

FITNESS FOOD

Are you getting it right?

Plant-based athletes have come a long way since being handed tired-looking plates of cheese at school

Recipes Anita Bean Words Tom Pilcher
Photography xxxx xxx xxxxx xxx

Take Anita Bean's journey as an inspirational example. By the mid-1980s, the lifelong vegetarian was leading a trend towards a plant-based diet, and into the 1990s, she was winning the British Bodybuilding Championships and placing in the Top 10 in the World Championships.

Plant-based eating in general and sport is a strong trend nowadays – something Anita's harnessed all her life.

"Growing up as a vegetarian in the 60s and 70s, I was very much in a minority. School dinnertime was a nightmare – I was the only one who didn't eat meat, so was usually given a plate of grated cheese instead," she tells *LK*.

"Vegetarianism was practically unheard of in those days and people assumed either something was 'wrong' with me or that I must be part of a religious cult.

"Thankfully, attitudes to vegetarianism have changed enormously since my childhood. I am no longer thought of as 'cranky' or 'weird', nor do I have to explain endlessly to people why I don't eat meat."

In her new book – *Vegetarian Meals in 30 Minutes: More Than 100 Delicious Recipes for Fitness* – Anita is not only serving up some wonderful additions to your repertoire, she is also telling you how to fuel right.

MUSCLE WITHOUT MEAT

For so long, it's been almost gospel that strength and power-based athletes should eat meat, but Anita is here to bust that myth.

"Adopting a vegan diet to boost performance is a big departure from the social stereotype"

"There are so many successful vegan athletes from all kinds of sports, including endurance and ultra-endurance, to strength, power and team sports, who have become great role models for a vegan diet," she says.

"The idea you could compete successfully without eating meat was unheard of 10 years ago. When I was competing as a vegetarian bodybuilder, I was always asked whether it was possible to build

muscle without meat.

"However, I proved the doubters wrong and over the past few years I've seen a huge rise in interest in vegan diets among athletes in my practice – including male athletes. They want to adopt a vegan diet to boost their performance, which is a big departure from the social stereotype."

It's not just athletes who are following in Anita's healthier footsteps – a Waitrose survey found that around a third of people cut out or cut down on meat last year, while the number of vegans in the UK has quadrupled over the past 12 months and will surely soon break the one million barrier.

Lockdown has been a precious time for everyone to experiment more about other ways of eating

"People have had more time to spend in the kitchen and experiment with new recipes, more time to spend gardening or growing vegetables, less money to spend on expensive ingredients such as meat, and so interest in vegan and vegetarian cooking has really grown," Anita says.





PROTEIN AND IRON

But what about getting enough protein and iron? While American golfer Bryson DeChambeau has spoken of drinking seven protein shakes a day, there are many ways to consume enough protein on a plant-based diet without needing any supplements.

"Most foods contain some protein," explains Anita. "Dairy, legumes, nuts, seeds, quinoa, grains, soya products such as tofu, tempeh and edamame beans. Provided you're eating enough and a wide variety over the day, then it does not matter whether it comes from animals or plants."

Although iron is not as readily absorbed from plants as meat, Anita adds: "The body adapts by absorbing a higher percentage from the food we eat."

"In other words, it's not about how much iron you consume, but how well you absorb it. Eating vitamin-C-rich food (most fruit or vegetables) at the same time greatly improves iron absorption."

Anita makes fuelling right sound easy, so adjust to similar good practises and you, too, could be a champion athlete in no time.



Recipes taken from *Vegetarian Meals in 30 Minutes: More Than 100 Delicious Recipes for Fitness* (Bloomsbury, RRP £16.99)

Halloumi, vegetable and sesame skewers

Makes 8 skewers

Perfect for barbecues, halloumi is lower in fat than most hard cheeses, but equally rich in protein and calcium. It goes well with crispy vegetables – briefly cooked on a high heat to retain nutrients. Peppers have many health benefits, while cherry tomatoes, aubergines or corn on the cob all work well.

10 mins Preparation & cooking time

Ingredients

- 250g halloumi, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 2 red onions, quartered
- 2 red or yellow peppers, deseeded and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 3 courgettes, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 16 button mushrooms

For the dressing:

- 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- juice of 1 lemon
- a small handful of chopped fresh herbs,

such as thyme, rosemary, mint or parsley

- 2 tbsp sesame seeds
- salt and freshly ground black pepper

To serve

- Warm flatbreads, rocket and watercress

Method

- 1/ Soak 8 bamboo skewers in a bowl of water for a few minutes (this stops them burning when on the griddle or barbecue).
- 2/ Thread the halloumi cubes and vegetables onto the skewers.
- 3/ In a bowl, mix together the ingredients for the dressing and brush the skewers with half of the mixture.
- 4/ Place a griddle pan or barbecue on a medium heat. Add the skewers and cook for 5 minutes before turning over and cooking on the other side for 5 minutes until lightly charred.
- 5/ Drizzle the skewers with the remaining dressing, before serving with warm flatbreads, rocket and watercress.

NUTRITION

per serving:

357
cals

19g
protein

23g
fat
(3g sat)

15g
carbs
(11g sugars)

8g
fibre

