

# A vegan diet will change your body for the better

## After going Vegan

- A few weeks in, you may see more energy and a change in bowel function
- After several months, acne may clear up, but vitamin D might be lacking-- Mix in 30 min a day of some kind of sunshine

Veganism, the plant-based diet which shuns meat and dairy, is having its time in the sun. Since 2008, there has been a [350% increase in the number](#) of self-described vegans in the UK alone. [Where this motivation stems from](#) is varied, but includes concerns about animal welfare, [worries about the environment](#) and religious reasons.



Soy – A new study suggests that eating plant protein can lower your risk of death, while eating meat is associated with an increased risk of death. Soy serves as a source of protein, such as in the form of tofu.



6 sources of plant-based protein. Whole grains – Whole grains include plant-based proteins. Nuts and nut butter – Nuts and nut butters, such as peanut butter or almond butter, contain plant protein.

Many people, though, seek a healthier diet. Research suggests that [veganism can have health benefits](#), if well planned. For those who have pursued a diet rich in meat and dairy for most of their lives, embarking on a vegan diet can lead to significant changes within the body.

### The first few weeks

The first thing that someone starting a vegan diet might notice is an energy boost with the removal of the processed meat that is found in many omnivorous diets, in favour of fruit, vegetables and nuts. These foods will boost your vitamin, mineral and fibre levels and thinking ahead about your meals and snacks rather than relying on convenience foods can help sustain consistent energy levels.



#### [How to make fast food healthier for vegetarians and vegans](#)

As time without animal products grows into weeks, there is likely to be a shift in bowel function either towards a more regular, healthy pattern or an increase in bloating, wind and loose motions. This is due to the higher fibre content of a vegan diet and the simultaneous increase in carbohydrates that ferment in the gut and can cause [irritable bowel syndrome](#).

#### [How does your body burn fat?](#)

This may settle eventually and could lead to [some positive changes](#) in the diversity of the bacteria in the colon, depending on whether a vegan diet is made up of processed food and refined carbohydrates or is well planned and balanced. Although not proven yet, scientists believe that a [high species diversity](#) for gut bacteria could be beneficial for the whole system, in the same way that [ecosystems are stronger](#) as a result of lots of different types of species thriving.

### Three to six months later

Several months into a vegan diet and some people may find that the increase in fruit and vegetables and reduced processed food can [help acne to clear up](#). By this point however, your stores of vitamin D might be dropping as key sources of it in our diet come from meat, fish and dairy, and it isn't always noticeable until it's too late. Vitamin D isn't well understood but it's [essential in keeping bones](#), teeth and muscles healthy and [deficiency has been linked](#) with cancer, [heart disease](#), [migraines](#) and [depression](#).



### [Is vegetarian fast food actually good for you?](#)

This is because vitamin D stores are only thought to last about two months in the body. How long your stores last will depend on the time of year that you decide to go vegan because the body can make vitamin D from sunlight. Making sure you eat [plenty of fortified foods](#) or take a supplement is important, especially in the winter months.

### [Three research-based weight loss strategies](#)

Within a few months, a well-balanced vegan diet which is low in salt and processed food may have impressive benefits for cardiovascular health, [helping to prevent](#) heart disease, stroke and reducing the risk of diabetes. As the intake of nutrients like iron, zinc and calcium are reduced on a vegan diet, our bodies get [better at absorbing them](#) from the intestine. The adaptation may be enough to prevent deficiencies in some people but not for everyone, in which case [supplements can fill the shortfall](#).

## **From six months to several years on**

Approaching a year on a vegan diet, vitamin B12 stores may become depleted. Vitamin B12 is a nutrient that is essential to the healthy functioning of blood and nerve cells and can only be found in animal products. [Symptoms of B12 deficiency](#) include breathlessness, exhaustion, poor memory and tingling in the hands and feet.

[B12 deficiency is easily prevented](#) by eating three portions of fortified food per day or taking a supplement, but managing it is very important, as any deficiency would negate the benefits of a vegan diet for [heart disease and stroke risk](#) and can cause permanent nerve and brain damage.

A few years down the line and even our bones will start to notice the change. Our skeleton is a mineral store and up until the age of 30 we can add minerals to it from our diet, but after that, [our bones can't absorb minerals anymore](#) and so getting enough calcium when we're young is vital.

### [I go to the gym every day; why can't I lose weight?](#)

After the age of 30, our bodies harvest the calcium from our skeleton for use in the body, and if we don't replenish the calcium in our blood through our diet, our bones fill the deficit and become brittle as a result.

Vegetables rich in calcium like kale and broccoli may protect bones, but many vegans don't meet their calcium requirements and there is a [30% increased risk of fracture](#) among vegans when compared to vegetarians and omnivores. [Plant-based calcium](#) is also harder to absorb and therefore supplements or plenty of fortified foods is recommended.

When contemplating the years ahead on a vegan diet, balance is key. Well-balanced vegan diets may have major health benefits. Many of those benefits can be offset by deficiencies if the diet isn't managed carefully, but supermarkets and food outlets are making it easier than ever to enjoy a varied and exciting vegan diet and [our appetite for meat overall is declining](#). With the right preparation, a vegan diet can be good for human health.

## Is Vegan Fast Food healthy ?

Plant-based diets have been associated with many health benefits, including a reduced risk of obesity, heart disease and Type 2 diabetes. So it might naturally follow that vegetarian fast food, which is inherently plant-based, would be more nutritionally appealing than its traditional relatives.

The truth is that, although the notion works in many cases, it's not a guiding food principle you can count on.

"Just because a restaurant or fast food menu item says it's vegetarian or vegan, it doesn't mean that it's automatically 'healthy.' It can have just as much, if not more, calories, saturated fat and sodium as non-vegetarian options," said Sharon Palmer, a registered dietitian and author of "Plant-Powered for Life."

It makes sense. After all, ingredients contribute calories, whether plant-based or not. And while fiber and protein can be higher in vegetarian meals, thanks to plentiful amounts of beans, vegetables and whole grains, so can things such as saturated fat and sodium, depending on how the food is prepared (fried vs. grilled, for example) and the amount of cheese and condiments a meal contains.

"Vegetarian and vegan food options that are deep-fried, covered in cheese or creamy sauces and piled over huge portions of fries, rice, wraps or breads may not be the healthiest option on the menu," Palmer said.

### [How to make fast food healthier for vegetarians and vegans](#)

For example, Veggie Grill's Fala-Full sandwich -- two pitas filled with falafel, hummus, pepperoncini and schug and tzatziki sauces, with a side of tabbouleh --- has 1,100 calories, 10 grams of saturated fat and more than a day's worth of sodium (2,380 milligrams). That's more than double the calories, 2½ times the sodium and the same amount of saturated fat as a McDonald's Big Mac. (A Big Mac has 540 calories, 950 milligrams of sodium and 10 grams of saturated fat).

On the other hand, the Veggie Grill's grilled "chickin' " sandwich made with soybean, wheat and pea-based protein has only 530 calories, 900 milligrams of sodium and 3 grams of saturated fat.

The takeaway: Menu items can vary widely, depending on the type and amount of ingredients used, and sauces and deep frying will contribute extra calories, fat and sodium. Speaking of burgers, the Amy Burger at Amy's Drive Thru -- a meat-free fast food restaurant with ambition to expand to other markets, owned by the company that makes Amy's vegetarian supermarket foods nationwide -- includes two veggie patties with cheese and sauce. The burger has 770 calories, 10 grams of saturated fat, 33 grams of protein, 9 grams

of fiber and 1,420 milligrams of sodium. Veggie Grill's Beyond Burger with a single patty has more saturated fat (13 grams) and the same amount of sodium as Amy's.



### [Is a vegetarian diet really more environmentally friendly than eating meat?](#)

Surprisingly, the McDonald's Big Mac has fewer calories and less sodium than both veggie burgers, and it has less saturated fat than Veggie Grill's single-patty veggie burger (10 grams).

Still, both veggie burgers have more fiber, and Amy's has more protein than Mickey D's Big Mac, which can keep you feeling full. Plus, Amy's ingredients -- aside from being meat-free -- are locally sourced and organic, all of which may be more important than nutrition numbers, especially for those who don't need to be counting them.

Veggie Grill's Mondo Nachos, for another example, made with "chickin' " and "queso chorizo" sauce, have more than 900 calories, 7 grams of saturated fat and almost 1,600 milligrams of sodium. By comparison, Taco Bell's BellGrande nachos with beef have fewer calories (760), slightly less saturated fat (6 grams) and less sodium (1,290 milligrams). Once again, however, the Grill's has more protein and fiber.



### [McDonald's best menu picks, by a nutritionist](#)

It's important to remember that not all beef tacos are created equal. Del Taco's queso loaded nachos with beef top the list, with more than 1,000 calories, a day's worth of saturated fat and over 2,000 milligrams of sodium.

When it comes to mac and cheese, both Amy's Drive Thru and Veggie Grill's vegan versions have less sodium, more fiber and a lot less saturated fat than Panera's small traditional version, though Panera's packs much more protein.

As with other menu items, the nutritional contributions of salads are a direct reflection of the ingredients used, so it's difficult to make broad generalizations. For example, Veggie

Grill's All Hail Kale salad and Amy's Super Salad with tofu, hummus, quinoa and roasted pumpkin seeds are nutritional winners, but a falafel-containing salad at Veggie Grill is going to have a lot more calories, sodium and fat.

Then again, that's really the takeaway message for all menu items, whether they are vegetarian, vegan or neither. That is, a meal is only as healthy as its ingredients.

So just because a food is "vegetarian" or "vegan" doesn't guarantee that it's a nutritionally superior option. French fries may be vegetarian, but that doesn't mean they should fill your plate on a regular basis.

Palmer recommends looking for options that include plenty of vegetables, such as salads, bowls or wraps; whole grains, such as quinoa or whole-grain bread; and simple protein options, like beans or a veggie burger patty. She also advises "going easy on sauces, creams and cheeses," which makes good health sense, whether you choose to eat vegetarian or not



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