**The 4 Essentials of a Vegan Diet**

Over the past 7 decades, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has consistently set forth guidelines for a healthy diet. However, these guidelines always incorporate animal products, thus discriminating against vegans whose diet excludes all animal products including dairy and eggs. In order to fill the need for clear dietary guidelines that are specific to vegans, the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM) has narrowed down all essential foods into these four Vegan Food Groups.

1. **Fruit**

Recommended at three or more servings a day, fruits help to raise the body’s natural resistance to illness. They are packed with fiber, vitamin C and beta-carotene. At least one of the three servings ought to be rich in Vitamin C, examples of which are citrus fruits, melons and strawberries.

1. **Legumes**

Two or more servings a day are recommended. They include beans, lentils, chickpeas and peas. Legumes are a rich source of fiber, protein, potassium, folate, iron, calcium, zinc and B Vitamins. They provide the body with energy, helping to prevent lethargy. Unlike meat as a source of protein, legumes do not contain saturated fats or cholesterol.

1. **Whole Grains**

The recommended intake is five or more servings a day. This group is not only restricted to the grains themselves, but extends to their products too. Grains include rice, corn, barley and millet; while their products incorporate whole-grain bread, pasta, tortillas and cereal. This food group provides protein, zinc and B vitamins, in addition to containing complex carbohydrates that the body converts into energy.

1. **Vegetables**

The recommended intake of vegetables is four or more servings a day. They provide the body with Vitamins A and C, in addition to providing nutritional value in the form of iron, riboflavin and calcium. To optimize these benefits, dark-green leafy vegetables are recommended in the form of broccoli, kale, turnip greens, chicory and cabbage. On the other hand, dark-yellow and orange vegetables are rich in beta-carotene. Good sources include carrots, sweet potatoes, pumpkin and winter squash. Vegetables are also a very effective antioxidant.