Going Vegan?  
Some food for thought…

As a vegetarian or vegan, you need to replace the nutrients provided by meat and eggs (protein, iron, vitamin B₁₂, phosphorus, zinc, etc.) with other healthy food sources every day.

As a vegan, you’ll also need to replace the nutrients found in milk products (protein, calcium, vitamin D, vitamin B₁₂, magnesium, zinc, etc.) with other sources.

Meat Alternatives

In place of meat, eat **2 to 3 servings of meat alternatives every day**. One serving is equal to:

- 175 mL (¾ cup) cooked beans, lentils, chickpeas, or other legumes
- 175 mL (¾ cup) hummus
- 150 g (¾ cup) tofu – this is about 1/3 of a standard package
- 150 g soy-based “veggie burger”, “veggie dogs”, or other simulated meat products
- 60 mL (¼ cup) nuts or seeds, shells removed (almonds, walnuts, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, etc.)
- 30 mL (2 T.) peanut butter, almond butter, or other nut butters

Iron

Vegans are more at risk for **iron deficiency** (something to be avoided as it robs you of energy and your ability to concentrate!), since meat alternatives like beans, tofu, and nuts are not as high in iron or as easily absorbed as the iron in meat.

For this reason, the recommended daily iron intake for vegetarians and vegans is nearly two-times more than for meat-eaters: 14 mg/day for males and 32 mg/day for females (aged 19-50).

Adding iron-rich foods like dried fruit, green leafy vegetables, and iron-fortified cereals to your daily menu is a good idea, in addition to including 2 to 3 servings of meat alternatives every day.

Other important tips:

- **Avoid drinking tea or coffee with meals** as they inhibit iron absorption (wait 1 hour after meals).

- **Try to include a fruit or vegetable at each meal:** something high in vitamin C, like oranges, strawberries peppers, broccoli, tomatoes as this helps your body absorb the iron from cereals, beans and tofu more easily.

- **Eat at least some of your vegetables cooked** (steamed, baked, grilled, etc.) or **fermented** (such as tempeh, miso soup, kimchi, sauerkraut) since these preparation methods allow a release of bound iron.
Grain Products

Choosing healthy grain products is even more important for vegans, as these foods can be a key source of protein, iron, B vitamins, magnesium, and other minerals when aiming to replace meat with other foods. Eating whole grains every day like oatmeal, brown rice, wild rice, barley, whole-wheat bread, whole-grain cereals, or quinoa is an important part of a healthy vegan diet.

Milk Alternatives

Excluding dairy products means you will need to consume other foods that are a good source of calcium and vitamin D every day. While exposing your skin to sunshine provides a source of vitamin D some months of the year, it is not a viable source during the winter months in Canada.

All vegans over age 19 should have 2 to 3 servings of milk alternatives (teens need 3 to 4 servings) every day. One serving is equal to:

- 250 mL (1 cup) soy-, almond-, hemp- or rice-beverage (fortified with added calcium and vitamin D)

Keep in mind that some brands of these beverages do not have added vitamin D and all except soy beverage are very low in protein. And although spinach and other leafy greens do contain some calcium, only a very small percentage is absorbed by the body.

Vitamin B<sub>12</sub>

Having a reliable source of vitamin B<sub>12</sub> is essential for a vegan because this important vitamin is only naturally-occurring in animal-based foods. Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> protects the nervous system and is a crucial component of nerves, red blood cells and DNA. Without it, permanent nerve damage can result. Fatigue, sore tongue and/or tingling in the hands or feet can be early signs of deficiency.

The only reliable vegan sources of B<sub>12</sub> are vitamin supplements OR foods fortified with B<sub>12</sub>. All simulated meat products (e.g. veggie dogs or veggie burgers) sold in Canada are fortified with vitamin B<sub>12</sub>, as well as certain brands of milk alternatives and other soy products (read the label). One brand of nutritional yeast, “Red Star T6635 Vegetarian Support formula” is fortified and can provide extra vitamin B<sub>12</sub> as well.

Vegetables & Fruit

Don’t be a vegetarian who doesn’t eat vegetables! Vegetables and fruits provide magnesium and potassium along with other important nutrients that would otherwise be provided by meat and milk products.

Eat at least 8 servings of vegetables and fruits each day: one serving is 125 mL (1/2 cup) of cut-up veg/fruit OR 250 mL (1 cup) leafy greens.

Deeply and brightly-coloured vegetables and fruits (like beets, spinach, squash, tomatoes, and mangoes) often have more nutrients and antioxidants than pale ones like (Iceberg lettuce, cucumbers, celery, or apples).

Need some FREE professional help?
The Health & Counselling Centre at UTM (Davis Building, Room 1123) has a Registered Dietitian who can assess your diet and help you make changes. Call (905) 828–5255 to make an appointment.