

# Teen Vegetarianism

More and more teenagers are choosing to become vegetarians and eliminating meat, poultry and fish from their diets. Their motivations for choosing vegetarianism can be varied: some teens are vegetarians for religious or cultural reasons, while others are concerned about animal rights or the environment. Other motives might include diet or health concerns, peer or family influence or simple food preferences.

Regardless of the reasons behind the decision to adopt a vegetarian lifestyle, such a choice requires careful consideration and planning in order to ensure that teens get the proper nutrients and that their new diet is a healthy one.

There are three types of vegetarians, and young adults will need to make different adjustments depending on which type they choose. A **vegan** is someone who does not eat any meat, fish, milk or egg products, or any food derived from an animal source. A **lacto-vegetarian** does not eat meat, poultry, fish or eggs but does consume dairy products. A **lacto-ovovegetarian** does not eat meat, poultry or fish but consumes egg and dairy products. Most vegetarians tend to be lacto-ovovegetarians, as this is the easiest vegetarian diet to follow in terms of obtaining the necessary nutrients.

A vegetarian diet can be very beneficial and can potentially lower blood pressure and decrease the chances of heart disease, adult-onset diabetes, obesity and some types of cancer. These benefits depend, however, on teens getting the proper nutrients,

including protein, iron, calcium, vitamin B12 and vitamin D. These tend to be found in meat, poultry and fish, and cutting these foods out of one's diet can sometimes lead to deficiencies. It's important for teens to learn about alternative sources that can provide the necessary nutrients to ensure a healthy and nourishing diet. Simply cutting out meat from your diet and replacing it with more carbohydrates, sugar and fat will reverse any of the benefits associated with vegetarianism!

Other challenges to adopting a healthy vegetarian diet include parental pressure and the lack of variety. When teens make the decision to become vegetarians, they are often faced with family resistance. Parents might think that it is only a fad, or they might worry that their teens will not get the proper nutrition. They might also be concerned about accommodating their teens—cooking for a family is hard enough without having to worry about alternative meal options for a vegetarian teenager. If teens educate themselves about vegetarianism and are prepared to help out with food preparation, these concerns can usually be dealt with. When deciding to become vegetarian, young adults can consult print and online resources in conjunction with their parents; not only will they show that they are serious about their decision, but they will also be better informed about how to stay healthy. They can also learn to make simple vegetarian meals on their own, and this will take the pressure off family members. There are many vegetarian cookbooks and websites offering easy,

quick and nutritious food ideas. Maintaining variety can also be a challenge, but the wealth of resources out there can help with this dilemma. Finding some fun and interesting meal ideas, as well as healthy and convenient snack foods, can help teens maintain variety and avoid becoming bored with the same old meals. Vegetarianism is more than just beans and tofu! Discovering ingredients such as lentils, red beans, chick peas, and tempeh, as well as foods like vegetarian sausages, deli slices, patties, hot dogs and ground round can go a long way towards maintaining a healthy and varied vegetarian diet.

#### **Some great veggie snack ideas:**

- Hummus with pita or veggies
- Soy yogurt or pudding
- Smoothie made with soy milk, juice and fresh or frozen fruit
- Soy cheese and crackers
- Trail mix made with nuts and dried fruit
- Soy nuts
- Apples with peanut butter or almond butter
- Whole-grain breads, bagels or muffins with nut spread or soy cheese

#### **Sources:**

Mangels, Reed. "Vegetarian Nutrition for Teenagers." *Vegetarian Resource Group*. [www.vrg.org/nutrition/teennutrition.htm](http://www.vrg.org/nutrition/teennutrition.htm)

Melina, Vesanto and Brenda Davis. *Becoming Vegetarian: The Complete Guide to Adopting a Healthy Vegetarian Diet*. Toronto: Wiley, 2003.

Palo Alto Medical Foundation. "Vegetarianism in Teens."  
[www.pamf.org/teen/health/nutrition/veggieteens.html](http://www.pamf.org/teen/health/nutrition/veggieteens.html)

#### **Some good resources for teen vegetarians:**

*Vegetarianteen.com* (Everything you ever wanted to know about veg teen life) [www.vegetarianteen.com](http://www.vegetarianteen.com)

"Becoming a Teen Vegetarian",  
[www.kidzworld.com/article/3002-becoming-a-teen-vegetarian](http://www.kidzworld.com/article/3002-becoming-a-teen-vegetarian)

"Is a Vegetarian Diet Right for Me?",  
[www.kidshealth.org/teen/food\\_fitness/nutrition/vegetarian.html](http://www.kidshealth.org/teen/food_fitness/nutrition/vegetarian.html)

"How to Be a Healthy Vegetarian: A Guide for Teens",  
[www.youngwomenshealth.org/vegetarian.html](http://www.youngwomenshealth.org/vegetarian.html)

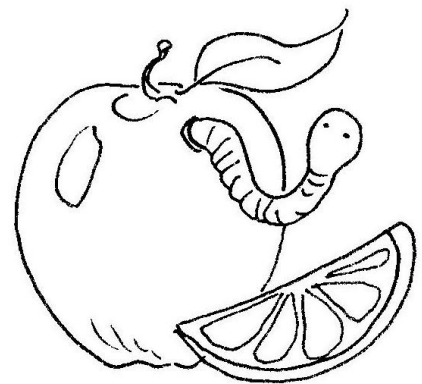
*A Teen's Guide to Going Vegetarian* by Judy Krizmanic

*Vegetables Rock!: A Complete Guide for Teenage Vegetarians* by Stephanie Pierson

*Student's Vegetarian Cookbook: Quick, Easy, Cheap, and Tasty Vegetarian Recipes* by Carole Raymond

*OK, So Now You're a Vegetarian: Advice and 100 Recipes from One Vegetarian to Another* by Lauren Butts

*Munchie Madness: Vegetarian Meals for Teens* by Dorothy Bates, Bobbie Hinman and Robert Oser



# Vegan Lasagna

## Tofu 'cheese' mixture:

- 1 pkg. tofu
- Olive oil
- Pitted olives
- Fresh basil
- Fresh garlic
- Fresh parsley

## Sauce:

- 12 oz. frozen veggie ground "beef"
- 1 jar plain vegan tomato sauce
- 4 Tbsp. sugar
- 2 Tbsp. olive oil
- Fresh basil and garlic to taste

## Filling:

- 3 cups fresh spinach, steamed
- 1 small pkg. mushrooms
- 2 Tbsp. olive oil

## Instructions:

Mash tofu. Add about 2 Tbsp. olive oil, several tablespoons diced basil and parsley, 1 Tbsp. garlic, olives. Allow to marinate several hours or overnight. Thaw ground "beef". Mix all sauce ingredients together and set aside. Toss spinach and mushrooms in oil and set aside. In a 13x9" pan, alternately layer vegan (eggless) lasagna noodles, spinach mixture, tofu mixture and sauce mixture. On final layer, place noodles, sauce mixture, fresh parsley and fresh basil. Bake at 400°F for 30 mins. Serves 6-8.

## Source:

*Vegetarianteen.com* [www.vegetarianteen.com](http://www.vegetarianteen.com)

