

Does a balanced diet require meat?



If you're thinking of going vegetarian, you may be concerned that you won't get the nutrients you need to be healthy. However, there are plenty of meat-free ways to get protein, calcium and iron regularly into your diet.

Protein

Meat is a popular source of protein, but you can remove it from your diet without sacrificing this nutrient. Men need about 56 grams of protein per day; women need about 46 grams. Children need between 19 and 34 grams daily.

For alternatives to getting protein from meat, try:

- Lentils (24 grams per cup, cooked)
- Chickpeas (10 grams per cup, cooked)
- Barley (10 grams per cup, cooked)

Calcium

Most people need about 1,000 mg of calcium daily. Children and older adults may need more. Calcium-fortified products can help.

For calcium, try:

- Collard greens (400 mg per cup, cooked)
- Fortified tofu (400 mg per cup)
- Fortified orange juice (300 mg per cup)

Iron

Iron is another key nutrient that you can get from sources other than meat. Adult women who have not yet reached menopause need about 18 mg of iron daily; most others need about 8 mg.

Here are some iron-rich vegetarian choices:

- Spinach (6 mg per cup, cooked)
- Large potato, unpeeled (3.2 mg)
- Cashews (2 mg per ounce)

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Source: WebMD®

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