

***Beginner's  
Guide to  
Plant-  
Based  
Eating***



# Appendix

|   |                |
|---|----------------|
| <b>Protein in Plant-Based Diets .....</b>                         | <b>Pg 1</b>    |
| <b>Key Amino Acids for Vegans .....</b>                           | <b>Pg 2</b>    |
| <b>Whole Soy Foods .....</b>                                      | <b>Pg 3</b>    |
| <b>Beans, Lentils, and Chickpeas: Tips for Easy Digestion....</b> | <b>Pg 4</b>    |
| <b>Calcium .....</b>  | <b>Pg 5</b>    |
| <b>Iron .....</b>   | <b>Pg 6</b>    |
| <b>Zinc .....</b>   | <b>Pg 7</b>    |
| <b>Iodine .....</b>   | <b>Pg 8</b>    |
| <b>Healthy Fats .....</b>   | <b>Pg 9–10</b> |
| <b>Vitamin B12 .....</b>  | <b>Pg 11</b>   |
| <b>How to Replace Dairy Milk and Half-and-Half .....</b>          | <b>Pg 12</b>   |
| <b>Plant-Based Cheese .....</b>                                   | <b>Pg 13</b>   |
| <b>Plant-Based Yogurt, Heavy Cream, and Ice Cream .....</b>       | <b>Pg 14</b>   |
| <b>Common Vegan Egg Replacements .....</b>                        | <b>Pg 15</b>   |
| <b>Specialty Vegan Egg Replacements .....</b>                     | <b>Pg 16</b>   |
| <b>Recommended Plant-Based Recipe Resources .....</b>             | <b>Pg 17</b>   |

# Protein in Plant-Based Diets

## What Are Amino Acids and Why Do They Matter?

Amino acids are the **building blocks of protein**, which your body needs to grow, heal, and stay strong. There are 20 amino acids, and 9 of them are essential, meaning your body can't make them and you must get them from food.

The good news is that by eating a variety of plant-based foods, you can get all the essential amino acids your body needs to stay healthy (Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, EatRight.org).

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## Daily Protein Recommendations

- Adults under 60: **0.36** grams/pound
- Adults over 60: **0.45** grams/pound
- Athletes: **0.6–0.8** grams/pound

**Example:** If you weigh 180 lbs and are over 60:

$0.45 \times 180 = \mathbf{81 \text{ g of protein/day}}$

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## Average Protein Content Per Serving (grams)

- **Beans/Lentils/Chickpeas:** (*1/2 cup cooked*): 10 g
- **Tofu** (*1/2 cup*): 10–20 g
- **Soy milk** (*1 cup*): 6–11 g
- **Tempeh** (*1/2 cup*): 16 g
- **Nuts & Seeds** (*1/4 cup*): 5 g
- **Grains** (*1/2 cup cooked/1 slice bread*): 3.5 g
- **Vegetables** (*1/2 cup*): 1.6 g
- **Fruits** (*1/2 cup*): 0.8 g
- **Processed plant-based meats:** 10–20 g
- **Plant-based protein shakes:** 10–20g

## *Key Amino Acids for Vegans*

| <b>Lysine</b>   | <b>Tryptophan</b>                                       |
|---|---|
| <b>Function:</b> helps build protein and repair tissues             | <b>Function:</b> supports mood, sleep and tissue health |
| <b>Daily Recommendation:</b><br>14 mg per pound of body weight      | Daily Recommendation:<br>200-400 mg/day                 |
| <b>Example:</b> a 180 lb person needs $14 \times 180 = 2520$ mg/day |   |
| <b>Average Content per Serving:</b>                                 | <b>Average Content per Serving:</b>                     |
| <b>Beans/Lentils/Chickpeas</b> (½ cup cooked): 594 mg               | <b>Beans/Lentils/Chickpeas</b> (½ cup cooked): 111mg    |
| <b>Tempeh</b> (½ cup): 800 mg                                       | <b>Tempeh</b> (½ cup): 200 mg                           |
| <b>Tofu</b> (½ cup): 700 mg   | <b>Tofu</b> (½ cup): 230 mg                             |
| <b>Grains</b> (½ cup cooked or 1 slice bread): 119 mg               | <b>Grains</b> (½ cup cooked or 1 slice bread): 40 mg    |
| <b>Nuts and seeds</b> (¼ cup): 219 mg                               | <b>Nuts and seeds</b> (¼ cup): 85 mg                    |
| <b>Vegetables</b> (½ cup): 80 mg                                    | <b>Vegetables</b> (½ cup): 19 mg                        |
| <b>Fruit</b> (½ cup): 40 mg   | <b>Fruit</b> (½ cup): 10 mg                             |

# **The Power of Soy:**

## **Complete Proteins from Plant-Based Sources**

### **What Are Soy Foods?**

Tofu, soy milk, edamame, and tempeh are examples of soy foods, which come from soy beans.

### **Nutritional Benefits:**

- Packed with **protein** and provide all **essential amino acids**.
- Rich in important **vitamins** and **minerals**.
- Offer similar nutrition to **protein from consuming animals**, making them an excellent replacement.

### **Health Benefits:**

Soy foods may help lower the risk of breast cancer and heart disease (American Cancer Society).

### **Daily Recommendations:**

**2-4 servings** of soy foods per day.

**click below for a complete guide to cooking tofu:**

<https://rainbowplantlife.com/guide-to-tofu/>

# Beans, Lentils, and Chickpeas:

## Tips for Easy Digestion

### Start Small:

- Begin with small portions and gradually increase. This allows your body to develop the bacteria needed to digest the sugars in beans that can sometimes cause gas.

### Easier Options:

- **Split peas** and **lentils** are often easier to digest than other beans.

### Tips for Reducing Gas:

#### For Canned Beans:

Cook them in their liquid for 10 minutes, then thoroughly rinse before eating.

#### For Dry Beans:

Soak for at least 12 hours, discard the water before cooking.

☀ Beans, lentils, and chickpeas are rich in **protein, fiber, zinc,** and **iron**, making them a nutritious addition to any meal. They support heart health, digestion, and energy levels, and they're easy to use in soups, salads, stews, and more. With their many benefits, they're a simple way to boost your health.

# Calcium

Supports:

 Strong bones and teeth

 Muscle function

 Nerve signaling

 Blood clotting

 Enzyme activity

Daily Recommendation for Adults: **1000mg**

## Top Plant-Based Sources

- **Fortified plant-based milk** (soy, almond, etc., 1 cup) – **300–450 mg**
- **Tofu** (firm, with calcium sulfate, ½ cup) – **350 mg**
- **Collard greens** (cooked, 1 cup) – **268 mg**
- **Kale** (cooked, 1 cup) – **177 mg**
- **Chia seeds** (2 tablespoons) – **179 mg**
- **Almonds** (1 ounce) – **76 mg**
- **Blackstrap molasses** (1 tablespoon) – **172 mg**
- **Broccoli** (cooked, 1 cup) – **62 mg**
- **Fortified orange juice** (1 cup) – **300 mg**
- **Bok choy** (cooked, 1 cup) – **158 mg**
- **Figs** (dried, 5 medium) – **68 mg**
- **Tempeh** (1 cup) – **184 mg**
- **Navy beans** (cooked, 1 cup) – **126 mg**
- **Sunflower seeds** (1 ounce) – **20 mg**
- **Tahini** (2 tablespoons) – **128 mg**
- **Sesame seeds** (1 tablespoon) – **88 mg**
- **Edamame** (cooked, 1 cup) – **98 mg**
- **Turnip greens** (cooked, 1 cup) – **197 mg**

# Iron

Supports:

- ♥ Producing red blood cells
- 👉 Transporting oxygen
- ⚡ Supporting energy levels
- 🛡 Boosting immune function

## Daily Recommendation:

Men and postmenopausal women: **14mg**

Women of childbearing age: **32mg**

## Top Plant-Based Sources

**Lentils** (cooked, 1 cup) – **6.6 mg**

**Spinach** (cooked, 1 cup) – **6.4 mg**

**Chickpeas** (cooked, 1 cup) – **4.7 mg**

**Tofu** (firm, ½ cup) – **3.4 mg**

**Quinoa** (cooked, 1 cup) – **2.8 mg**

**Pumpkin seeds** (1 ounce) – **2.5 mg**

**Black beans** (cooked, 1 cup) – **3.6 mg**

**Fortified cereals** (1 serving) – **8–18 mg (varies by brand)**

**Chia seeds** (2 tablespoons) – **2.2 mg**

**Cashews** (1 ounce) – **1.9 mg**

**Potatoes** (baked with skin, 1 medium) – **1.9 mg**

**Edamame** (cooked, 1 cup) – **2.3 mg**

**Swiss chard** (cooked, 1 cup) – **4 mg**

**Sunflower seeds** (1 ounce) – **1.4 mg**

**Tahini** (2 tablespoons) – **2.6 mg**

**Dried apricots** (½ cup) – **1.7 mg**

**Nutritional yeast** (fortified, 1 tablespoon) – **2 mg**

💡 Tip: Pair these foods with vitamin C-rich options (like oranges, bell peppers, or tomatoes) to maximize absorption!



# Zinc

Supports:



Cell division



Boosting the immune system



Aiding in wound healing

## Daily Recommendation:

Men: **11 mg**

Women: **8 mg**

## Top Plant-Based Sources

**Pumpkin seeds** (1 ounce) – **2.9 mg**

**Hemp seeds** (3 tablespoons) – **3 mg**

**Chia seeds** (2 tablespoons) – **1 mg**

**Lentils** (1 cup cooked) – **2.5 mg**

**Chickpeas** (1 cup cooked) – **2.5 mg**

**Quinoa** (1 cup cooked) – **2 mg**

**Cashews** (1 ounce) – **1.6 mg**

**Tofu** (½ cup) – **1 mg**

**Oats** (1 cup cooked) – **2.3 mg**

# Iodine



Supports:



Energy metabolism



Thyroid hormone production

## Daily Recommendation:

Adults: **150mcg**

## Top Plant-Based Sources

Iodized salt ( $\frac{3}{4}$  **teaspoon** provides ~150mcg of iodine)

Kelp tablets (**1 tablet** daily)

Dried sea vegetables:

- Nori (**2-5** sheets)
- Dulse ( $\frac{1}{2}$ -**1** tsp)
- Kelp (just a **pinch**)



Tip: Choose sea vegetables or kelp tablets for iodine if limiting sodium!

# Healthy Fats for a Plant-Based Diet

Fats are important for your body—they give you energy, help your brain, and keep your heart healthy. On a plant-based diet, it's important to eat foods like nuts, seeds, avocados, and plant oils to make sure you're getting the fats your body needs.

Two types of **essential fats**—also called **fatty acids**—are especially important because your body can't make them on its own:

1. **Omega-6 fats** (for healthy skin and cells)
2. **Omega-3 fats** (for your brain, eyes, and heart)

## Omega-6 Fats

*How much do you need?*

- Women: **12 grams a day**
- Men: **17 grams a day**

## Top Plant-Based Sources

- **Sunflower oil** (1 tablespoon): **9 grams**
- **Safflower oil** (1 tablespoon): **10 grams**
- **Pumpkin seeds** (2 tablespoons): **6 grams**
- **Walnuts** (4 tablespoons): **7 grams**
- **Hemp seeds** (2 tablespoons): **7 grams**
- **Tofu** (½ cup): **5 grams**
- **Almonds** (3 tablespoons): **4 grams**
- **Tahini** (1 tablespoon): **4 grams**

## Omega-3 Fats

*How much do you need?*

Women: **1 gram a day**

Men: **1.6 grams a day**

### **Top Plant-Based sources:**

**Flaxseeds** (1 tablespoon, ground): **6 grams**

**Chia seeds** (2 tablespoons): **5 grams**

**Walnuts** (1 ounce, about 14 halves): **2.5 grams**

**Hemp seeds** (1 tablespoon): **1 gram**

**Flaxseed oil** (1 tablespoon): **7 grams**

**Canola oil** (1 tablespoon): **1 gram**

## What About DHA?

DHA is an omega-3 fat essential for brain and eye health. While your body can convert some omega-3s into DHA, the amount is minimal. To ensure you're getting enough, consider taking a **vegan DHA** supplement made from algae.

### **How much do you need?**

200–500 mg of DHA omega-3 fats

### **Suggested supplement:**

*DEVA vegan omega-3 DHA-EPA 500 mg* ([click here to purchase](#))

# Vitamin B12

## What Is B12?

- Vitamin B12 is made by **bacteria** in soil and water.
- In the past, people and animals got B12 naturally from unwashed plants or untreated water.

## Why Do We Need It Now?

- Modern farming and cleaner food systems mean there's less B12 in our diets.
- Farm animals are often given B12 supplements, so vegans can skip the middle step and take the supplement directly.

## How to Get B12:

Take a B12 supplement, such as **Deva Vegan B12** ([click here to purchase on Amazon](#))

## How Much to Take:

**Daily Dose:** 25–100 mcg per day.

**Or:** Take 1000 mcg 2–3 times a week.

# How to Replace Dairy Milk and Half-and-Half

If you're looking for plant-based milk with nutrition similar to cow's milk, **soy milk** and **pea protein milk** are excellent choices. Both provide around **7g of protein** per serving and are often fortified with calcium, vitamin D, and other essential nutrients.

## Choosing the Right Plant Milk for Cooking and Baking:

**Soy milk:** Best for baking because its higher protein content helps baked goods brown nicely and gives them a good texture. It's also versatile and works well in savory dishes like soups and casseroles.

**Oat milk:** Creamy and mild, a great choice for cakes, muffins, and quick breads where a neutral flavor is key.

**Almond milk:** Light and slightly nutty, perfect for pancakes and waffles or for adding a subtle flavor to your dishes.

**Coconut milk:** Rich and flavorful, ideal for creamy desserts, curries, and soups.

## Recommended Plant-Based Milk Brands:

- Silk Unsweetened Soy Milk
- Oatly Oat Milk
- Ripple Pea Milk

## Half-and-Half Substitutes:

For a rich, creamy plant-based half and half, try:

- Trader Joe's Half and Half
- Silk Half and Half
- Califia Farms Half and Half
- Ripple Half and Half

# Plant-Based Cheese

## Store-Bought Options:

Available in shreds, slices, and blocks at most grocery stores.

## Recommended brands:

- Miyoko's Creamery
- Follow your heart
- Violife
- Daiya

## Homemade Options:

- **Nutritional Yeast:** adds a cheesy flavor to dishes.
- **Vegan Crema Fresca** – This Healthy Kitchen - [click for recipe](#)
- **Vegan Cheese Sauce** – Love and Lemons - [click for recipe](#)
- **Cashew Ricotta** – Simple Veganista - [click for recipe](#)
- **Tofu Ricotta** – Simple Veganista - [click for recipe](#)

# Plant-Based Yogurt, Heavy Cream and Ice Cream

## Recommended plant-based ice cream brands:

- Nada Moo
- Ben & Jerry's (*Non-Dairy Flavors*)
- So Delicious
- Trader Joe's

## Recommended plant-based yogurt brands:

- Kite Hill (*Greek Style or Almond Milk Yogurt*)
- Sprouts Grocery (*Coconut-Based Yogurt*)
- Silk (*Soy-Based Yogurt*)
- Siggis (*Coconut Blend Yogurt*)
- Cocojune (*Cultured Coconut Yogurt*)
- So Delicious (*Coconut Milk Yogurt*)

## Heavy Cream Replacements:

### Store-Bought Options:

- Country Crock Plant Cream
- Califia Farms Heavy Whip
- Silk Whipping Cream

### DIY Options:

**Non-Dairy Milk & Oil:** Blend 2/3 cup non-dairy milk with 1/3 cup oil.

**Non-Dairy Milk & Vegan Butter:** Blend 2/3 cup non-dairy milk with 1/3 cup melted vegan butter.

**Cashew Cream**—Minimalist Baker ([click here for recipe](#))



# Common Vegan Egg Replacements

There are many ways to replace eggs in a vegan diet. This guide highlights options for both cooking and baking, along with substitution ratios.

## Chickpea Flour

- **Uses:** Cookies, quick breads, muffins, French toast
- **Substitution:** 3 tbsp flour + 3 tbsp water = 1 egg

## Silken Tofu

- **Uses:** Brownies, custards, cheesecake
- **Substitution:** 1/4 cup = 1 egg

## Bananas

- **Uses:** Quick breads, muffins, pancakes
- **Substitution:** 1/4 cup purée = 1 egg

## Applesauce

- **Uses:** Quick breads, muffins, cakes
- **Substitution:** 1/4 cup purée = 1 egg

## Flaxseed Meal

- **Uses:** Cookies, brownies, pancakes
- **Substitution:** 1 tbsp meal + 2.5 tbsp water = 1 egg

## Aquafaba

**What is it?:** Liquid from canned chickpeas

### Best For:

- Meringues
- Cakes, quick breads, cookies and brownies
- Pancakes and waffles
- Vegan mayonnaise
- Dips and sauces

### Substitutions:

**1 tbsp** = 1 egg yolk

**2 tbsp** = 1 egg white

**3 tbsp** = 1 whole egg

**How to Use:** Whisk for 45–60 seconds until foamy.

# Specialty Vegan Egg Replacements

## Just Egg

- **What is it?:** Plant-based egg substitute made from mung beans
- **Forms:** Liquid and folded

## Liquid Just Egg

- **Uses:** Scrambles, frittatas, casseroles, omelets, French toast, pancakes, crepes, breads
- **Substitution:** 3 tbsp liquid = 1 egg
- **Nutrition:** 5g protein per serving

## Folded Just Egg (*find in frozen aisle*)

- **Uses:** Breakfast sandwiches, fried rice, bowls
- Found in the freezer section
- **Nutrition:** 6g protein per serving

## Bob's Red Mill Egg Replacer

- **What is it?:** Gluten-free powdered egg replacement
- **Uses:** Muffins, cakes, cookies, quick breads
- **How to Use:** Mix with water, let sit for 1 minute to thicken.

## Substitutions:

- 1 tbsp replacer + 2 tbsp water = 1 egg
- 1 1/2 tsp replacer + 2 tbsp water = 1 egg white
- 1 1/2 tsp replacer + 1 tbsp water = 1 egg yolk

# Recommended Plant-Based Recipe Resources

Explore a variety of vegan food bloggers, each offering unique recipes, tips, and inspiration for plant-based cooking.

**Cheap Lazy Vegan**

[www.cheaplazyvegan.com](http://www.cheaplazyvegan.com)



**Plant Based Brandon** ([youtube](#))



**Rainbow Plant Life**

[www.rainbowplantlife.com](http://www.rainbowplantlife.com)



**Plant You**

[www.plantyou.com](http://www.plantyou.com)



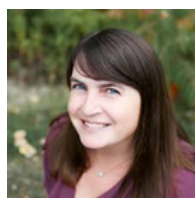
**Make It Dairy Free**

[www.makeitdairyfree.com](http://www.makeitdairyfree.com)



**The Hidden Veggies**

[www.thehiddenveggies.com](http://www.thehiddenveggies.com)



**Derek Sarno** ([youtube](#))



**Healthy Little Vittles (Gluten-Free)**

<https://healthylittlevittles.com/>

