

PLANT-BASED DIETS & BARIATRIC SURGERY

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Plant-based diets are growing in popularity, and depending on the type of plant-based diet, the following foods may or may not be eaten; eggs, milk, cheese, yoghurt, honey, fish, poultry and meat. Individuals may choose to follow a plant-based diet for a number of reasons including animal welfare, perceived personal health reasons and environmental concerns.

What is the healthiest diet to follow though? It's one that is based around fruits and vegetables, whole-grains and unsaturated fats (vegetable oil, nuts, seeds and avocado), and is low in foods that are high in sugar and fat and low in nutrients such as biscuits, crisps and sweets. Small amounts of meat and fish CAN feature as a part of a healthy and balanced plant BASED/FOCUSSED diet.

Plant-Based Diets & Bariatric Surgery

Protein is essential following weight loss surgery and during the initial weeks you may be reliant upon milk to meet your needs. Soya milk contains a similar amount of protein in comparison to cow's milk, however nut milks contain hardly any. If you rely on nut milks then you may need to consider adding a plant-based protein powder - look for one that provides a mixture of different sources of protein to ensure that you're getting a range of different amino acids (the breakdown of protein) such as hemp, pea and rice protein.

Meat and fish are excellent sources of protein, as well as other nutrients, and although following weight loss surgery you may struggle to eat certain types of meat or indeed the quantity of meat that you ate prior e.g. steak or fried chicken, you should be able to eat meats such as minced beef or casseroled chicken. Quorn and vegetarian sausages are other sources of (plant-based) protein.

Nutrients to be Aware of if Eating a Plant-Based Diet

- **Protein for muscle preservation when losing weight** - If you avoid meat and fish, aim to eat a variety of different proteins e.g. tofu, lentils, chickpeas, beans, nuts, seeds & soya.
- **Omega 3 fatty acids for heart health** - If you don't eat oily fish, make sure to include foods such as flaxseed oil, tofu and walnuts/pumpkin seeds regularly and consider taking an Algal supplement which contains the most beneficial type of omega 3 fatty acid DHA; the body doesn't convert ALA (the plant based type omega 3) to DHA very well.
- **Calcium for bone and teeth health** - If you don't drink milk or eat dairy, make sure to choose fortified milk alternatives (this means that calcium is added in), figs, sesame seeds, calcium-set tofu and almonds. You should also take your daily calcium supplement as directed by your dietitian if you have had a gastric bypass or sleeve.
- **Iodine for thyroid function** - Iodine is found in dairy and white fish. If you avoid these look for a milk alternative that has it added in. Your multivitamin should also contain this.
- **Iron transports oxygen around the body** - Vegan sources of iron include lentils, soybeans, tofu, dried fruit, dark green vegetables, wholemeal bread and fortified breakfast cereals (none vegan sources include meat, eggs and fish). Have these foods with a source of vitamin C (such as fruit and vegetables) to enhance absorption and keep tea and coffee to 30 minutes either side as they can inhibit iron absorption. You should also take your daily iron supplement as directed by your dietitian if you have had a gastric bypass or sleeve, two hours away from your calcium supplement to help with absorption.
- **Vitamin B12 supports energy levels** - In addition to your 3 monthly vitamin B12 injections you could look at consuming fortified milk alternatives (where B12 is added as an ingredient), nutritional yeast and marmite. Your multivitamin should also contain this.
- **Selenium for a healthy immune system** - Try having a few Brazil nuts a day to ensure you're getting this essential mineral. Your daily multivitamin should also contain this.
- **Vitamin D helps you to absorb calcium** - Vitamin D is found in oily fish and eggs as well as vegan sources including fortified breakfast cereals and milk alternatives. You should also take your daily vitamin D supplement (often included in the calcium supplement) as directed by your dietitian if you have had a gastric bypass or sleeve.