

FITNESS

CW essential guide to...

Following a vegetarian diet

How to get your protein, iron and Omega-3s

Anita Bean

If you have chosen to follow a vegetarian diet, you may be wondering if you're getting enough protein and other nutrients from plant foods to fuel your cycling and promote recovery.

The main protein sources for vegetarian cyclists are dairy foods, eggs, nuts, seeds, beans, lentils, soya products (tofu, tempeh), wholegrains (such as bread, oats, pasta, rice and millet) and quinoa. However, most plant sources of protein — with the exceptions of quinoa, soya and hemp — do not provide all eight amino acids. The solution is to combine protein sources: grains with pulses (e.g. black beans and vegetable curry with rice); grains with dairy (e.g. porridge); soya with vegetables (e.g. tofu and vegetable stir-fry); grains or pulses with nuts (e.g. chickpea and nut burgers); dairy or eggs with vegetables (e.g. spinach and goat's cheese frittata).

For optimal muscle recovery, aim for 0.3g/kg body weight (roughly 20–25g) post-exercise and per meal. This is equivalent to 500ml milk or 25g whey, soya, pea or hemp protein (mixed with water), or

four tablespoons (200g) cooked pulses combined with five tablespoons (250g) cooked wholegrains (pasta, rice or quinoa).

The type of iron found in plants is less easy for your body to absorb than is the iron found in meat. However, you can increase the amount absorbed by eating a vitamin C-rich food (i.e. fruit, vegetables) at the same time as iron-rich foods. Good plant sources of iron include wholegrains, quinoa, nuts, seeds, beans, lentils, leafy green vegetables, dried fruit and egg yolk.

Vitamin B12 deficiency is a risk for vegans, for whom supplementation is recommended. Adequate amounts can be obtained from eggs and dairy. The richest source of omega-3 (fatty acids EPA and DHA) for non-vegetarians is oily fish. Flax seed, hemp oil, pumpkin seeds, chia seeds and walnuts do provide some alpha linoleic acid (ALA), which is converted to EPA and DHA in the body, but only at a limited rate. Consume a tablespoon of these per day.

Anita Bean is author of *The Vegetarian Athlete's Cookbook*, published by Bloomsbury, available from December 29.



whole new way of eating and cooking. But it has made me more adventurous in the kitchen and has led me to a much more whole foods-based diet and away from processed foods.

From a health perspective, I get sick less often — less of the annoying head colds, blocked noses and sore throats that often plague cyclists in hard training blocks. Since



PROS AND CONS OF A VEGETARIAN DIET

Pros	Cons
A longer lifespan: long-term vegetarians live on average nearly four years longer than meat-eaters, according to 2016 research conducted at the Mayo Clinic, Arizona.	Lack of nutrients: if you do not have a plan in place for getting the nutrients found in meat through vegetarian sources, you can fall short on protein, iron, zinc, omega-3s; and, for vegans, calcium and vitamin B12.
Lower heart disease risk: the EPIC-Oxford Vegetarian Study of 45,000 people showed vegetarians have a 32 per cent lower chance of developing heart disease.	Not getting enough calories: plant-based diets are not very calorie-dense so you may unintentionally eat too few calories to fuel your cycling.
Lower cancer risk: populations that eat less meat tend to have less cancer, particularly bowel, breast and prostate cancers.	Eating too much fibre: many plant-based foods are high in fibre. Eating lots of high-fibre foods may cause premature satiety, gas, bloating and GI discomfort.
Better for the environment: livestock farming is responsible for 15 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions.	
More sustainable and a better use of land: 30 per cent of the planet's available surface is used by livestock or for growing food for livestock.	
Budget-friendly: Meat is much more expensive than plant-based proteins like beans, lentils, nuts, seeds and tofu.	

making the switch, my physical performance level has increased steadily each year for the last six years.

My rate of recovery has also improved, and my body feels cleaner, faster and leaner. With faster recovery comes increases in performance, as I can fit in more training sessions per year and lose less days to illness.

I TRIED IT



'I'm fitter and faster since going veggie'

Edward Greene, 25, is a semi-pro cyclist and rides for LowestRates Cycling Team based in Quebec, Canada.

I decided to give up eating meat in 2010 after taking an Ethics course at university. It was a challenge at first; I had to embrace a

EXPERT OPINION



Jon Day is a lecturer in English at King's College London and author of *Cyclogeography: Journeys of a London Bicycle Courier*.

'Cycling: it's not about the numbers'

I've always cycled, but have never been much of a competitive cyclist. For years I worked as a bicycle courier in London, a job that I loved for the fact that it allowed me to ride my bike every day and ride it to exhaustion. At the end of my time on the road, I slept more deeply and with more satisfaction than I ever had before, and was fitter than I ever will be again.

I miss that fitness now that I've returned to being a lowly cycle commuter, but have so far resisted the call of serious training. This is in part because I worry about what I would lose were I to become a fully signed-up member of the racing classes. Friends tell me breathlessly of their

"Agonising over data and ratios leaves me cold"

intense training regimes, of the passionate intensity of riding L'Etape, and the sociability of club rides, but I like cycling for the solitude it affords — the thinking time — so have never joined a club. Agonising over the data of my body — measuring my power output and geekily comparing gear ratios and energy bars — leaves me cold.

One of the great joys of cycling is the perspective it gives you on the landscapes you travel through, either urban or rural. By bike you feel the inclines and gradients of the land you cover. The bike provides a moving view of the world that is both more intimate than that from the car, and more cinematically sweeping than that offered by walking.

Obsessing over training, concentrating not on the world at large but on your body — on your best times, or your longest distances ridden — seems to me to be an impoverishment. The idea of locking myself away in a room over the winter and riding rollers fills me with profound existential dread. What pleasure can there be in such activities? Constantly measuring yourself against yourself or, with Strava, against other anonymous riders seems to miss what is the true joy of cycling: the joys of encountering the world, and of getting somewhere.

