Meatless Meals – Protein Alternatives

Going vegetarian for one day a week for dietary or religious reasons is a small change in your diet that can expand the variety of foods you choose to eat and improve your health and the environment.

Don't Just Cut Back, Add to Your Diet

It is not just about cutting back on red meats, but eating more healthier foods and protein alternatives such as beans and lentils, nuts and seeds, whole grains, low fat dairy products, and vegetables.

Remember the MIND diet for brain and heart health?

It stands for Mediterranean-DASH Intervention for Neurogenerative Delay. It emphasizes eating more often foods like fish, fruits, beans, vegetables, high fiber breads and whole grains, nuts and seeds, and olive oil. This diet also encourages one to limit meat to four times a week, cheeses once a week, and sweets to less than five servings a week.

Protein amounts in common foods:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Type</th>
<th>Protein Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meats, poultry, fish, cheese</td>
<td>1 oz. = 7 grams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egg (large)</td>
<td>1 = 6 grams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beans and lentils:</td>
<td>1/2 cup = 7 grams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuts and seeds:</td>
<td>1 oz. = 7 grams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peanut butter:</td>
<td>2 Tbsp. = 8 grams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tofu:</td>
<td>1/2 cup = 10 grams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk:</td>
<td>1 cup = 8 grams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soy Milk</td>
<td>1 cup = 5-8 grams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cottage cheese:</td>
<td>1/4 cup = 7 grams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek yogurt:</td>
<td>6 oz. = 12 grams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular yogurt:</td>
<td>1/2 cup = 6 grams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quinoa, cooked:</td>
<td>1 cup = 8 grams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oatmeal, cooked:</td>
<td>1 cup = 6 grams</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whole grains, such as whole-wheat bread, whole-grain pasta, brown rice, oats, buckwheat, quinoa and millet are good sources of fiber for normal bowel function, along with protein and a variety of vitamins and minerals. Try a new grain

Barley is a mild-flavored grain often used to add thickness to stews and soups. Barley is also a great addition to casseroles with carrots, root veggies, and onions.

Pearled barley and hulled barley are the two most popular types. Pearled barley is milled barley, which takes 40 minutes to cook. Hulled barley--barley with its outer layer removed--is more nutritious than pearled but takes a full 90 minutes to cook.
Beans and lentils are a great source of protein, fiber, folate, iron and potassium. These nutrient-rich foods are also good sources of manganese, magnesium, copper, and thiamin.

Traditional cooks soak dried beans overnight before cooking them, but canned beans are a great convenience. Include canned cannellini beans, pinto beans, black beans, or chick peas (garbanzo beans) in your weekday meals. Always drain the canned beans in a colander and rinse them well under cold water to remove some of the salt or sodium.

1. Add zucchini, summer squash, eggplant, peppers, and oregano to sautéed onion and garlic. Stir in cannellini beans, chopped tomatoes and 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar, and serve over brown rice or bulgur.
2. Mash beans and avocado in a bowl and spread on a whole grain wrap. Add cilantro, and for crunch, some onion, carrot, or red cabbage.
3. Top salads with beans to add protein and texture.
4. Add cannellini or black beans to your pasta dishes.
5. Mash pinto beans with some ground cumin and heat in the microwave. Spread on a tortilla, and add salsa and guacamole.
6. Combine one can red kidney beans, one can garbanzo beans, bell pepper, onion, and parsley, mix with a citrus vinaigrette, and let marinate for several hours.
7. Combine white kidney beans, sun-dried tomatoes, garlic, rosemary, oil, and red-wine vinegar in a food processor or blender. Fold in kalamata olives and enjoy with fresh vegetables or whole grain crackers.
8. To make a creamy bean dip combine red kidney beans, chopped onion, red wine vinegar, chili powder, and ground cumin in a food processor. Thin, if necessary, with a little water
9. Briefly sauté onions and then add kidney beans, corn, peppers, tomato sauce, garlic, paprika, and chili powder. Simmer for about 30 minutes to make a vegetarian chili.

Quinoa (keen-wa) is commonly used in salads, soups, pilafs, and side dishes, quinoa has a wonderful nutty taste and aroma. It's a quick-cooking grain--done in 15 minutes in a saucepan filled with 2 cups water to 1 cup quinoa.

Brown rice cooks in double the amount of water or broth and it needs to simmer for a full 45 minutes. Cook up a batch and store it in a container in the refrigerator for days when you don't have time to let it cook slowly.

Par-boiled cracked wheat--bulgur--cooks by rehydration. Pour twice the amount of boiling water or broth over dry bulgur and let stand for about 30 minutes. Bulgur wheat makes tabbouleh salad, but it is also a substitute for ground beef. When cooked in vegetarian chili, its texture becomes very similar to ground beef, but offers more fiber and far less fat.

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Eggs are a staple in the Mediterranean Diet. One large egg contains about 70 calories, 5 grams of fat and 6 grams of protein. The yolk, which has nearly 50% of the egg’s protein, is a source of vitamin D and many other vitamins and minerals, so unless you are on a restricted diet, eat the entire egg.

1. Scramble or fry an egg in olive oil. Place on one side of a whole wheat English muffin and sprinkle the other side with shredded cheese. Add sliced tomatoes and/or avocados.

2. Sauté onions, tomato, and olives in olive oil. Then, beat 2 eggs with a bit of feta cheese, add to the vegetables in the skillet, cover, and cook for about 5 minutes, or until the eggs are set.

3. Mash hummus, avocado, or Greek yogurt with egg yolks to make a healthy filling for deviled eggs. Add olives to jazz it up even more!

4. Mix spinach, broccoli and diced peppers with several beaten eggs. Pour the mixture into muffin tins coated with olive oil and bake at 350°F for 20 minutes for a healthy, crustless mini-quiche.

5. Spice up your egg salad! Chop hardboiled eggs, capers, jalapenos, and pickles and toss with olive oil and vinegar or a mustard vinaigrette.

6. Bake whole-wheat pizza dough for 8 minutes at 500°F. Spread sautéed shallots and asparagus (cut into 2-inch pieces) over the dough. Whisk 2 eggs and pour on the top of the vegetables. Sprinkle with goat cheese and bake for approximately 8-10 minutes until the eggs are set and the cheese is melted.

7. Add scrambled eggs to tortillas or stuff into pita pockets for more protein.

8. Combine corn, red onion, grape or cherry tomatoes, arugula, beans (white, red, or garbanzo) with halved hard-boiled eggs and splash with lemon juice and olive oil for a colorful, filling salad.

9. Sauté garlic in extra-virgin olive oil, add cooked pasta, and top with several eggs beaten with grated Parmesan cheese. Cook, tossing gently, until the eggs are hot and set.

10. Add leftover rice to diced vegetables sautéed in olive oil, stir, and add two beaten eggs. Continue stirring until the eggs are set.

11. For an easy protein-packed meal, toss cannellini beans, hard-boiled eggs, olives and arugula with lemon vinaigrette.

12. For a quick breakfast, lightly coat a mug with cooking spray, add one egg and one tablespoon milk, beat together and microwave on high for 45 seconds. Stir, microwave for another 35-40 seconds (or until set), add cheese and season with salt and pepper.
**Tofu** is one of the easiest and healthiest foods to cook. The mild taste goes with anything, and it is packed with quality protein. Tofu is packed in water. If you do not press out the old water you cannot get any new flavors in.

1. Slice open a package of extra-firm, water-packed tofu (not the silken kind) and drain the water. Cut the block of tofu width-wise into however many slices you want.
2. Lay a dish towel on a cookie sheet or tray; place some paper towels on top of that.
3. Spread the slices of tofu out in a single layer on top of the towels. Put more paper towels and another dish towel on top of that.
4. Set some heavy objects on top. Use another cookie sheet on top, and stack books on it.
5. Leave it for at least 30 minutes, but preferably a couple hours. You can leave it like this all day or night if you put it in the fridge. If in a hurry, you can apply some "manual pressure" and cut back the time to 15 minutes, but it's not going to be quite as good.
6. Uncover; leave as "tofu steaks" or cut into cubes, marinate and cook according to your recipe. Tofu must be marinated to give it taste and not with any oil as oils will coat it and prevent the flavors from getting into the tofu.

If you are going to pan-fry or stir-fry your tofu, coat it in cornstarch after marinating. A medium or light coat is best. Just put your marinated tofu in a big plastic zipper bag, add a half cup of cornstarch, close and shake well. Dump it all into a colander over the sink to shake off the excess. This will give your tofu a good, crispy coating and it helps the tofu not stick to the pan.

Tofu is great on the grill, in a grill pan and under the broiler. Marinate it, spray your cooking surface and cook until you get nice grill marks or crispy edges, about seven minutes per side. Tofu does not actually need to be cooked.

It is right at home in stir-fry, but use an Italian marinade and some bread crumbs and it can easily substitute for chicken parmesan. Use a steak marinade, grill it with onions and barbecue sauce and serve on a toasted bun. Cube it, coat with cornstarch, pan fry these “chicken nuggets” and serve with honey mustard and sweet potato fries.

**Do you have a questions or concerns about what to eat?**
If you are participating in services offered by Schenectady County’s Senior and Long Term Care services, you are eligible to have a free consultation with a Registered Dietitian.

Call Cornell Cooperative Extension, Schenectady County at 518-372-1622, ext. 269.
Leave a message, if necessary, for dietitian to call you back.

**Check out our website for nutrition resources:**
http://cceschenectady.org/nutrition-for-seniors