A vegetarian eating plan is one that excludes the consumption of meat, fish and poultry. If egg and dairy products are consumed, this is called a lacto-ovo vegetarian diet.

When following a vegetarian style of eating, it is just as important to consider what you “do” eat as what you “don’t” eat. For example, someone who doesn’t eat meat fish or poultry but only eats cheese and pasta—is technically following a vegetarian style of eating— it’s just not balanced or nutritious.

You will want to include foods from all the major food groups represented on the plate, focusing on getting a good balance of protein, grains, vegetables, fruits and fats.

While most vegetables and even grains contribute some protein to your diet, it is important to focus on including other higher protein foods at every meal. Here are some examples:

**One serving equals:**
(based on your weight and activity level you may need more than one serving at a meal)
- 1 whole egg
- 8 oz milk/soy milk or yogurt

- 4 oz of cottage cheese
- ½ cup legumes (beans)
- 4 oz tofu (soybean product), tempeh or lentils (fermented soybean product with a slightly nutty taste), seitan (wheat gluten), or TPV (Textured Vegetable Protein)
- 1 oz nuts or seeds (small handful)
- 1 oz cheese
- 2 Tbsp nut butter
- 1/2 cup quinoa or amaranth

Fill the rest of your plate with vegetables, fruits and whole grains and some fat.

**Be sure to get enough:**

**B12** – which is only found in animal products. It can also be found in fortified cereals and grains. It may be wise to take a supplement to assure you are getting enough.

**Calcium** – dairy products are your best source – aim for 2-3 servings of dairy or calcium fortified products such as juices and soy milk per day. Plant based sources of calcium include dark green veggies and almonds. Again if you don’t think you will be able to consume enough calcium in your diet then opt for a supplement to be on the safe side.

**Vitamin D** – if you are consuming 2-3 servings of milk, fortified yogurt or fortified non dairy milk alternative daily then you are covered. If however this is a challenge for you, you should take a supplement. Vitamin D is difficult to get from diet alone and most people do not get the daily sun exposure needed to make enough of this vitamin.

**Iron** – Iron is found in egg yolk, legumes, fortified grains and cereals, dark green veggies and tofu. Adding a food high in vitamin C at each meal will help you absorb the iron in that meal. (See list below)

**Foods high in Vitamin C**
- Citrus fruits and juices (oranges, grapefruit, pineapple)
- Kiwi
- Strawberries
- Cantaloupe
- Papaya, mango
- Baked potato
- Bell peppers
- Tomatoes and tomato products
- Dark leafy greens
- Cauliflower

*note the supplement should include vitamin D.
Optimize your health and weight by following these suggestions for Balancing Your Vegetarian Plate:

**1/3 of your plate should be grains.**
Try to choose whole grains.

**About 1/3 of your plate should be fruits & vegetables.**
Try for several different colors.

**1/3 of your plate should be protein.**
Try to choose a leaner option.

**Fruits & Vegetables**
- Provide vitamins and minerals, antioxidants, fiber and carbohydrates for energy.
- Choose a rainbow of colored fruits and vegetables everyday to assure you are getting the full spectrum of health benefits.

**Grains**
- Provide fiber, B vitamins, and carbohydrates for energy
- Try to vary the grains you eat at each meal
- Include: breads (whole wheat is recommended), pastas, cereal, rice, tortillas, crackers

**Meat Substitutes/Dairy and Eggs**
- Provide protein, fats and iron
- Include eggs, yogurt, milk, cheese, legumes, seeds, nuts and nut butters, soy

**Fats**
- Yes! Your body needs fats to survive. Some fats impart more health benefits than other. (avocado, nuts, olives, olive oil & canola oil)
- Nuts, seeds, avocado, milled or crushed flax seed or flax seed oil, olives are good sources of essential fats that enable your body to work properly.
- Occasionally choose sweets such as candy and other desserts only in addition to your balanced plate, rather than a large part of it.
- Fried foods provide fats, but should should be eaten less frequently

*if your foods already contain fat, added healthy fat is not necessary.*