



## Vegetarian Vitamin B-12 Food Sources

### Overview and Recommendations

- Vitamin B12 deserves attention.** This vitamin is probably one of the greatest nutritional concerns for vegetarians and vegans, because vitamin B12 is generally found only in animal foods. While vegetarians can obtain vitamin B12 from dairy foods and eggs, vegans do not consume these foods, thus it can be virtually non-existent in their diets. Many foods are supplemented with vitamin B12, such as some nutritional yeasts, breakfast cereals, and meat alternatives, but it is important that regular, consistent supplies of vitamin B12 be included in the diet. Inadequate intake may result in vitamin B12 deficiency, which can lead to megaloblastic anemia and even difficulty walking, memory loss and disorientation. Thus, vitamin B12 supplements are recommended at levels needed to meet the RDA. It's important to consider that folate—typically high in vegetarian and vegan diets—can mask the presence of vitamin B12 deficiency.
- Ages 50+ vitamin B12 needs.** Regardless of diet preference, the National Institutes of Health recommends that all adults over 50 years of age receive most of their B12 through supplements and fortified foods, due to impaired absorption that occurs during aging.

### Tips To Meet Your Needs

- If you're vegan, take a daily B-12 supplement.** While many foods may be fortified with B12, such as nutritional yeasts, plant-based milks, and cereals, it's important to get a regular source of B12 daily that meets 100% of the RDA. In fact, the Vegetarian Nutrition Dietetic Practice Group suggests that vegans consume much higher levels of vitamin B12 (250 mcg/day for adults) to compensate for poor absorption of supplements. As with all dietary supplements, it's important to discuss B12 supplementation with your health care provider. The preferred form of B12 supplements is cyanocobalamin.
- Vegetarians, get B12, too.** Vegetarians should also include regular servings of B12, such as in eggs, dairy products, and fortified foods. If you're nearly vegan, or consume few dairy products or eggs, you may also benefit from a supplement at least a few times per week.
- Check the food label.** If you rely on nutritional yeasts and fortified foods for B12 intake, check the label to see how much vitamin B-12 they contain before purchasing them.

| Vitamin B-12 RDA                                   |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| Life Stage Group                                   | Vitamin B-12 (mcg)  |
| Infants:<br>0 to 6 months<br>6 to 12 months        | 0.4<br>0.5          |
| Children:<br>1 to 3 years<br>4 to 8 years          | 0.9<br>1.2          |
| Males:<br>9 to 13 years<br>14 to 50 years<br>51+   | 1.8<br>2.4<br>2.4** |
| Females:<br>9 to 13 years<br>14 to 50 years<br>51+ | 1.8<br>2.4<br>2.4** |
| Pregnancy  | 2.6                 |
| Lactation  | 2.8                 |

\*\* Vitamin B-12 intake should be from supplements or fortified foods due to the age-related increase in food bound malabsorption.

RDA from United States Department of Agriculture Library; DRI Table: RDA and AI for Vitamins and Elements

## Vegan Vitamin B-12 Food Sources

| Food   | Serving      | Vitamin B-12 (mcg) |
|--|--------------|--------------------|
| Almond milk, fortified with vitamin B12          | 1 cup        | 3*                 |
| Coconut milk, fortified with vitamin B12         | 1 cup        | 3*                 |
| Nutritional yeast                                | 1 tablespoon | 2                  |
| Soymilk, original, fortified with vitamin B-12   | 1 cup        | 1.2*               |
| Vegan mayonnaise                                 | 1 tablespoon | 0.24               |
| Tempeh   | 100 grams    | 0.12               |
| Ready-to-eat cereal, fortified with vitamin B-12 | ½ - ¾ cup    | 0.6 – 6*           |

## Vegetarian Vitamin B-12 Food Sources

|                        |                 |      |
|------------------------|-----------------|------|
| Yogurt, plain, low-fat | 8 ounces        | 1.37 |
| Milk, low-fat          | 8 ounces        | 1.15 |
| Cottage cheese, 1%     | ¾ cup           | 1.07 |
| Cheese, Swiss          | 1 ounce         | 0.95 |
| Egg                    | 1 whole, medium | 0.39 |
| Ice cream, vanilla     | ½ cup           | 0.26 |

\*May vary depending on product.

All nutritional information from USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference or food manufacturer labeling

Courtesy of Sharon Palmer, RD, The Plant-Powered Dietitian™