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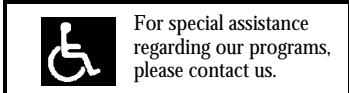
VEGETARIAN FOOD GUIDE PYRAMID

The Food Guide Pyramid is an excellent guide for most consumers. But what about the vegetarian population, or those wanting to become vegetarian? The following is a summary of an article recently published, providing recommendations for a Vegetarian Food Guide Pyramid.

The food guide pyramid for vegetarians differs from the standard food guide pyramid in that it has foods that are designated to an "optional" group of categories. This was done to take into account the fact that not all vegetarians are vegans (people who abstain from ingesting all forms of animal products). At the base of the triangular shaped pyramid are the five major plant-based food groups: Whole Grains and Legumes; Fruits and Vegetables; and Nuts/Seeds. The optional food groups are Vegetable Oils, followed by Dairy and Eggs, with Sweets forming the tip of the pyramid. A statement proclaiming the necessity of vitamin B-12 from either supplements or enriched foods is included at the bottom of the pyramid for people who are vegans.

A healthy vegetarian diet requires a variety and abundance of plant foods. Eating a variety of foods from all the plant groups in amounts needed to meet energy needs each day could provide all nutrients needed by human except for vitamin B-12 and, possibly, vitamin D. On the other hand, diets containing ample plant foods are low in total fat and saturated fat and high in fiber, folate, antioxidants (vitamin C, vitamin E, and carotenoids), as well as various phytochemicals and protective compounds.

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The proposed vegetarian food guide pyramid emphasizes unrefined and minimally processed foods, because they contain more vitamins, minerals, and dietary fiber than do refined and processed foods. Whole grains have been associated with a lower risk of heart disease, some cancers and diabetes. Vegetarian diets that include dairy products, eggs, or both furnish the nutrients required by healthy adults, with no need for routine dietary supplementation. But due to the high fat and saturated fat found in these foods, nonfat and low-fat products is emphasized on the proposed model.

Not all-vegetarian diets are low in fat. The fat intake of vegetarians can vary widely from 15-40% of total daily intake. Many newcomers to vegetarian diets rely too much on cheese as a meat substitute and can have diets high in saturated fat. However, well-planned diets contain mostly monosaturated or unsaturated fat. Nuts and seeds are the most commonly consumed foods contributing to the intake of unsaturated fat.

Studies have shown that vegetarian diets, following the proper guidelines, can promote adequate growth and development and meet the nutritional needs of healthy individuals throughout life. It has also been shown that vegetarians have lower rates of heart disease, diabetes, cancer and other chronic conditions than in the general population. Vegetarian diets are also associated with lower body weight and lower blood pressure.

Summarized from: American Journal of Clinical Nutrition 99(70 suppl):645S-619S, 1999.

Source: eFOOD RAP , Volume 10, Number 8, May 2, 2000, Rebecca J. Bryant <http://www.cfs.purdue.edu/extension/efr/efrframe.htm>

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