

Ask Anya

Anya Todd is a vegan registered and licensed dietitian who graduated from Case Western Reserve University and completed her internship at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation. Active in animal rights for nearly 20 years, Anya resides in Ohio with her vegan boyfriend and not-quite-vegan animal companions. Though she follows a well-balanced diet, she never turns down a plate of vegan french toast, especially if topped with strawberries and bananas. Here, Anya answers your pressing questions about vegan health and nutrition.



Q: **How much protein do I need, and is it possible to get enough through a plant-based diet?**

A: Protein intake is a common concern and often a misunderstood issue when speaking with regard to a vegan diet. Its function in the body is to assist with cell growth and repair, as well as assist in immunity and hormone production. The daily human body requirement is approximately 0.8-1 gram of protein per kilogram of body weight (To get kilograms, just divide your weight by 2.2). Therefore, a healthy person weighing 130lbs would require approximately 60grams of protein per day. Please note that these requirements vary through life stages (childhood, pregnancy, lactation).

In today's society, we tend to have the mentality that one can never have too much of anything – and this applies to protein as well. Though the Atkins craze is slowing, Americans still consume considerably more protein than what is recommended. Excessive amounts of animal protein have been linked to osteoporosis and kidney disease. There are a variety of plant foods that can provide substantial amounts of protein without the cholesterol and saturated fat that is offered in animal protein. Soy, seitan, quinoa (a grain), beans, and nuts are just a few of these protein powerhouses. There is no need to worry about the issue of 'complementary proteins' in order to ensure you are getting all your essential amino acids. That is far too complicated and eating should not be complicated. A well-varied vegan diet can provide your body with the protein it needs. Now go enjoy that tofu stir-fry without any worries!

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Q: **If I do not consume dairy products, how can I get the calcium I need?**

A: Despite what the dairy industry claims, milk is not the only way to obtain calcium and maintain strong bones and teeth. There are many plant sources that will supply calcium while leaving out the cholesterol and saturated fat found in the milk from animals. It is recommended for the average adult under 50 to consume approximately 1000mg of calcium per day. For those people over 50, the amount increases to 1200mg per day.

Luckily, more common foods in a vegan diet are being fortified – everything from soymilk to orange juice to granola bars now provides an ample amount of calcium. An 8-oz glass of fortified soymilk or rice milk provides 300mg. Tofu processed with calcium can provide 250mg in a 4 oz. serving. Blackstrap molasses, soy yogurt, and collard greens are also excellent sources. Like any other nutrient, calcium is best obtained by eating a variety of foods. A vegan who lives on a diet based heavily on Swedish Fish and coffee is sure to run the risk of a deficiency. So, if you think you would benefit from a calcium supplement, it is important to note this mineral is best absorbed in amounts of 500mg or less.



For one-stop vegan health info, recipes, tips, and videos, check out ChooseVeg.com. A vegan food pyramid, cancer-fighting recipes, and videos on preventing disease through plant-based foods are all just a click away.