

A Guide to Healthy Weight Loss

Three weeks on a low-fat vegan diet gets you on the road to your healthy weight goal

PHYSICIANS COMMITTEE FOR RESPONSIBLE MEDICINE

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Of the many ways to lose weight, one stands out as by far the most healthful. When you build your meals from a generous array of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and beans—that is, healthy vegetarian choices—weight loss is remarkably easy. And along with it come major improvements in cholesterol, blood pressure, blood sugar, and many other aspects of health. The message is simple: Cut out the foods that are high in fat and devoid of fiber, and increase the foods that are low in fat and full of fiber. This low-fat, vegan diet approach is safe and easy—once you get the hang of it.

Getting started can seem a bit daunting. It is often hard to imagine doing anything—be it a diet, new exercise regimen, or any other new, healthy habit—forever. Try this: Follow the diet approach outlined here for just three weeks. That will give you enough time to adjust to new flavors and will also allow you to start significant weight loss and see other positive health changes. Participants in PCRM’s recent weight loss study who switched to a vegan diet reported the best way to do this approach is to *follow the diet completely for three weeks*. This means no sneaking ranch dressing onto your salad, adding egg whites to muffin batter, or having a bit of chicken with dinner. Only by doing the diet *all the way* will you be able to reap all the benefits and avoid lapses that can lead to weight gain.

So let’s get started! Choose the day when you would like to start the diet. Weigh yourself before you start and keep track of your weight during the three weeks. Also, keep a record of what you are eating. Keeping a food record and a journal of how you feel while you’re on the diet will help you monitor your progress. Below is a comprehensive guide to get you started. Good luck!

LOW-FAT VEGAN DIET

OVERALL PRINCIPLES: Choose foods from plant sources. Avoid all animal products and keep vegetable oils to a bare minimum.

FOCUS ON THE “NEW FOUR FOOD GROUPS”

The New Four Food Groups—grains, legumes, vegetables, and fruit—can provide you with all the nutrients you need. To meet your nutrient needs, select 8 servings of grains, 3 servings of legumes, at least 4 servings of vegetables, and 3 servings of fruit daily. It’s important to vary the foods you choose within the food groups, because not only is “variety the spice of life” it helps you to cover all your nutritional bases. The food guide chart below will provide you with about 1500 calories. At the end of this guide, you will find ways to adjust this level of calories to meet your own energy requirements.

Food Group	Serving Recommendations
Grains (A serving equals about 80 kcal) 6 of your 8 servings should be from whole grain sources like wheat bread, brown rice, whole wheat pasta, bran cereal, oatmeal, etc.	You should get 8 servings a day. A serving is ½ cup cooked grain, like oatmeal or pasta, 1 oz. of dry cereal (usually ¾ cup to 1 cup), one slice of bread, or half a pita bread or tortilla. Most bagels are actually four servings. Eight servings may sound like a lot, but 1 cup of oatmeal for breakfast, a sandwich with two slices of bread for lunch, and a bowl of pasta made with 1½ cups of spaghetti with a slice of French bread meets your 8-serving goal. Check the servings off each day: <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Legumes (A serving equals about 100 kcal) Have at least 1 cup of beans every day.	You should have 3 servings from the legume group each day. A serving is a half-cup of cooked beans, ½ cup low-fat bean spread, 1 cup low-fat soymilk, or 1 oz. of vegetarian meat substitute. Check the servings off each day: <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

<p>Vegetables (A serving equals 35-50 kcal)</p> <p>At least one serving should be a raw vegetable like salad or carrot sticks.</p>	<p>You should aim for at least 4 servings of vegetables each day. This means ½ cup cooked or 1 cup raw. As long as the vegetable isn't topped with a fatty dressing or sauce, you can eat as many servings as you want from this group. At least 1 of your vegetable servings should be calcium-rich, dark leafy greens, such as broccoli, kale, or collards.</p> <p>Check the servings off each day:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Fruit (A serving equals 80 kcal)</p>	<p>Aim for 3 servings of fruit each day. A serving is ½ cup chopped or one small piece of fruit. Aim for low-calorie, high-nutrition fruits like strawberries, kiwis, mangos, blueberries, peaches, plums, oranges, grapefruit, and raspberries.</p> <p>Check the servings off each day:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Sweets (optional)</p> <p>One sweet serving has no more than 1 gram of fat and equals 100 kcal.</p>	<p>You should have no more than 1 sweets serving per day. Your sweets should be fat free. Try fruit if you are craving sweets. Other low-fat ideas include a bowl of sweetened whole grain cereal with low-fat soymilk, a soymilk/fruit smoothie, or sautéed bananas or apples (in water and a bit of maple syrup) with a little cinnamon.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/></p>

If you've checked off all your boxes and you're still hungry, add extra servings of foods from the vegetable or bean group to your plate. Is this too much food for you? Cut out the sweets first, then subtract a grain serving or two. However, you shouldn't cut your calories too low. Most people should never go below 1200 calories per day.

INFORMATION ON CONDIMENTS AND BEVERAGES:

- For salad dressings and condiments, use the non-fat varieties, such as fat-free Italian dressing for salads and mustard for sandwiches.
- Coffee and tea are fine, but make sure to use non-fat, non-dairy creamers and sweeteners.
- Alcoholic beverages can be used occasionally. Avoid creamy beverages such as White Russians and Bailey's Irish Cream.
- Sugar may be used occasionally.
- Nuts, seeds, avocados, olives, peanut butter, chocolate (non-dairy), and full-fat soy products such as tofu, tempeh, and soy cheese, come from plant foods, but are too high in fat to be conducive to weight loss. These foods may be used in modest amounts on rare occasions.

FOODS TO AVOID:

- **Meats, poultry, fish, eggs (both whites and yolks), and all dairy products (regular and non-fat),** including milk, yogurt, cheese, ice cream, cream, sour cream, and butter.
- **Added oils,** such as margarine, salad dressings, mayonnaise, and cooking oils.
- **Fried foods,** such as potato chips, French fries, onion rings, tempura, and donuts.

A WORD ABOUT...

Protein: Plant foods have plenty of protein. The recommended amount of protein in the diet is 10-12 percent of calories. Most vegetables, legumes, and grains contain this amount or more. Excellent protein sources include beans or lentils (especially in combination with rice or other grains) and meat analogues, such as veggie burgers.

Calcium: Plant-based sources of calcium are widely available. Good sources of calcium include broccoli, kale, collards, mustard greens, beans, figs, fortified orange juice, fortified cereal, and fortified, non-fat soy- or rice milks.

Vitamin B₁₂: Vitamin B₁₂ is only found in animal products and fortified foods, such as many breakfast cereals and soymilks. To ensure an adequate intake on this diet, you should take a common multivitamin or a B₁₂ supplement of 5 µg per day.

MEAL SUGGESTIONS

Now that you know what foods to eat and what nutrients to look out for, it's time to figure out how to translate that into actual meals. Below is a listing of meal ideas for breakfast, lunch, dinner, desserts, and snacks.

BREAKFAST—Often breakfast can be similar to the one you are accustomed to with a few simple modifications.

- Hot cereals: oatmeal, cream of wheat, creamy rice cereal, grits, or Irish oatmeal with cinnamon, raisins and/or applesauce (no milk)
- High-fiber cold cereals: wheat or oat bran cereals with non-fat soy or rice milk and berries, peaches, or bananas
- Melons, such as cantaloupe and honeydew, or any other fruit
- Whole grain toast topped with cinnamon or jam (no butter or margarine)
- Bagels (no cream cheese) topped with apple butter or hummus
- Oven-roasted “home fries” plain or smothered with roasted mushrooms, peppers, and onions

If you like extra protein:

- Fat-free meat substitutes, such as Gimme Lean™ fat-free “sausage”
- English baked beans or chickpeas
- Breakfast burrito filled with fat-free refried beans, lettuce, and tomato (no egg or cheese)
- Tofu scrambler or marinated tempeh in small amounts

LUNCH—Whether you dine in or out at lunchtime, there are lots of healthy and delicious options to choose from. Here are some ideas to get you started.

Salads

- Garden salad with lemon juice, fat-free dressing, or soy or teriyaki sauce
- Legume-based salads: three-bean, chickpea, lentil, or black bean and corn salads
- Grain-based salads: noodle, couscous, bulgur, or rice salads

Soups

- Vegetable-based soups: potato-leek, carrot-ginger, mixed vegetable, or mushroom-barley.
- Legume-based soups: black bean, vegetarian chili, spinach lentil, minestrone, or split pea.
- Instant or prepared soups (as long as they are low-fat and free of animal products).

Sandwiches/Wraps

- CLT: cucumber, lettuce, and tomato sandwich with Dijon mustard
- Hummus sandwich tucked into whole wheat pita with grated carrots, sprouts, and cucumbers

- Sandwich made with fat-free meat alternatives such as barbeque seitan or veggie pepperoni slices with your favorite sandwich veggies
- Black bean dip, peppers, tomatoes, and lettuce wrapped in a whole-wheat tortilla
- Italian eggplant sub: baked eggplant slices, pizza sauce, and mushrooms on a multi-grain sub roll
- Black bean and sweet potato burrito with corn and tomatoes

Other Ideas and Add-Ons

- Last night's leftovers
- Fresh fruit, applesauce, or fruit cup packed in juice
- Cut-up vegetables
- Rice cakes, fat-free crackers, baked tortilla chips

DINNER—Emphasize vegetables and grains in all your meals. The evening meal is a good place to try new items. You might start with a bean, rice or other grain, or potato dish and add a couple of vegetables.

Starches:

- Grains: Use generous amounts of grains.
 - ◆ pasta
 - ◆ brown rice
 - ◆ boxed rice dishes (e.g., pilaf, curried rice, etc.)
 - ◆ couscous
- Potatoes: Enjoy them baked or mashed and topped with steamed vegetables, salsa, ketchup, Dijon mustard, black pepper, or black beans.
- Breads: Whole-grain is preferred. Avoid sweet breads that contain oil, eggs, or milk.

Vegetables:

Try any vegetables you like.

- Greens (broccoli, spinach, kale, Swiss chard) topped with lemon
- Carrots
- Corn (*note: corn is technically a grain, but works as a vegetable*)

Legumes:

- Pinto beans, vegetarian refried beans, baked beans, black beans, garbanzos, kidney beans

Main Dishes:

- Pasta marinara: Choose commercial brands that are free of cheese and are low in fat.
- Beans and rice: Try black beans with salsa, vegetarian baked beans, or fat-free refried beans.
- Soft tacos: Prepare this dish with whole-wheat flour tortilla, beans, lettuce, tomato, and salsa.
- Chili: Vegetarian boxed versions are fine.
- Veggie lasagna: Made with low-fat tofu to replace the ricotta, layered with grilled veggies.
- Rice pilaf, Spanish rice, or packaged rice dinners: Try packaged rice dishes and omit butter.
- Steamed rice and stir-fried vegetables: This meal can be seasoned with soy sauce. Be sure to use a non-stick pan.

- Fat-free vegetarian burgers: Make your own lentil burgers or try soy-based commercial brands.
- Fajitas: Lightly sauté sliced bell peppers, onions, and eggplant in a non-stick pan, with fajita seasonings.

Desserts:

- Fresh fruit
- Fat-free chocolate or fruit sorbet
- Popsicles
- Baked apples

SNACKS

- Bagels (plain or flavored; no cheese, butter, or margarine)
- Fruit, carrots, or celery sticks
- Vegetarian soup cups (split pea, lentil, etc.)
- Toast with jam (no butter or margarine)
- Baked tortilla chips with salsa or bean dip

GENERAL TIPS

TRYING NEW FOODS AND NEW TASTES:

- Explore new recipes, new books, new products.
- Fat-free meat substitutes can ease the transition.
- Be strict with yourself. This is easier than teasing yourself with small amounts of the foods you are trying to leave behind.
- Focus on the short term. Three weeks is a short time.
- Frozen vegetables are fine.
- Canned beans and vegetables are okay for convenience.
- If you have trouble finding recipes you like, explore our recipe database at www.pcrm.org or try a healthy, vegan cookbook.

CUTTING THE FAT:

- Use a non-stick pan.
- “Sauté” vegetables in water or vegetable broth.
- Steam vegetables.
- When you can’t avoid oil, use a cooking spray instead of poured oils.
- Use non-fat, non-dairy coffee creamers.
- Read package labels to check grams of fat per serving. It is best to choose products that have less than 2 grams of fat per serving.

ON THE GO:

- Travel Tips:
 - ◆ Request non-dairy vegetarian meals for flights
 - ◆ All hotel restaurants have oatmeal, pasta with tomato sauce, potatoes, and vegetable plates, even

if these items are not on the menu.

- ◆ Bring along instant soup cups, instant oatmeal, and small containers of soy- and rice milk.
- Dining Out: Look for ethnic restaurants, especially Japanese, Chinese, Indian, Mexican, and Italian, as they normally have many vegetarian dishes.
 - ◆ *Japanese*: vegetable sushi
 - ◆ *Chinese*: lots of rice with smaller amounts of vegetable dish; request oil-free and sauce on the side
 - ◆ *Mexican*: bean burrito, hold the cheese, sour cream, and guacamole; Spanish rice. Ask the waiter to bring out warm corn tortillas to dip in the salsa and to take away the fried chips.
 - ◆ *Italian*: pasta e fagioli (soup); pasta marinara. Ask that oil be kept at an absolute minimum.
 - ◆ *Thai*: vegetarian selections with lots of rice; avoid coconut milk
 - ◆ *Indian*: rice dishes or breads (beware of curries—very fatty)
 - ◆ *Middle Eastern*: couscous; baba ganouj and hummus with lots of pita bread
 - ◆ *American*: vegetable plate; salad bar; baked potato; baked beans; spaghetti; fruit plate. For salads, ask for no dressing, or try lemon or lime juice or soy or teriyaki sauce. Ask that fatty toppings, such as cheese, bacon, eggs, olives, and avocados, be left off.

AT WORK: *Keep the following on hand.*

- Instant soups
- 3-bean salad
- Rice cakes
- Bagels
- Fresh or dried fruit
- Bean dip with rice cakes or fat-free chips

CRAVINGS:

- Stock up on healthful foods at home and at work to prevent hunger-induced indiscretions.
- Keep unhealthful foods out of the house. Donate non-perishable items that aren’t allowed in the diet to your local food pantry.
- If you follow a very low-fat menu, your tastes will gradually drift to prefer lower-fat foods.

TROUBLESHOOTING:

- *What to tell others:*
 - ◆ “I’m following a low-fat [or vegetarian] diet right now.”
 - ◆ “I’m trying to increase my fruit and vegetable intake and cut out some fat.”
- If beans give you gas, use less beans and more grains and meat analogs.

The Veganizer

See how to change your regular meals into low-fat vegan meals.

If your regular breakfast is:	Try this breakfast instead:
Cereal with milk Orange juice Strawberries	Cereal with non-fat soy- or rice milk Orange juice Strawberries
Donut Coffee with cream Banana	Cinnamon raisin toast with jam Coffee with non-fat, non-dairy creamer Banana
Scrambled eggs Home fries English muffin Sausage Hot tea	Scrambled low-fat tofu Oven-roasted potatoes English muffin Gimme Lean™ fat-free sausage Hot tea
Bagel with cream cheese Latte	Bagel plain or with fruit spread Soy latte made with non-fat soymilk

If your typical lunch is:	Try this lunch instead:
Turkey sandwich with lettuce, tomato, and mayo Yogurt Potato chips	Sandwich with hummus or black bean spread, lettuce, and tomato Applesauce Fat-free chips or crackers
Chicken noodle soup Bread Green salad	Vegetable soup or minestrone Bread Green salad with fat-free dressing or vinegar
Last night's leftovers (roast beef, mashed potatoes, gravy, and peas) Orange	Last night's leftovers (veggie burger, mashed potatoes, mushroom gravy, corn, and peas) Orange
Chicken burrito Rice Refried beans	Seasoned tofu and sweet potato burrito with lettuce, tomato, and onion (hold the cheese) Rice Vegetarian black beans

If your typical dinner is:	Try this dinner instead:
Fettuccine alfredo or spaghetti with meatballs Green salad with ranch dressing Garlic bread with butter Butter-pecan ice cream	Pasta primavera with mixed vegetables and garlic or spaghetti with marinara sauce Green salad with fat-free balsamic vinaigrette Toasted French bread without butter Chocolate sorbet
Broiled salmon Boiled new potatoes with parmesan cheese Asparagus with hollandaise	Broiled portabella mushrooms Boiled new potatoes with basil and black pepper Asparagus with orange sauce
Hot and sour soup Beef and broccoli Rice	Vegetarian tofu soup Stir-fried Chinese vegetables (hold the oil) Broccoli with garlic sauce Lots of rice
Chicken fajita Rice Refried beans Piña Colada	Vegetable fajita (hold the oil) Rice Vegetarian black beans Margarita