

# ASK Anya



*Anya Todd is a vegan registered and licensed dietitian who recently accepted a position at Rainbow Babies & Children's Hospital in Cleveland. She looks forward to teaching youngsters about the benefits of eating their fruits & vegetables.*

**Q** • What are the top 5 nutrition-packed staples vegans should have in their kitchens?

*For a well-balanced vegan diet, the following items are pantry "must haves":*

## KALE

This vegetable seems to be everywhere these days, and for good reason. Kale is part of the cruciferous family, which also includes broccoli and cauliflower. Packed full of antioxidants and rich in vitamins and minerals, like vitamin A and calcium, kale is as nutritionally rich as it is versatile. Kale can as easily work in a green smoothie as it can in a stir-fry. I encourage at least one serving (which is a cup raw or a half cup cooked) of the dark green veggie on a daily basis.

## VITAMIN B12

In any way, shape or form, I cannot stress enough the importance of having a reliable source of this powerhouse vitamin in your diet.

*Vitamin B12 is essential for healthy blood, and a healthy heart and brain.*

There is no plant source that provides us with enough vitamin B12, so be sure to take a supplement or consume vitamin B12-fortified foods like non-dairy beverages, Red Star nutritional yeast, cereals, and mock meats.

The daily recommended vitamin B12 intake for adults is 2.4 mcg. If you opt for fortified foods, 2-3 servings per day will typically provide your daily dose. Supplements can vary in strength, so choose between 25 and 100 mcg pills daily, or a 1,000 mcg pill 2-3 times per week.

## BLACKSTRAP MOLASSES

Perhaps your only experience with blackstrap molasses has been in gingerbread or baked beans. You probably never gave much thought to it, but blackstrap molasses is an excellent source of iron and calcium. A tablespoon provides almost 20% of the recommended daily allowance of both. Add it to hot cereals, smoothies and baked goods, stir it into nut butter, or even dilute it in hot tea.

## BEANS

Talk about a plethora of shapes, colors and tastes! From the ordinary chickpea to the uncommon adzuki, beans are chock-full of nutrition. Protein is often thought of as the main nutrient in beans, but they are also rich

in fiber and iron. Plus, they don't cost much, and are low in fat. Depending on the variety of bean, they are wonderful for easy dishes like dips, soups, salads, and casseroles.

## OMEGA-3 FATTY ACID

Like vitamin B12, omega-3 fatty acid is an essential nutrient found in a few fantastic foods. Just a small handful of walnut halves (about 7-9) or a tablespoon of ground flaxseed provides the suggested daily dose. Sprinkle ground flaxseed onto salads, stir it into oatmeal, or blend it into a smoothie for a nutrient-packed treat.

*Omega-3 fatty acid may reduce the risk of chronic conditions, such as cardiovascular disease, joint pain and inflammation throughout the body.*

This nutrient also plays a major role in mental functioning (memory, concentration, and problem solving), and for this reason is often called "brain food."