscles and nerves and immune protection.

Food sources: Legumes (eg beans, lentils, chickpeas), soy foods (eg tofu, tempeh, soy milk, soy yoghurt), textured vegetable protein (TVP), eggs, nuts and seeds, dairy foods, quinoa, amaranth grain, wholegrains

Tip: You do not need to combine proteins at each meal, simply consume a variety of proteins throughout the day and have an adequate energy intake



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Vitamin B12

Older adults are a high-risk group of vitamin B12 deficiency. Main causes of deficiency include insufficient intake and inadequate vitamin B12 absorption due to problems with the gastrointestinal tract. Vitamin B12 is required for cell division, the formation of red blood cells and maintenance of the nervous system.

Food Sources: Dairy foods (eg. milk, yoghurt and cheese), eggs, B12-fortified foods (eg. some soy milk, meat analogues, veggie burgers, Marmite™ that have had vitamin B12 added). A vitamin B12 supplement will be needed if these foods are not eaten regularly, especially for those following a vegan diet.

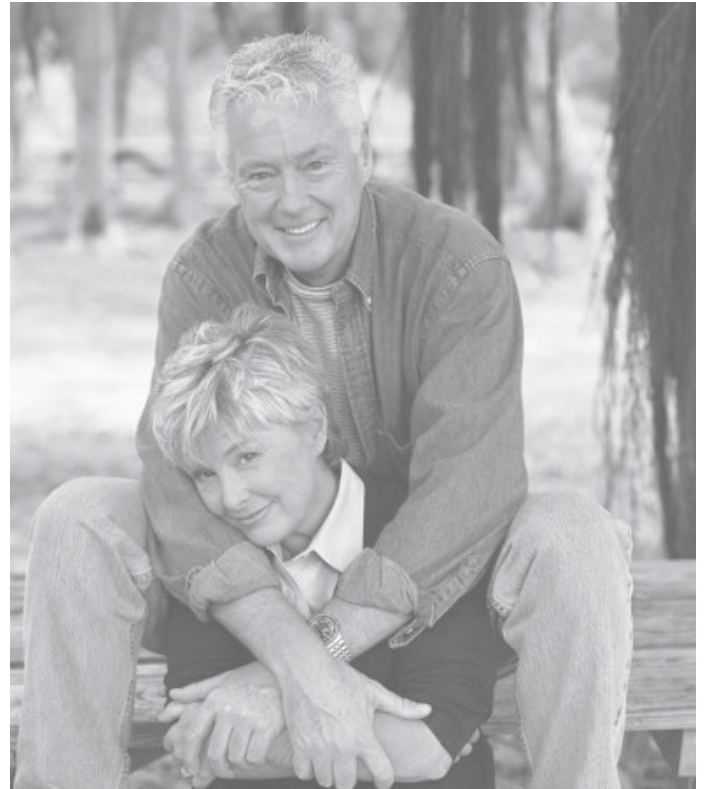
Iron

Important for oxygen transport around the body.

Food Sources: Legumes, iron-fortified foods (eg. breads and cereals), tofu and tempeh, nuts, seeds, green leafy vegetables, eggs, quinoa, amaranth grain, wholegrains, dried fruit.

Tips to increase iron absorption:

- Consume foods high in vitamin C (citrus fruits and juices, strawberries, kiwi fruit, tomatoes, broccoli) with meals
- Avoid drinking tea and coffee with meals – tannins in tea and coffee inhibit iron absorption
- Avoid taking calcium supplements with meals



Vitamin D

Dietary sources of vitamin D are particularly important for older adults as production of vitamin D in the skin, in response to sun exposure, decreases with age. Vitamin D helps with calcium absorption into bones and is important for the immune system.

Food Sources: Eggs, vitamin D-fortified foods (margarine and some milks). Vitamin D is also obtainable by the action of sunlight on bare skin.

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Zinc

Found in every part of our body and has a wide range of functions. It is important for wound healing, healthy skin and a strong immune system.

Food Sources: Legumes, grains, nuts, seeds, eggs, cheese, cow's milk, soy products (eg. tofu, tempeh, soy milk, soy yoghurt).

Tips to increase zinc absorption:

- Soak legumes before cooking or use canned legumes
- Consume sprouted beans, grains and seeds and breads that contains yeast
- Consume foods containing organic acids such as citric acid (in fruit and vegetables) at meals

Omega-3

Plays a critical role in good health and protection against disease

Food Sources: Flaxseed oil, chia seed oil, hemp seeds, walnuts, canola oil, soybeans, seaweed, eggs (omega-rich eggs are also available), chia seeds, linseeds (stored in the fridge), fortified soy milks (soy milks that have omega-3 added)

Tips to achieve optimal intake ratio of essential fatty acids:

- Consume foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids
- Reduce omega-6 consumption by replacing sunflower, safflower & corn oils with canola, soybean or olive oil



Iodine

Essential for human growth and development and production of thyroid hormones

Food Sources: Dairy products, eggs, iodised salt, nori

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Solutions to Common problems

Poor appetite

- Eat small frequent meals
- Avoid filling up on nutrient poor drinks such as tea and coffee

Too tired to cook

- Keep a supply of ready made or easy to prepare meals such as instant porridge and canned vegetable soup
- Use canned legumes instead of dried to eliminate the need for soaking
- Use your freezer. Cook extra and freeze for later. Good freezer meals and snacks include: soups, casseroles, lasagne, wholemeal biscuits and muffins



Difficulty chewing

- Take your time with eating
- Cut food into small pieces
- Choose meals soft in texture such as: soups, stews and casseroles
- Stew fruit
- Mash or puree tofu and legumes before use

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This information has been independently reviewed by the Dietitians Association of Australia. For expert nutrition and dietary advice contact an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD). Visit 'Find an Accredited Practising Dietitian' at www.daa.asn.au or call 1800 812 942.