

# The Vegetarian Balance

The Department of Education's Healthy Food and Drink in Public Schools Policy encourages eating a variety of foods. This is consistent with the Australian Guide to Healthy Eating and eating from the 5 food groups.

We know that for some canteens, catering for vegetarian students and staff can be tricky. With our tips and a little extra planning, preparing vegetarian meals does not need to be a chore. Best of all, most vegetarian items will be categorised as green.

Vegetarian diets are common and increasing. The reason for following a vegetarian diet varies, e.g., ethical reasons, religious beliefs, environmental concerns, taste or health. The high cost of meat and other animal products is another consideration.

Whether it is a life-long choice or a short-term experience, it is important to be mindful of replacing the nutrients that animal products often provide.



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## Animal products are our best source of several nutrients, including:

- Protein - for muscle growth and development
- Iron and vitamin B12 - needed to make healthy blood
- Calcium - for strong bones
- Zinc - for a strong immune system
- Omega-3 - for a healthy heart.

### The vegetarian balance:

When following a vegetarian diet an individual should try to incorporate nutritious food choices such as:

- eggs, legumes (dried or canned beans or chickpeas), lentils
- tofu, tempeh
- wholegrains including oats, brown rice, quinoa, buckwheat, freekeh, wholegrain pasta and wholegrain breads
- nuts and seeds
- dairy foods or calcium-enriched plant-based foods
- fruit and vegetables
- healthy fats like extra virgin olive oil, nuts and seeds, or an omega-3 supplement
- vitamin B12-fortified foods if excluding dairy and eggs
- flaxseed, chia seeds, walnuts or omega-3 fortified foods (some breads include these).

One of the easiest ways to find out what the vegetarian students would like to eat is simply by asking them! Invite students to submit a recipe and send them to FreshSNAP for review. The best recipe/s can be added to the menu. This empowers the students as they get to have a say on what foods they eat and gets them excited because their favourite dishes are on the menu – it's a win-win!

# Canteen Menu Solutions to cater for Vegetarians

### Meat Free Monday

Consider having a Monday special each week that is vegetarian. Or perhaps the whole menu is vegetarian one day per week.

### Meal swaps

Plan meals where the bulk of the preparation and ingredients are the same for all students, with just one variation for vegetarians.

- Burgers: the salads, burger rolls, condiments, reduced fat cheese and any side dishes can be the same for everyone. Cook up a couple of different patties (e.g., lean beef, chicken and a bean or falafel patty). The bean patty along with the cheese provides protein, iron, calcium, zinc and vitamin B12.
- Pizza: the same prep work can be done for all students, just add meat topping for those who want it.
- Parmigiana: eggplant parmigiana is a popular dish that's easy to prepare. The sauce, reduced fat cheese topping and all the sides can be the same for both vegetarians and non-vegetarians. Swap eggplant for chicken for the non-vegetarians.
- Explore cuisines: many international dishes are traditionally vegetarian and are packed full of flavours that students love. Check out all our vegetarian meal ideas on the FreshSNAP website.