



It is possible to eat a well-balanced vegetarian diet but as an athlete, you need to consider a few additional things. Meat & fish are excellent sources of protein, iron, vitamins & fatty acids essential for health & performance. Choosing to be vegetarian simply means you need to use plant sources to meet these needs.

PROTEIN

Protein is abundant in animal proteins e.g. red meat & poultry. It is therefore important to ensure you consume enough protein as a vegetarian from plant sources (20-25 g per meal). Protein has many functions:

- Muscle growth & repair
- Hormones to control appetite & growth
- Enzymes involved in food breakdown
- Haemoglobin which carries oxygen in the blood
- Collagen makes up hair, nails & connective tissues

20 amino acids (AAs) make up the building blocks of protein
8 AAs can't be produced by the adult body & hence need to be consumed in the diet
Vegetarians can obtain sufficient protein if they eat a varied diet
Cereals & legumes provide different AAs & hence eating both food sources are commonly known as complementary proteins. You don't need to eat these in the same meal



IRON

Essential for healthy blood, muscles, nerves, digestion & energy levels. Main source of iron is red meat & so you must ensure you find this important mineral elsewhere.

You need 8-15 mg/d.

Good sources include tofu, pulses, fortified cereals, green leafy vegetables, nuts, sprouted beans/seeds & dried apricots/dates/raisins.



VITAMIN B12

Essential for healthy blood & growth. Helps keep eyes, brain & nervous system functioning optimally. Good sources include dairy, fortified cereals & yeast extract.



Omega 3 & 6

Essential for health & the normal functioning of the brain, respiratory, circulatory & immune systems. Omega 3 can help to reduce inflammation & muscle soreness. Food sources include flaxseed, hempseed, rapeseed & walnuts. Other sources include green leafy vegetables, eggs, seeds, soya beans & maize.

