

# How to Coach the Vegetarian and Vegan Client



Plant-based eating is the elimination of meat and/or animal-based products. This alternative lifestyle is growing in popularity as more and more people choose to make plants their prime fuel substance.

Trainers who are neither vegans or vegetarians—but train clients who are—may be concerned about their clients’ dietary choices and whether these will affect how they respond to exercise. What follows is a basic primer on plant-based eating that can help you understand the specific needs of vegan and vegetarian clients.

## **Defining Plant-Based Eating**

**Vegetarians** do not eat meat, but consume dairy-based products. This is generally the largest group of plant-based eaters. Vegetarianism is technically broken into three categories.

**Lacto-ovo-vegetarians** consume eggs and dairy products.

**Lacto-vegetarians** consume dairy products, but not eggs.

**Ovo-vegetarians** consume eggs, but not dairy.

**Vegans** do not eat meat or dairy. Vegan lifestyles are stricter and do not include products produced from living creatures such as honey or gelatin. Veganism is considered a lifestyle, while vegetarianism is viewed more as a diet.

**Pescatarians** do not eat meat, but consume fish. There is much controversy on whether this can be classified as a vegetarian.

**Fruitarianism** consume raw fruits, seeds and nuts, but no vegetables, grains or animal products.

## **Why Do People Choose Plant-based Diets?**

The reasons for adopting a plant-based lifestyle varies widely among individuals, including:

Disliking the taste of meat

Ethical reasons, such as a desire not to harm animals or the environment

Health concerns, such as heart health or other diseases, that may be positively affected by a plant-based diet

Cultural or religious practices, including Hinduism and Seventh Day Adventists, which call for abstaining from meat

### **Plant-Based Macronutrient Tips**

Plant-based eaters typically consume a greater amount of carbohydrates than their meat-eating counterparts. Clients who are focused on losing weight can benefit from eating higher amounts of plant and fruit sources for carbohydrates, while endurance-focused clients likely require the more substantial energy supplied by heartier carbohydrate sources such as pasta, rice, quinoa or other whole grains in addition to fruits and vegetables.

Endurance clients typically require a higher percentage intake of protein as well. The suggested protein intake ranges from 0.4-0.8 grams per pound of body weight, and highly active clients may need to aim for the higher end of that scale to ensure adequate muscle recovery.

Ideally, each meal should be a balance of fat, carbohydrate and protein. Balanced meals are not only healthy, but offer complete protein combinations. Examples include:

*-Tofu, rice and vegetable stir-fry*

*-Fruit smoothie blended with coconut milk (optional protein powder)*

*-Bean and rice casseroles or salads*

*-Legume soups*

*-Salads topped with olive oil and lemon; hummus and pita*

*-Oatmeal made with rolled oats and plant/nut milk, and topped with berries and nuts*

While macronutrient ranges vary according to physical activity levels, general guidelines have been established:

*-Carbohydrates: 50-65%*

*-Protein: 10-35%*

*-Fat: 20-35%*

### **Protein Consumption Concerns**

Protein intake is a significant concern for many people, trainers included. Protein, which is comprised of 20 amino acids, is considered either complete or incomplete. A complete protein is a food that contains all of the essential amino acids. Eggs, soy, tofu and dairy products are complete. Conversely, an incomplete protein does not contain all of the essential amino acids. Examples include fruits, vegetables, nuts, grains and seeds. Eight to ten amino acids are not produced by the body and must be consumed through foods.

A common misconception is that a person must eat all the essential amino acids in one meal. Eating the essential amino acids throughout the day, however, is sufficient for vegetarians and vegans to consume “complete” proteins. With careful planning, vegetarian and vegans can consume adequate amounts of protein. Whether an

individual is a meat-eater or a vegan (or somewhere in between), consuming a well-balanced diet is essential.

Protein deficiency occurs when a person is either calorically deficient or consumes all nutrient-less, processed foods. Here are some sources of high-quality plant-based proteins:

- Nut or soy milk*
- Nut butters*
- Tofu, seitan and tempeh*
- Hemp seeds*
- Beans and legumes*
- Quinoa and millet*
- Sprouted bean breads*
- Nuts and seeds*
- Dark, leafy greens*

### **Other Nutritional Tips**

While clients with specific nutritional needs that cannot be addressed within a health and fitness professional's scope of practice should be referred to a registered dietitian, there are some basic recommendations you can make to help your vegan and vegetarian clients make healthy choices.

Choose whole foods. It can be easy to rely on foods that have been heavily processed to mimic meat- or dairy-based foods. Instead, encourage your clients to adopt the following approach: "Apples before applesauce. Applesauce before apple pie." Avoid processed foods whenever possible, but try to make healthier choices. For example, a bean-based chip is a better choice than regular potato chips. Quality nutrition comes from sources closest to nature.

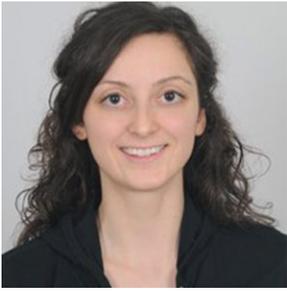
If using the MyPlate method of portion control, half of the plate should contain fresh fruits and/or vegetables. Vegans and meat-eaters alike benefit most from a variety of fresh vegetables and fruits. One quarter of the plate should include a protein and the other quarter should include a denser carbohydrate.

Remember, no vegetarian or vegan client is alike. Some clients want to focus on eating healthy, whole foods, while other clients will follow a macronutrient pie chart (e.g., 55% carbohydrates, 20% protein and 25% fats). Work with your clients to determine which eating approach is best for each individual's lifestyle and goals.

### **What Not to Do as a Trainer**

It is not uncommon for vegans to be questioned about their protein intake and lifestyle choices. As a trainer, never suggest adding meat or dairy to a diet unless the client asks for the advice.

Also, do not judge your clients' lifestyle choices or suggest their health or muscle mass would improve if they started eating meat. Finally, avoid offensive jokes or remarks that either makes fun of the lifestyle or animal rights—always honor and respect your client's choices.



By Elizabeth Kovar

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