

Food first

Advice for adults with a small appetite following a vegan or plant based diet

This information is for people who are following a vegan or plant based diet and who might be at risk of malnutrition. A plant based diet is one based on foods that come from plants with few or no ingredients that come from animals.

Why have I received this handout?

You may have a poor appetite or have been eating less due to feeling unwell. If you are not getting enough nutrition to meet your body's needs you will lose weight and could be at risk of malnutrition. Vegan or plant based diets can sometimes be lower in energy and higher in fibre, which can also make maintaining or gaining weight more challenging.

Malnutrition makes it more difficult for the body to fight illness and infection. It can make us feel weak, tired and low in mood. To treat malnutrition we need to increase the energy or calories, protein and overall nutrients that we eat and drink.

This handout provides advice on increasing your intake using ordinary foods and by making simple changes to your meals, snacks and drinks. Although some of the foods and drinks in this leaflet may usually be considered unhealthy, they are recommended until your appetite and weight improve. These foods are energy-dense and can help to reduce your risk of malnutrition.

If you have diabetes, it is preferable to fortify your food with protein and fats rather than adding extra sugar or including more sugary foods. This will help to minimise the impact on your blood glucose levels. If you normally check your blood glucose levels and further to making these dietary changes find that they are higher than your target range, contact your GP or diabetes nurse for advice regarding your diabetes management. Read our food first diabetes leaflet for more information: bit.ly/4cDUvzk



Helpful tips

1	Try eating little and often.
2	Aim for 3 small meals and 2 to 3 snacks between meals.
3	Avoid having drinks just before meals as they can make you feel full. Have drinks after your meal or between meals instead.
4	Allow plenty of time to eat and take your time.
5	Try ready-meals if you have difficulty cooking or preparing meals, either bought from the supermarket or from a meal-delivery service.
6	Softer, moist foods can be easier to manage, especially if you feel weak or tired.
7	Some fresh air and gentle exercise may help stimulate your appetite.

What foods should I choose?

Choose your favourite foods, eating foods you enjoy can help you eat more. Try to eat a variety of foods to make sure you get a range of nutrients.

Aim to have food high in protein in 2 to 3 meals each day. Good sources of protein include lentils, beans, nuts, seeds and nut butters, soya, tofu and other plant-based meat alternatives.

Include dairy alternatives. Choose original or sweetened non-dairy alternatives to cows milk which are fortified with calcium, vitamin D and other nutrients such as iodine, B2 and B12. Organic versions are not fortified. Soya alternative to milk will contain more protein and calories than most others. Aim to include 500mls of a plant-based fortified milk a day. This can be used in drinks, but also in sauces and custard and desserts.

Include a variety of fruit and vegetables in your diet. Certain ones such as avocado and dried fruits are naturally higher calorie options. You can add extra calories and/or protein to vegetables or fruit by adding oil, nutritional yeast flakes, vegan cheese or vegan margarine or spread to vegetables, or dairy free custard or cream to fruit.

Aim to have starchy foods such as cereals, potatoes, bread and rice at every meal. You can add extra calories and protein by fortifying these foods, see ideas below.



Make sure you stay well hydrated by aiming to have 1,600ml (female) to 2,000ml (male) per day. Make the most of your drinks by choosing nourishing drinks, see below.

Nourishing snacks

Aim for at least 2 snacks a day. A range of both sweet and savoury snacks, depending on taste, are ideal. Try some of the snacks below.

Savoury snacks

- Toast, crumpet, crackers or vegan croissant with nut butter, vegan pate, avocado, vegan cheese or vegan cream cheese.
- Chilled snacks such as plant based mini savoury egg, vegan sausage roll or sausage, vegan mini quiche.
- Savoury nibbles such as crisps, popcorn, roasted edamame beans or nuts.
- Guacamole or houmous with pitta bread.
- Falafel, samosas or bhaji.
- Vegan cheese scone and plant based spread.

Sweet snacks

- Toasted teacake or fruited malt loaf with vegan spread.
- Crumpet or vegan croissant with jam.
- Dried fruit and nuts.
- Plant based flapjack, cake or biscuits.
- Dark chocolate or vegan 'milk' chocolate.
- Vegan stick ice cream.
- Plant based yogurt.
- Plant based dessert pot or custard.
- Pancakes made with gram flour with syrup.

Similar vegan products can vary in terms of calories and protein content. When choosing your snacks try to choose the ones higher in calories and protein.

High calorie fortified snack recipes

Chocolate Pots

Ingredients

- 170g or 6oz firm silken tofu.
- 2 to 3 teaspoons cocoa powder.
- 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract.
- 1 tablespoon vegan milk of choice.
- Pinch of salt.
- 2 tablespoons maple syrup.
- Juice of half a lime.

Toppings (optional)

- Selection of your favourite chopped nuts.
- Vegan dark chocolate shards.

Method

1. Blend everything together (except toppings).
2. Pour mixture into 2 bowls and store in fridge.
3. When serving, sprinkle over toppings.



Calories	Protein	Quantity	Time to prepare
125kcal	8g protein per serving	Serves 2	5 minutes

Protein balls

Ingredients

- 300g pitted dates, such as medjool.
- 70g peanut butter.
- 65g oats.
- 3 tablespoons dark vegan chocolate chips.
- 1 tablespoon ground flaxseeds.
- Pinch of salt.
- 3 tablespoons cocoa powder.

Method

1. If the dates are on the dry side, add a little boiling water to them first.
2. Blend all ingredients together in a food processor.
3. Roll into small balls. You should get about 14 from this recipe.
4. Store in the fridge until ready to serve.



Calories	Protein	Quantity	Time to prepare
300kcal	6.7g protein per 2 balls	Makes 14 balls	5 minutes

Nourishing drinks

Make the most of your drinks and avoid filling up on low calorie drinks such as tea, coffee, herbal teas, broth-style soups, squash or diet fizzy drinks. Good choices for nourishing drinks include plant based milk drinks, especially if made using a fortified plant based milk. Examples include hot chocolate, vegan Horlicks, fruit smoothie made with plant based milk or yogurt. Plant based nourishing drinks are available to buy online and at some supermarkets and health food shops such as Huel or Alpro plant protein soya flavoured plant based milk.

You can also make your own nourishing home made fortified drinks. Please see example below.

Dairy-free chocolate banana peanut smoothie

Ingredients

- 180mls sweetened soya milk (note other milk alternatives are lower in calories and protein)
- 1 heaped tablespoon (25g) smooth peanut butter
- 1 teaspoon cocoa powder
- 1 teaspoon vegetable oil
- 4 teaspoons sugar (reduce to 1 teaspoon if you have diabetes)
- Half a ripe banana (optional)

Method

1. Mix all the ingredients together in a blender or smoothie maker and blend until smoothie.
2. Alternatively, mix together the peanut butter, cocoa, oil and sugar into a smooth paste.
3. Gradually whisk in the soya milk.

Calories	Protein	Quantity
450kcal	14.5g protein per serving	1 serving

Fortifying your food

Fortifying food means adding small amounts of other ordinary foods to your meals and snacks. If you have a small appetite or are losing weight, fortifying your food can add more energy and protein. The following can be used to fortify with.

Food	Calories (kcal)	Protein (g)	Ideas to fortify your meals
1 tablespoon of oil	135	0	Drizzle on top of meal, add to soups
10g vegetable spread	63	0	Spread thickly on bread, add to potatoes and vegetables
1 tablespoon (15g) peanut, cashew or almond butter	95	3.6	Spread on toast, add to sauces or soups, use to make dressings or marinades
1 tablespoon (15g) of tahini paste	101	3.8	Add to sauces or soups, use to make dressings or marinades
1 heaped dessert spoon (10g) Pea protein powder	41	8.0	Add to drinks, soups, sauces, mashed potato.
1 heaped dessert spoon (10g) Soya protein powder	39	9.0	Add to drinks, soups, sauces, mashed potato.
25g ground or chopped nuts	125	6.5	Add to porridge, puddings such as custard or rice pudding, or stir-fried vegetables
3 heaped teaspoons (5g) of nutritional yeast flakes	17	2.4	Add to soups, casseroles, porridge, cereals and yoghurts
30g dairy free cream cheese	68	1.5	Have on bread or crackers, add to pasta dishes, mashed potato and use as a jacket potato filling
30g dairy free cheese	98	0.3	Have on bread or crackers, add to pasta dishes, mashed potato and use as a jacket potato filling
1 tablespoon (15g) creamed coconut	104	1.1	Add to soups, curries, custards or desserts
2 tablespoons (30ml) dairy free single cream alternative	41	0.4	Add to soups, curries, mashed potato, custards, desserts, porridge
2 tablespoons (30ml) dairy free double cream alternative	89	<0.1	Add to soups, curries, mashed potato, custards, desserts, porridge
1 scoop (60ml) dairy free ice cream	55	0.3	Add to fruit, desserts, milkshakes
1 tablespoon vegan mayonnaise	98	<0.5	Add to sandwiches, wraps, burgers, jacket potatoes, mashed potato.
Silken tofu (100g)	59	6.8	Add to soups, salads, stir fry, desserts
2 tablespoons (30g) Greek style plain soya yogurt	20	1.7	Add to chilli, curries, jacket potato, fruit, desserts.

Further information

If you follow a vegan or a plant based diet, there are certain nutrients you may need to pay closer attention to, to ensure you are meeting your requirements. These include protein, long chain omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids, vitamins B12 and D, calcium, iron, zinc and iodine.

Useful links

- British Dietetic Association plant based diet resources:
bda.uk.com/resource/vegetarian-vegan-plant-based-diet.html



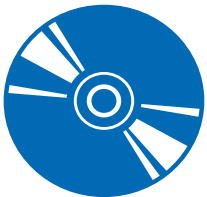
- Vegetarian for Life guide to food fortification for vegans:
vegetarianforlife.org.uk/files/Fortification_guide_2021.pdf



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