

# Considerations for plant-based diets



Plant-based diets have been growing in popularity for several years for reasons including environmental impact, animal welfare, and/or personal health concerns. Plant-based eating patterns focus on foods primarily from plants, such as fruits and vegetables, nuts, seeds, oils, whole grains, legumes, and beans. While a plant-based diet can include being vegetarian and vegan, it doesn't necessarily mean that you never eat meat or dairy. You are simply choosing to make your diet consist of more plant-based foods. Here are some tips for a healthy plant-based lifestyle:

- **Add plant-based protein.** Protein is an important building block of bones, muscles, cartilage, and skin. Your body also uses it to build and repair tissue. Many legumes, nuts, and seeds are protein-rich and can be eaten as an alternative to the protein found in meat.
- **Consider a vitamin B-12 supplement.** Vitamin B-12 is needed to form DNA and red blood cells, and is vital in the function and development of brain and nerve cells. Deficiency in this vitamin can cause fatigue, nausea, or anemia. Few plant foods contain vitamin B-12, so a supplement may be needed if you are not regularly consuming meat.
- **Enrich your diet with calcium and vitamin D.** Your body needs calcium to maintain strong bones, while your heart, muscles, and nerves require calcium to function properly. Calcium-fortified plant-based milks, leafy greens (e.g., kale and spinach), almonds, and tofu can be great sources of calcium. Additionally, vitamin D, which aids in calcium absorption, can be taken in supplement form.
- **Choose whole grains more often.** While white rice and white bread are both plant-based foods, they are depleted in beneficial nutrients and are high glycemic, which means they can make your blood sugar spike, increase hunger, and lead to overeating. Beneficial plant-based whole grains include quinoa, barley, bulgur, millet, and amaranth.
- **Beware of additives in plant-based products.** Plant-based products such as soy-based meat alternatives may contain preservatives, additives, and salt, which can all contribute to the development of several chronic diseases. Remember to review nutrition labels and choose products with ingredients you recognize.
- **Drink more water.** Vegetables are rich in fiber, which can cause bloating and gas without sufficient water intake. Aim to drink plenty of water throughout the day to avoid these symptoms. Nonetheless, fiber has incredible health benefits, and plant-based eating has been found to help individuals meet their minimum daily fiber requirements when compared to individuals that consume a diet higher in meat products.