

Specific Nutrients for Vegetarian Pregnancies

Protein

You will probably get lots of questions about whether or not you are getting enough protein. Current recommendations for protein in pregnancy call for 25 grams more of protein per day in the second and third trimesters for a total of 71 grams of protein

One study showed that the average non-pregnant vegan woman was eating 65 grams of protein daily, almost enough to meet the needs during pregnancy. If your diet is varied and contains good protein sources such as soy products, beans, and grains, and you are gaining weight, you can relax and not worry about getting enough protein. Many women simply get the extra protein they need by eating more of the foods they usually eat. As an example, you can add 25 grams of protein to your usual diet by adding 1-1/2 cups of lentils or tofu, 2-1/2 cups of milk.

Calcium and Vitamin D

Vegans also get lots of questions about calcium. Both calcium and vitamin D are needed for the development of the baby's bones and teeth. There is some evidence that pregnant women adapt to low calcium intakes and increased needs by increasing calcium absorption and reducing calcium losses ⁶. This certainly is worthy of additional study and may be pertinent to vegans whose diets may be low in calcium. However, for the time being, calcium intakes of 1300 milligrams daily are recommended for women 18 and younger and of 1000 milligrams daily for women 19 through 50 ⁷. Pregnant vegans should make a special effort to have 8 or more servings of calcium-rich foods daily.

Pregnant women who have regular sunlight exposure do not need any extra vitamin D ^{7,8}. However, if there is any question as to whether or not your sun exposure is adequate, 5 micrograms (200 IU) of dietary and/or supplemental vitamin D is recommended ⁷. Supplements of vitamin D should only be used with the approval of your health care provider since high doses of vitamin D can be toxic. Fortified foods like some brands of soy milk and orange juice and some cereals are another way to meet vitamin D needs.

Iron

Iron deficiency anemia is not uncommon during pregnancy, whether vegan or non-vegetarian. Iron needs are much higher than usual in pregnancy because of the increase in the amount of the mother's blood and because of blood formed for the baby. Iron supplements of 30 milligrams daily during the second and third trimester are commonly recommended along with iron-rich foods ³. Additional iron may be needed in case of iron deficiency. Iron supplements should not be taken with calcium supplements and should be taken between meals in order to maximize absorption. Even when iron supplements are used, pregnant vegans should choose high iron foods like whole grains, dried beans, tofu, and green leafy vegetables daily and ensure that you are having a good source of vitamin C, e.g. fruit or juice to enhance iron absorption.

Vitamin B₁₂

The regular use of vitamin B₁₂ supplements or fortified foods is recommended for all pregnant vegans. Vitamin B₁₂ plays an important role in the developing fetus. Fortified foods include some breakfast cereals, some soy milks, and Red Star Vegetarian Support Formula nutritional yeast. If you are drinking milk or having eggs, your B 12 needs are being met.

Folate

Folate has been in the news because of its connection with a type of birth defect called neural tube defect. Studies have shown that women who have infants with neural tube defects have lower intakes of folate and lower blood folate levels than other women. Folate is needed early in pregnancy (before many women know they are pregnant) for normal neural tube development. Many vegan foods including enriched bread, pasta, and cold cereal; dried beans; green leafy vegetables; and orange juice are good sources of folate. Vegan diets tend to be high in folate, however, to be on the safe side, women capable of becoming pregnant should take a supplement or use fortified foods that provide 400 micrograms of folate daily.

Docosahexaenoic Acid (DHA)

DHA is a type of fat that is mainly found in fatty fish. It seems to be important in the development of the brain and the retina, a part of the eye. Some DHA can be made from another fat called linolenic acid that is found in flaxseed, flaxseed oil, canola oil, walnuts, and soybeans. Choosing these foods regularly and avoiding foods containing trans-fats that can interfere with DHA production, can help to enhance DHA production. Some women may opt to use a vegan DHA supplement produced from microalgae.

Iodine

Pregnant vegans should use iodized salt at the table or in cooking to insure adequate iodine intake. Slightly more than half a teaspoon of iodized salt meets iodine needs in pregnancy while the iodine needs of breast-feeding women can be met by $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon of iodized salt. Other options are a low-dose iodine supplement (check - iodine may already be in your prenatal supplement at 100% of the Daily Value, and, if it is, additional iodine is not needed) or limited use of sea vegetables.

Table 2: Sample Menu Plan for Pregnant Vegans

Breakfast:

1/2 cup oatmeal with maple syrup
1 slice whole wheat toast with fruit spread
1 cup EdenSoy Extra soy milk
1/2 cup calcium and vitamin D fortified orange juice

Snack:

1/2 whole wheat bagel with margarine
Banana

Lunch:

Veggie burger on whole wheat bun with mustard and catsup
1 cup steamed collard greens
Medium apple
1 cup EdenSoy Extra soy milk

Snack:

3/4 cup ready-to-eat cereal with 1/2 cup blueberries
1 cup EdenSoy Extra soy milk

Dinner:

3/4 cup tofu stir-fried with 1 cup vegetables
1 cup brown rice
Medium orange

Snack:

Whole grain crackers with 2 Tbsp peanut butter
4 ounces apple juice

Nutritional analysis of sample menu

	RDA/AI
2240 calories	
100 grams protein (18% of calories)	71 grams
55 grams fat (22% of calories)	
336 grams carbohydrate (60% of calories)	
1688 mg calcium	1000 mg
32.5 mg iron	49 mg (supplemental iron may be needed to meet the iron RDA for vegetarians)
11.2 mg zinc	11 mg
2.1 mg thiamin	1.4 mg
1.4 mg riboflavin	1.4 mg
23.1 mg niacin	18 mg
9 mcg vitamin B ₁₂	2.6 mcg
4.2 mcg vitamin D	5 mcg (supplement/sun exposure indicated)
850 mcg folate	600 mcg

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