

Vegetarian Choices



An increasing number of people, whether vegetarian or meat-eater, are choosing to eat more plant-based meals. This may be for health, climate, sustainability or animal welfare reasons, but whatever the reason, catering staff have an important role in ensuring that vegetarian meals meet the nutritional needs of staff.

While vegetarian food can be highly nutritious, it can also be unhealthy depending on the ingredients and cooking methods used. Balance is the key to a healthy heart. A healthy vegetarian diet includes lots of fruit and vegetables, wholegrains, pulses (peas, beans and lentils), nuts and seeds, while making sure to provide adequate protein, iron and calcium.

Vegetarian diets can be nutritious and healthy. Just follow a few simple tips...

- Aim to offer a vegetarian choice as often as possible.
- Vegetarian meals should include a protein source, for example: chickpeas, kidney beans, black beans, butter beans, lentils, soy products (tofu, tempeh), Quorn™, eggs and nuts.
- Toasted seeds and nuts and sprouted beans go great in salads.
- Options such as vol-au-vents or spring rolls should only be offered very occasionally as pastry or deep-fried choices are high in fat.
- Milk and dairy foods are a great source of calcium and protein, but don't rely on these to replace meat and fish, as this can result in too much saturated fat, not enough iron, and not enough texture and bulk.
- Aim to include good sources of iron and calcium for vegetarians, e.g. eggs, peas, beans, lentils, nuts, seeds, dried fruit, dark green leafy vegetables like broccoli, wholemeal bread, soya foods, and cereals/milks/yogurts fortified with added iron and calcium.

Recommended serving size of protein in vegetarian dishes:

1 serving is:

- ¾ cup beans (including baked beans), peas, lentils,
- 2 eggs (medium)
- 100g/4oz soya or tofu
- 40g/1.5oz unsalted nuts or peanut butter or seeds
- 25g/1oz of low-fat cheddar or semi-soft cheese
- 25g/1oz low-fat soft cheese

The actual portion that a person eats may be bigger or smaller than the servings listed above. For example, 1 egg would count as ½ a serving.

For a healthy balanced diet people require two servings of protein per day.

Sample Vegetarian Menu

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Tofu & vegetable stir-fry with brown rice	Tuscan bean and lentil soup with a slice of wholegrain bread	Vegetable lasagne (with chickpeas or butter beans)	Vegetarian chilli con carne (kidney beans) or a bean casserole	Falafel burger with low-fat cheese, mushrooms and tomato on a wholegrain bun