

# DIETARY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AN OPTIMAL VEGAN DIET

To avoid a vitamin B<sub>12</sub> deficiency, all vegans must regularly consume vitamin B<sub>12</sub>-fortified foods (eg, fortified breakfast cereals, soy milk, vegetarian meat analogs, energy or snack bars, soy powders or other beverage mixes) or take a daily vitamin B<sub>12</sub> supplement. Vegans should not consider fermented soy products, leafy vegetables, or seaweed to be reliable sources of active vitamin B<sub>12</sub>.

Although it is possible to consume adequate calcium from plant foods, it can be difficult. Eight or more servings of calcium-rich plant foods and calcium-fortified foods are recommended. To ensure adequate calcium in the diet, vegans should regularly consume calcium-fortified foods and/or calcium supplements to meet the Recommended Dietary Allowance.

To ensure adequate vitamin D status—especially during the winter months, for older adults, and for those who live in northern latitudes—vegans must regularly consume

vitamin D-fortified foods such as soy milk, rice milk, orange juice, breakfast cereals, and margarines. Supplements of vitamin D<sub>3</sub> may also be necessary if vitamin D blood levels are low.

Vegans should consume two servings per day of plant foods naturally rich in the omega-3 fatty acid alpha-linolenic acid, such as ground flaxseed, walnuts, canola oil, soy products, and hemp seed-based beverages. Though more research is needed in this area, fortification or supplementation is likely necessary only for those with a family history of conditions linked to low levels of omega-3s, such as heart disease, macular degeneration, or depression.

— Author compiled recommendations using reference 3 and Messina V, Melina V, Mangels AR. A new food guide for North American vegetarians. *J Am Diet Assoc.* 2003;103(6):771-775.