

# Caring for Vegan Inpatients

By Dietitian Heather Russell



## The lowdown on vegan nutrition

### Getting the balance right

Well-planned vegan diets can meet nutritional needs during every stage of life. The following advice is based on the UK's Eatwell Guide:

Food group	Suggested intake
Fruit and vegetables (fresh, tinned, frozen or dried), including orange varieties and leafy greens	At least 5 x 80g portions per day (30g for dried fruit)
Starchy foods – ideally higher fibre choices, such as oats, sweet potato, wholemeal bread, wholewheat pasta and brown rice	Every meal
Protein-rich foods, such as beans, lentils, chickpeas, tofu, soya alternatives to milk and yoghurt and peanuts	Most meals
Nuts and seeds, especially those rich in omega-3 fat, such as walnuts, ground linseed, hemp seeds and chia seeds	Daily
Calcium-rich foods, such as fortified foods and calcium-set tofu	Examples: 400ml of fortified plant milk provides about $\frac{2}{3}$ recommended daily intake for adults. 100g of calcium-set tofu (uncooked weight) might provide $\frac{1}{2}$ .

### Nutrients that deserve special attention

It is recommended that everyone in the UK uses a vitamin D supplement during autumn and winter as a minimum. Vegans also need to ensure reliable intakes of vitamin B12, iodine and selenium. Take a look at the table below for more information:

Nutrient	Suggestions
Vitamin B12	Eat fortified foods at least twice a day providing a total of at least 3mcg (micrograms), use a daily supplement containing at least 10mcg, or use a weekly supplement containing at least 2000mcg
Vitamin D	Supplement during autumn and winter (all year if you do not regularly expose your skin to sunlight or you have darker skin). Vitamin D3 from lichen and vitamin D2 are vegan-friendly. Recommended dose is 10mcg per day.
Iodine	Arguably, a supplement is the best option. Recommended intake for adults is 140mcg per day.
Selenium	Eat a couple of Brazil nuts daily or supplement. Recommended daily intakes for adults are 60-75mcg.

## Understanding vegan needs

### The definition of veganism

Vegans avoid the use of non-human animals as far as is possible and practicable. A vegan diet excludes all animal products, including meat, fish, milk, eggs and honey. Someone who follows a vegan lifestyle will seek to use products that do not contain animal ingredients, and have not been tested on animals.

### Why vegan?

- It helps animals
- It reduces your impact on the environment
- Well-planned vegan diets support excellent health
- It reduces the demand for feeding crops to non-human animals

### Protected beliefs

- Freedom of thought, belief and conscience is protected by human rights legislation
- Nutritional care should be provided in a way that respects equality and diversity

*“When a person has specific dietary requirements relating to moral or ethical beliefs, such as vegetarianism, these requirements must be fully considered and met. Every effort should be made to meet people's preferences...” (Care Quality Commission)*

### Tips for ward staff

- Did you know that vegan options are suitable for most people? They can be offered to the following groups:
  - Vegans, vegetarians and people who eat meat and fish
  - Those trying to limit their consumption of animal products
  - People with allergies to milk and/or eggs (if free from these allergens)
  - Vegan meals may be acceptable to people who eat Halal or Kosher food (discuss with service user)
- If someone tells you that they need vegan meals, follow these three simple steps:
  1. Ask them if they have any other dietary requirements
  2. If you're not sure what is available, speak to the housekeeper or catering manager
  3. Make sure that vegan spread and fortified plant milk are available
- Remember that someone following a vegan lifestyle will be concerned about animal ingredients in all products, and animal testing, but the definition of veganism recognises that it is not always possible to avoid the use of animals
- It's a great idea to offer staff training so that you can provide the best possible care for vegans