

What is a vegan bodybuilding diet?

Bodybuilders strive to develop their musculature through intensive resistance training for aesthetic purposes.

Nutrition plays a key role in the process of muscular development. It's generally accepted that for optimal muscle growth to occur, [protein intake](#) should be rather high at around 0.7–1.0 grams per pound (1.6–2.2 grams per kg) of body weight per day ([1](#)).

A calorie surplus of 10–20% is also beneficial for gaining muscle mass, especially for those who are not brand new to training ([1](#)).

Traditional [bodybuilding diets](#) include a lot of animal source foods due to their high protein and calorie content.

The vegan bodybuilding diet is devoid of all animal products and higher in protein than traditional vegan diets ([2](#)).

This presents a challenge for bodybuilders following a vegan diet, as plant-based proteins tend to be of lower quality than their animal-based counterparts, which can affect muscle gain ([3](#), [4](#)).

Therefore, it takes careful planning to ensure sufficient intake of protein, calories, and several micronutrients that a vegan diet may lack.

The vegan bodybuilding diet also changes during different stages of a bodybuilder's life, such as whether they're in their off-season or undergoing contest preparation, when fat loss is common.

SUMMARY

The vegan bodybuilding diet is high in fruits, vegetables, and plant-based protein. It excludes all animal-based products and is usually higher in protein than a traditional vegan diet.

How to implement the diet

While [implementing a vegan diet](#) may seem quite simple, it takes a good deal of planning to ensure you're eating complete meals.

The vegan bodybuilding diet includes several staple foods on which many of the meals are based.

To start the vegan bodybuilding diet, it's beneficial to plan out 5–7 days of meals to ensure you have all of the ingredients, as many vegan recipes require several items.

If you're transitioning from a traditional diet, it may help to slowly incorporate more vegan foods into your regular diet before fully switching over.

Fill up on high protein plant foods

When following a vegan bodybuilding diet, it's important to get enough protein to aid your muscle-building goals.

Considering that many [vegan protein sources](#) usually do not contain all of the essential amino acids, higher amounts and a wider variety of these foods need to be eaten to regularly meet your needs.

Filling up on high protein vegan foods, such as seitan, tofu, legumes, and quinoa, can help you meet your protein needs to maximize muscle gain.

Vegan protein powders can also help you meet your protein needs by providing concentrated sources of protein surrounding workouts and throughout the day.

Make sure to eat enough fat

By consuming [sufficient amounts of fat](#), you obtain the calories needed to promote muscle gain, as fat provides twice the number of calories as carbs and protein per gram.

The general recommendation for fat intake for off-season bodybuilders is 0.5 grams per pound (1 gram per kg) of body weight daily ([1st](#)).

This equates to around 80 grams of fat per day for a male bodybuilder weighing 175 pounds (80 kg).

When embarking on a vegan bodybuilding diet, it may help to track your intake of macronutrients — protein, carbs, and fat — for the first few weeks to ensure you're meeting your needs.

Drink plenty of fluids

Given that a vegan bodybuilding diet tends to be high in fruits, vegetables, grains, and legumes, fiber intake can become quite high.

When you significantly increase your fiber intake, certain side effects can arise, such as bloating, excessive flatulence, and abdominal pain ([5](#)).

[Drinking enough water](#) is one way to help prevent complications from a high fiber vegan diet. A minimum of 1 ml of fluid per calorie is a good place to start ([6th](#)).

For example, if you're eating a 2,000 -calorie diet, aim for 2,000 ml (68 ounces) of fluids. Still, keep in mind that your water needs may vary, especially when you're exercising.

Educate yourself

Education plays an important role in following a vegan diet and can set apart a successful diet from an unsuccessful one.

Given that the vegan diet prohibits the intake of several food groups, it puts followers at risk of certain nutrient deficiencies.

To prevent these, it's crucial to know [which foods provide](#) the key nutrients the diet may otherwise lack.

Fortunately, with the rise in popularity of the vegan diet, educational resources have been created that can lead you in the right direction.

SUMMARY

Implementing the vegan bodybuilding diet requires a good deal of planning and education. Ensuring adequate protein and calorie intake, including plenty of fat, and drinking enough water are three major aspects that should not be overlooked.

Potential benefits of the vegan bodybuilding diet

The vegan diet has been associated with several potential [health benefits](#).

Reduces heart disease risk

People following vegan diets seem to be at a significantly lower risk of developing heart disease ([7](#)).

This may be partly attributed to a reduced intake of saturated fats and cholesterol and a higher intake of fiber and various plant compounds.

Traditionally, vegans tend to have lower blood pressure and levels of total and LDL (bad) cholesterol than the general population ([7](#)).

Moreover, the vegan bodybuilding diet is high in fruits and vegetables, which contain a good amount of dietary fiber. [High fiber intake](#) has been associated with a lower incidence of stroke and heart disease ([8](#)).

Can promote a healthy body weight

Those following a vegan diet typically have a lower body mass index (BMI) than those following a traditional Western diet, which reduces the risk of several disease factors (7^[9]).

One 16-week study looked at the effects of the vegan diet on 75 people with excess weight. It found the vegan diet to be more effective at improving body weight, fat mass, and insulin resistance markers than a control diet (9^[9]).

Therefore, if you're starting out on your bodybuilding journey with a bit of [weight to lose](#), the vegan diet may be beneficial in that regard.

May protect against certain cancers

Following a vegan diet has been associated with a reduced risk of various types of cancer, compared with a traditional Western diet (10^[9]).

This effect is likely due to the increased legume, fruit, and vegetable intakes associated with the vegan diet, which lead to higher fiber, micronutrient, and phytonutrient intakes (11^[9]).

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The vegan diet has also been linked to a reduction in BMI. A high BMI is another risk factor for [certain types of cancer](#) (12^[9]).

What's more, eating more soy, which is typical of those following a vegan diet, has been associated with a reduction in breast cancer risk in women (13^[9]).

Lastly, various levels of processed [red meat intake](#) have been linked to a higher risk of colorectal cancer. This increased risk does not apply to those following a vegan diet (14^[9]).

SUMMARY

The vegan bodybuilding diet is rich in fruits and vegetables and can provide several health benefits, such as lowering your risk of heart disease and cancer, as well as promoting a healthy body weight.

Some downsides of the vegan bodybuilding diet

While the vegan bodybuilding diet appears to have numerous potential benefits, it comes with some downsides to consider.

Can increase your risk of nutrient deficiencies

The main downside of the vegan bodybuilding diet is an increased risk of several [nutrient deficiencies](#).

By excluding animal products from your diet, your intake of various essential nutrients is reduced — primarily calcium, omega-3s, iron, zinc, and vitamins B12 and D (7⁰¹).

You may need to take a vegan multivitamin to ensure proper intake of the above nutrients. Vegan omega-3 supplements are also available, which are usually made from algae.

While these nutrients can be obtained from fortified vegan foods, nutrition education plays an important role when starting a vegan diet.

Higher fiber intake

Another potential downside of the vegan bodybuilding diet is its [excessively high fiber intake](#).

While a high fiber intake is generally considered healthy, consuming too much fiber can cause digestive issues, such as bloating, excessive flatulence, and abdominal pain (5).

The recommended dietary fiber intake is 14 grams per 1,000 calories, which is around 25 grams for women and 38 grams for men. This amount is easily exceeded on a vegan diet (15²).

Excessive fiber intake can also lead to a feeling of fullness and reduced appetite. While this may be beneficial for some populations, it could limit bodybuilding progress if sufficient calories are not consumed (16², 17²).

Can be tough to meet protein and calorie needs

Given that a vegan bodybuilding diet mainly consists of nutrient-dense, high fiber foods, it may be difficult to meet protein and calorie needs without proper planning.

Vegan diets tend to be lower in calories than traditional diets, due to the exclusion of many higher calorie, animal-based food items.

Thus, following a vegan bodybuilding diet may make it challenging to eat more calories than your body burns to support your bodybuilding goals.

This can be counteracted by increasing [portion sizes](#), adding healthy fats to your meals, and eating cooked vegetables as opposed to raw ones to reduce their volume, which allows you to eat more of them.

May be overly restrictive for some people

By eliminating all animal-derived products, the vegan bodybuilding diet can be too limiting for some people.

Though the selection and availability of vegan food has grown rapidly in recent years, the diet can be seen as slightly monotonous, compared with the traditional Western diet.

Fortunately, the number of creative [vegan recipes](#) that can add life to the diet and keep it interesting is limitless.

Foods to eat

The vegan bodybuilding diet usually includes many of the following foods:

- **Beans and legumes.** These provide a good source of protein and fiber.
- **Hemp, flax, sunflower, and chia seeds.** They contain a good amount of protein and omega-3s.
- **Quinoa and amaranth.** These two pseudograins provide complete sources of protein.
- **Meat substitutes.** Made to look and feel like meat, these products are usually made with soy or pea protein.
- **Soy products.** Examples include tofu, tempeh, edamame, soy milk, and soy protein powder.
- **Calcium-fortified plant milks and yogurts.** These fortified products can help vegans meet their daily requirements for calcium and vitamin D.
- **Spirulina.** This [blue-green algae](#) packs a lot of protein, as well as several vitamins and minerals.
- **Vegan protein powders.** The best varieties are usually made from a combination of protein sources, such as peas, hemp, and brown rice.
- **Nutritional yeast.** Used in vegan cooking for its savory flavor, [nutritional yeast](#) is commonly fortified with vitamin B12.
- **Sprouted grain breads.** These provide a good source of protein and complex carbs.
- **Oats.** Oatmeal and oats provide a good amount of protein per serving, as well as some beneficial fiber.
- **Fruit and vegetables.** These are an important part of any vegan diet.
- **Whole grains and cereals.** These can provide a good source of protein, B vitamins, and fiber.

- **Nuts and nut butters.** They can provide a good source of protein when combined with other complementary proteins. Plus, they're a good source of healthy fats.
- **Tahini.** This paste made from sesame seeds provides a good amount of fat and a bit of protein per serving.
- **Healthy oils.** Oils, such as olive, avocado, and hempseed, provide a good source of healthy fats and some essential omega-3s.
- **Vegan dark chocolate.** High in antioxidants, vegan dark chocolate contains some essential vitamins and minerals, such as calcium, iron, potassium, magnesium, and vitamins A, B, and E.

Dietary supplements

Considering that the vegan bodybuilding diet may lack certain nutrients, it's recommended that followers take advantage of certain [dietary supplements](#).

With the rise in popularity of the vegan diet in recent years, nutrition supplements geared toward those following it have greatly improved in quality and taste.

One of the main supplements to consider is a [vegan protein powder](#), which allows you to reach the protein intake levels recommended for bodybuilding while staying within a certain calorie range.

There are numerous vegan protein powders available, such as soy isolate, pea, hemp, and brown rice. It's best to find a powder with several sources to ensure you're getting all of the essential amino acids.

Another potentially beneficial supplement is a vegan multivitamin that includes sufficient quantities of the nutrients that the vegan diet typically lacks, such as calcium, iron, zinc, and vitamins B12 and D.

Some other supplements to consider are creatine and beta-alanine. These two well-studied compounds are naturally found in meat products and available in

vegan-friendly varieties. They can play a role in energy metabolism and muscle gain.

While supplementing is not entirely necessary on the vegan diet, it can reduce the chances of nutrient deficiency and optimize the diet for your bodybuilding purposes.

SUMMARY

The vegan bodybuilding diet is based on several nutritious whole foods. Dietary supplements may also play a crucial role in making up for nutrients the diet may lack.

Foods to avoid

The vegan bodybuilding diet tends to avoid or limit the following foods:

- **Animal foods.** Meat, fish, poultry, dairy, eggs, and bee products are entirely off-limits on a vegan diet. Certain animal additives found in several foods fall into this category as well.
- **Foods that might not be vegan-friendly.** Some breads, deep-fried foods, candy, potato chips, [dark chocolate](#), and other products may harbor animal-derived ingredients.
- **Vegan junk food.** Candy, ice cream, and some [vegan protein bars](#) should be restricted, as they tend to be high in refined sugar and calories.
- **Mock meats and cheeses.** These tend to be processed and may contain additives. They also tend to provide fewer nutrients than whole foods. Therefore, these products should be limited.

SUMMARY

While vegan diets are typically based on non-animal whole foods, there are some foods you should watch out for when starting the diet. Some may contain traces of animal-derived ingredients, whereas others may lack a sound nutritional profile.

5-day meal plan

While calorie and macronutrient intakes vary greatly by individual and specific goals, here is a sample 5-day vegan bodybuilding diet meal plan.

Day 1

- **Breakfast:** protein oatmeal made with oats, vegan protein powder, soy milk, banana, and nut butter
- **Lunch:** tofu stir-fry made with extra firm tofu, vegan pasta, beans, red lentils, celery, onion, and spinach
- **Dinner:** teriyaki tempeh with [broccoli](#) and quinoa
- **Snack:** strawberry-banana protein shake

Day 2

- **Breakfast:** breakfast burritos made with tofu scramble and vegetables on vegan tortillas
- **Lunch:** lentil loaf made with lentils, kidney beans, veggies, and nutritional yeast
- **Dinner:** black-bean veggie burger with sweet potato fries
- **Snack:** peanut butter and oatmeal snack bars

Day 3

- **Breakfast:** hummus toast made with sprouted grain bread, hummus, hemp seeds, and [sunflower seeds](#)
- **Lunch:** vegan burrito bowl made with rice, beans, and homemade mock taco meat
- **Dinner:** sweet-and-sour stir-fry made with tofu, rice noodles, and vegetables
- **Snack:** mock tuna salad sandwich



Day 4

- **Breakfast:** chocolate-peanut-butter smoothie bowl made with bananas, peanut butter, almond milk, vegan protein powder, and cocoa powder
- **Lunch:** black bean and quinoa “meat” balls over whole grain vegan pasta
- **Dinner:** vegan chili with tofu mince, kidney beans, tomatoes, and red lentils
- **Snack:** roasted chickpeas with red pepper flakes

Day 5

- **Breakfast:** protein pancakes made with whole grain flour and vegan protein powder with toppings of your choice
- **Lunch:** coconut-tofu-curry stir-fry made with tofu, [soba noodles](#), and edamame
- **Dinner:** vegan sloppy joe made with lentils and veggies
- **Snack:** chocolate-peanut-butter protein shake

SUMMARY

With many creative recipes available, the vegan bodybuilding diet doesn't have to be boring. There are several staple ingredients that many of the recipes are based upon. It's helpful to plan out several days of meals to make shopping easier.



The bottom line

The rising popularity of the vegan diet has attracted attention from many individuals, including those in the bodybuilding community.

While traditional bodybuilding diets include large amounts of animal protein, the vegan bodybuilding diet eliminates all animal-derived products and is [higher in protein](#) than a traditional vegan diet.

Following a vegan diet can provide several health benefits, although it comes with some drawbacks for bodybuilding, which should be taken into consideration.

It's wise to consult your healthcare provider or nutritionist before starting a vegan diet.