



# Transitioning to a plant-based diet

If you're thinking about transitioning to a plant-based diet, or simply implementing more plant-based foods into your routine, here are some pointers to help you meet your nutritional needs!

## INTRO

Whether you have decided to switch to a fully plant-based diet or are planning to eat plant-based most of the time, you are doing your body and your health a big favor! It is more than possible to thrive on a plant-based diet, but it's important to know the best sources of nutrients so that you don't lack any of the essentials.

Note: Ideally, snacks should include at least two macronutrients. Macronutrients include carbohydrate, protein, and fat.

## PROTEIN SOURCES

Contrary to popular belief, getting enough protein on a plant-based diet is extremely easy. Protein is found in legumes (beans, peas, lentils), whole grains (brown rice, oats, wheat), nuts and seeds, and in many vegetables! Although protein needs vary depending on age, physical activity level and other factors, people often get more than enough protein.

**Daily Needs:** You can get a rough estimate of your daily needs by multiplying your weight in kilograms by 0.8 to 1.0, depending on physical activity levels. For example, a 60 kg individual who works out regularly would need about 60 grams.

## BEST PLANT-BASED PROTEINS

FOOD	PROTEIN (IN GRAMS) PER SERVING	SERVING SIZE
Pea Protein	30 grams	4 tbsp
Soybeans	16 grams	¼ cup
Tofu	15 grams	3 oz
Hemp Seeds	10 grams	3 tbsp
Pumpkin Seeds	10 grams	¼ cup
Lentils	9 grams	½ cup
Edamame	9 grams	½ cup
Nut Butter	8 grams	2 tbsp
Wheat Pasta	8 grams	2 oz
Beans	8 grams	½ cup
Chickpeas	7 grams	½ cup
Nuts	6 grams	¼ cup
Sunflower Seeds	6 grams	¼ cup
Quinoa	6 grams	¼ cup
Chia Seeds	6 grams	2 tbsp
Oats	5 grams	½ cup
Brown Rice	5 grams	1 cup
Corn	5 grams	1 cup
Green Peas	4 grams	½ cup
Flax Seeds	4 grams	2 tbsp
Kale	3 grams	1 cup
Asparagus	3 grams	1 cup
Brussels Sprouts	3 grams	1 cup
Broccoli	2.5 grams	1 cup
Mushrooms	2 grams	1 cup
Nutritional Yeast	2 grams	1 tbsp

## MICRONUTRIENTS TO CONSIDER

### VITAMINS & SUPPLEMENTS

If following a fully plant-based diet (no animal products), a vitamin B12 supplement is necessary. Other vitamins are not required, unless you are on the low spectrum or deficient in a nutrient, or if recommended by your doctor or dietitian. A multivitamin may be recommended for those starting with their plant-based transition to ensure all needs are met.

#### **Vitamin B12**

**Function:** Essential for proper neurological function, DNA synthesis, and formation of red blood cells. Symptoms of deficiency include fatigue, weakness, numbness or tingling in hands and feet, and possibly depression, confusion and poor memory.

**Daily Needs:** 1.8 mcg

**Sources:** Supplements and fortified foods (nutritional yeast, cereals, milk alternatives).

#### **Iron**

**Function:** Essential for oxygen transportation from the lungs to the rest of the body. Low iron levels cause fatigue, lightheadedness, dizziness, heart palpitations, and possibly anemia.

**Daily Needs:** 18 mg females, 8 mg males

**Sources:** Nuts, legumes (beans, green peas, chickpeas, lentils), tofu, vegetables (spinach, broccoli, tomatoes), fortified foods (grains, cereals), dark chocolate.

**Tip:** Vitamin C helps with the absorption of iron.

Consume iron-rich foods with a source of vitamin C (citrus fruits, vegetables) to boost iron absorption. One example would be adding lemon juice to a spinach salad.

#### **Calcium**

**Function:** Required to maintain strong bones, muscle contraction, and proper nerve conduction between the brain and the body. Over time, low calcium levels can result in loss of bone density, increasing the risk for osteoporosis and bone fractures.

**Daily Needs:** 1,000-1,200 mg

**Sources:** Soybeans (tofu, edamame, tempeh), legumes (beans, lentils, peas), almonds, seeds (sesame, chia, flax), leafy greens (kale, turnip greens), broccoli, fortified foods (milk alternatives, cereals).

**Tip:** Vitamin D improves the absorption of calcium, so even though you may be consuming plenty of calcium-rich foods, your calcium levels could still be insufficient if your vitamin D levels are low. In that case, you may want to work on increasing vitamin D levels through sun exposure or supplementation.

#### **Omega-3**

**Function:** Essential for brain function, joint health, heart and vision. Omega-3 fatty acids are known for reducing inflammation and lowering triglyceride levels. Although fatty acid deficiency is rare, symptoms include dermatitis (skin inflammation), rough and scaly skin, hair loss, and poor wound healing.

**Daily Needs:** 1.1g females, 1.6g males

**Sources:** Flax seeds, flax oil, chia seeds, hemp seeds, walnuts, soybeans, edamame

#### **Vitamin D**

**Function:** Helps absorb calcium, which is essential for bone health. Since many Americans have low levels of vitamin D, it's important to get your levels checked to assess the need for a supplement (especially if you don't get much sun exposure). Vitamin D deficiency can result in weak bones, characterized by bone pain and muscle weakness.

**Daily Needs:** 600 IU

**Sources:** Fortified foods (milk alternatives, cereals, orange juice), sun exposure, supplements.

### EATING OUT TIPS

- **Cooking methods:** some restaurants cook foods in butter or chicken/beef stock. Ensure your food is steamed or cooked in vegetable oil.
- **Ask for modifications:** if a dish has dairy or animal protein, ask if it can be substituted with a plant source of food (vegetable, legume, grains).
- **If not many plant-based dishes are available,** check the "Sides" options. Often you should be able to make a whole meal from side orders such as rice, beans, and vegetables.
- **Don't assume people know what plant-based diets include.** With so many dietary styles out there, often people may not know the difference between vegan and vegetarian, for example. Always explain what your dietary restrictions are to ensure the server/chef knows what you can or cannot eat.