



# VEG OUT & POWER ON

## BLOG #2: DOES THE NUTRITION STOCK UP?

Recent healthy eating guidelines (Ireland and UK) advise that meat (in particular red and processed meat) and processed meat should be reduced and replaced with plant based proteins including beans, pulses and plant based dairy alternatives. These guidelines recommend increasing fruit and vegetables, wholegrain carbohydrates and reducing saturated fat, sugar and salt intakes.

However it is important to remember that meat and fish are important nutrient sources in the diet, rich in protein, vitamins and minerals (iron, zinc, B vitamins, Omega 3). In addition, dairy is a unique package of essential nutrients. Dairy is a source of high biological value protein (for muscle function) and calcium (for bone health). How can you ensure you are getting all of the nutrients, vitamins and minerals you require while following a plant based diet?

One of the main benefits of a plant based diet is the tendency to be rich in a variety of nutrients including fibre, vitamins A, C and E, thiamine, riboflavin and folate. If you chose to follow a plant-forward diet, here are some specific nutrients to consider to ensure your diet is nutritionally complete.

### Plant Protein

Protein functions in the body in building and repair of body tissues. The general population require around 0.8-1.0g of protein per kg body weight per day.

Amino acids are the building blocks of protein. While meat and dairy (animal protein sources) contain all of the essential amino acid proteins that your body needs, plant proteins tend to be lacking in some of the essential amino acids. Therefore if you are following a plant based diet, it is essential that you eat a variety of plant proteins each day. Soya products offer a good alternative to meat protein, with soya products shown through research to have beneficial effects on heart (cardiovascular) health.

As an indicator, the following foods contain 20g protein:

- 3 medium eggs
- 1 large can (400g) baked beans
- 300g kidney beans
- 2 handfuls (100g) unsalted nuts or seeds
- 6 ½ tablespoons (165g) quorn mince

## Calcium

Calcium is a mineral essential for bone health combined with weight-bearing exercise and vitamin D. When choosing dairy alternatives check out the nutritional content, ensuring the product is calcium fortified and unsweetened. Plant sources of calcium include: dried fruit e.g. figs, nuts e.g. almonds, peas, beans and leafy green vegetables.

## Omega 3

These are essential fatty acids important for your health (heart and joint health, eye and brain development) and are commonly found in oily fish. Plant based foods are less reliable sources of omega 3 fatty acids.

However, if you are not eating fish, plant sources include walnuts, flax/linseeds, rapeseed, hemp seeds, chia seeds and soya beans. If you wish to use omega 3 supplements, it is best to consult your dietitian or your doctor as many supplements also contain vitamin A which can be dangerous if taken in very large quantities. Algae based supplements are also available for vegan/vegetarians.

## Iron

Insufficient iron intake can result in tiredness and anaemia. The form of iron available in plants (non-haem) is less well absorbed than that found in meat (haem). Plant sources of iron include green leafy vegetables, wholegrains, seeds, nuts, pulses (peas, beans) and lentils. Food rich in vitamin C (e.g. citrus fruits, broccoli), can help with the absorption of plant based iron.

## Vitamin B12

An essential vitamin for metabolism and red blood cell formation. The main sources of B12 are red meat and dairy, however nutritional yeasts, breakfast cereals, and meat alternatives may be fortified.

**A well planned plant based diet can be nutritionally complete, it just needs a little planning to ensure you get all the nutrients needed for a healthy balanced diet. Have you tried 'Plant Market' vegan and vegetarian dishes in our restaurants?**

**If you liked this blog follow us on**

 [@\\_healthyforlife](https://twitter.com/_healthyforlife)

 [@Healthyforlife\\_ne](https://www.instagram.com/Healthyforlife_ne)

For all of our wellbeing blogs created fortnightly by Aramark Dietitians and Nutritionists.