



CHOICES NUTRITION CONSULTANTS

THE VEGAN DIET

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

I have just read that only organic sugar is vegan. Why is this?

Cane sugar is filtered through activated charcoal, which can be vegetarian or animal (bone) based. Beet sugar does not require this step. On the label, however, sugar is simply labeled as sugar and the only way to find out processing details is by calling the manufacturer. Organic sugar or dehydrated cane juice have not been in contact with animal byproducts. Maple syrup and molasses may also be processed with animal products such as lard; choose organic versions to ensure a vegan product.

Why aren't all cheese alternatives vegan?

Many cheese alternatives use casein, a dairy protein, to help the product melt more like dairy cheese. Vegan Rella and Earth Island Vegan Gourmet are two completely vegan cheese alternatives.

Do I need B₁₂ supplements?

Vitamin B₁₂ is found naturally in animal foods such as milk, eggs and meat. Unless careful about diet vegans may become deficient in this nutrient, leading to neurological damage. Physical signs of vitamin B₁₂ deficiency may be hidden due to the high folate content of most vegan diets. Luckily, there are many vegetarian alternatives that are fortified with B₁₂. Some soy milks contain as much as 50% of your RDA in a single 250ml serving. Many soy based meat alternatives, such as Yves, are also fortified with B₁₂. In order for the vitamin to be beneficial, it must be in its active form, so sources such as sea vegetables or miso are inadequate. Red Star Vegetarian Support Formula, a nutritional yeast, contains active vitamin B₁₂ and can be relied upon to supplement the diet. However, if you do not consume these foods daily, it may be a good idea to take a supplement.

How much iron do I need?

The RDA for vegetarians is actually higher than that for non-vegetarians because of the bioavailability of vegetarian (non-heme) iron. Vegetarian women need 33mg of iron per day, and men need 14mg. Remember to eat foods rich in iron with a food rich in vitamin C, as vitamin C helps support absorption of iron. Good sources of iron include enriched Cream of Wheat, amaranth, enriched whole wheat pasta, and lentils. Tofu, blackstrap molasses and dried figs are also sources. For more sources

of iron see the BC Health File: Iron and You, at www.bchealthguide.org/healthfiles/hfile68d.stm.

Where can I learn more about the vegan diet?

There are a number of resources for vegans, such as www.vegan.org, www.veganchef.com, and www.govegan.net. Vesanto Melina, a registered dietitian specializing in vegetarian diets has a website at www.nutrispeak.com.