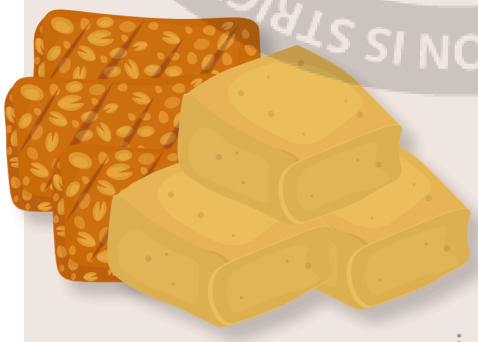
- Nutrition

PART ONE
The basics

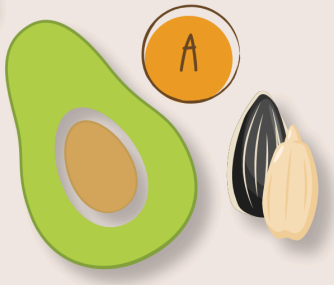
SIMPLE STEPS TO SMART NUTRITION

Whether you're a new vegan or simply looking to refresh your knowledge, understanding how to build a balanced plate is key. In the first of our three-part series, Cath Short shares her tips to help you thrive





CATH SHORT
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MACRONUTRIENTS: PROTEIN

Let's start with the basics: protein, fats and carbohydrates. These are the major building blocks of any diet and each plays a unique role.

Protein isn't just for athletes. It's essential for muscle repair, hormone production and immune function. Contrary to popular belief, getting enough protein on a vegan diet is totally achievable. Aim to include a source of protein in every meal to stay fuller for longer and support muscle health.

SOURCES TO TRY:

Legumes (lentils, chickpeas, black beans)
Tofu, tempeh, and edamame
Nuts and seeds (chia, hemp, pumpkin seeds)
Quinoa, oats and buckwheat
Protein powder such as Vivolife Perform, which has no added nasties
100% soya mince (try Clearspring)
Black bean spaghetti

MACRONUTRIENTS: FATS

Healthy fats are crucial for brain function, hormone production and absorbing fat-soluble vitamins such as vitamins A, D and E.

SOURCES TO TRY:

Avocados
Nuts and nut butters
Seeds (flax, chia, hemp)
Olives and olive oil
Coconut (milk, oil, flesh), in moderation
Soybeans

It's worth noting that soy also contains lecithin, a fat-like substance that supports brain and nerve function.



MACRONUTRIENTS: CARBOHYDRATES

Carbs are your body's preferred energy source. Whole, unrefined carbs provide fibre, which supports digestion and keeps you feeling full.

SOURCES TO TRY:

Fruits and vegetables
Wholegrains (brown rice, whole wheat pasta, barley)
Legumes (chickpeas, lentils, black beans)
Starchy vegetables (such as sweet potatoes and squash)

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MICRONUTRIENTS: VITAMIN B12

Micronutrients may be needed in smaller amounts, but they're vital for health.

B12 is an essential vitamin that is not produced by plants or animals – it is synthesised by bacteria. It plays a vital role in nerve function and the production of red blood cells.



SOURCES TO TRY:
Fortified foods (such as plant milks and nutritional yeast) or a B12 supplement. Consider using an oral spray (try Boost B12 by BetterYou), which is absorbed efficiently through the thin membrane of the mouth.

MICRONUTRIENTS: OMEGA-3S



Fish get their omega-3s by eating algae and seaweed – so why not go straight to the source? Algae-based supplements offer a clean, sustainable, plant-based alternative without the toxins often found in fish oil. These essential fats support brain and heart health.

SOURCES TO TRY:
Good choices are chia seeds, flaxseeds and flaxseed oil, hemp seeds, nori-wraps, nori-flakes, walnuts, algae oil (supplement).

MICRONUTRIENTS: CALCIUM

Important for bone health as well as muscle and nerve function.

SOURCES TO TRY:
Fortified plant milks, tahini, almonds, kale and broccoli.





MICRONUTRIENTS: IRON

A meta-analysis in the *Journal of Nutrition* found heme iron from meat increases heart disease risk by 57%. Non-heme iron from plants showed no such risk.

Iron is a vital micronutrient needed for the production of hemoglobin, which helps transport oxygen in the blood, and for maintaining energy levels, cognitive function and a healthy immune system. Pair plant-based (non-heme) iron with vitamin C-rich foods to boost its absorption.

SOURCES TO TRY:
Lentils, beans, tofu, spinach, pumpkin seeds. Pair with peppers, citrus fruits and broccoli.

MICRONUTRIENTS: IODINE

This is crucial for thyroid function.

SOURCES TO TRY:
Look for iodised salt, seaweed and iodine supplements, if needed.

MICRONUTRIENTS: VITAMIN D

Supports immune health and calcium absorption. Most people need supplementation, especially in winter.



SOURCES TO TRY:
Sunlight (the body produces vitamin D when skin is exposed to UVB rays)
Fortified foods (such as plant milks and cereals)
Vegan vitamin D3 supplements
Wild mushrooms and UV-exposed mushrooms can naturally produce vitamin D_2. Look for labels such as 'UV-exposed' or 'vitamin D enhanced' to ensure a beneficial amount.

YOUR VEGAN MEAL PLAN

BREAKFAST
Overnight oats with almond or oat milk, chia seeds, banana and berries. Add a sprinkle of hemp seeds for protein and omega-3s.

LUNCH
Chickpea and avocado wholemeal wrap with rocket, grated carrot and tahini dressing. Mixed fruit salad.

SNACK
A palmful of mixed nuts and an apple.

DINNER
Stir-fry with tofu or tempeh, garlic, ginger, broccoli, peppers and mushrooms with brown rice or edamame spaghetti. Top with sesame seeds and a splash of tamari. Finish with a few squares of dark chocolate.

BEFORE BED
Herbal tea, such as camomile, peppermint or valerian.

VEGAN BASICS GROCERY LIST

PANTRY
Lentils, chickpeas, black beans
Brown rice, quinoa, oats
Canned tomatoes, coconut milk
Nut butters
Seeds: chia, flax, pumpkin

FRIDGE
Tofu, tempeh
Plant milks (fortified)
Leafy greens
Vegetables

SNACKS
Fresh fruit
Nuts and trail mix
Houmous and veggie sticks (carrots, celery, peppers)

PLAN YOUR MEALS RIGHT

Build your meals around plants. Start with vegetables, then add a protein, healthy fats and wholegrains or starchy veg.
Eat the rainbow – different colours for different nutrients.
Batch cook grains, prep veggies and keep pantry staples on hand.
Listen to your body – energy levels, digestion and mood can tell you a lot about what's working.

NEXT MONTH

We'll explore how to optimise your vegan diet and highlight 5 common mistakes. Until then, enjoy building your vibrant plant-powered plate!

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