A vegan (or strict vegetarian) diet is one in which only plant products are consumed. You will want to include foods from all the major food groups represented on the plate, focusing on vegetables and fruits as the majority of your plate with moderate portions of foods high in protein and grains.

If you have decided to follow a vegan diet for whatever personal reasons you may have, it is important to put some thought into finding the right balance of nutrients for optimal health. A vegan eating plan isn’t just about what you don’t eat, but also what you do eat. While most vegetables and even grains contribute some protein to your diet, it is important to focus on other high protein foods at every meal.

We recommend consuming a variety of foods high in protein every day:
And in particular getting a minimum of 2 servings of nuts or seeds and 3 servings of legumes (beans, lentils, soy) per day.

Typical portion sizes for plant based proteins one serving equals:
• 8 oz soy/rice/alm ond milk
• ½ cup legumes (beans)
• 4 oz tofu (soybean product), tempeh (fermented soybean product with a slightly nutty taste), seitan (wheat gluten), or TPV (Textured Vegetable Protein)
• 1 oz nuts (small handful)
• 1 oz soy cheese
• 2 Tbsp nut butter

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

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 — aim for 2-3 servings of calcium fortified products such as juices and soy/ almond/rice 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. “note the supplement should include vitamin D.

Vitamin D — if you are consuming 2-3 servings of fortified soy/rice/alm ond milk 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 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 of foods high in Vitamin C below)

Foods high in Vitamin C
• Citrus fruits and juices (oranges, grapefruit, pineapple)
• Kiwi
• Strawberries
• Cantaloupe
• Baked potato
• Bell peppers
• Tomatoes and tomato products

Zinc — As long as you consume whole grains, legumes, green veggies and nuts you should be meeting your needs.

Omega 3 fatty acids — aim for two servings per day of walnuts, canola oil, milled or crushed flax seed or flax seed oil.

Calories — be sure that you are eating enough to meet your daily energy needs. If you begin to lose weight quickly or are feeling sluggish, contact your doctor or Duke Nutritionist to review your diet.
Optimize your health and weight by following these suggestions for Balancing Your Vegan Plate

About ½ of your plate should be fruits & vegetables.
Try for several different colors.

¼ of your plate should be grains.
Try to choose whole grains.

¼ 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

Plant Protein
• Includes: Legumes, soy/ tofu, nuts, seeds, nut butters, tempeh, seitan

Fats*
• Yes! Your body needs fats to survive. Some fats are better than others. (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 only be eaten in moderation.

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