


Lack of Protein in Some Vegetarians Resulting from Inadequate Intake of Meat Substitutes

‘Penne with sweet corn and assorted vegetables’, ‘stirred-fried rice vermicelli with peas’, ‘lotus root and black fungus with rice’... These vegetarian meals provide an adequate amount of vegetables but lack meat substitutes and hence protein. In fact, so long as a vegetarian meal contains proper meat substitutes, it can also provide energy and nutrients.

What vegetarian foods can substitute for meat?

Lentils and their products, eggs, seeds and nuts are proper substitutes for meat, as they contain a rich amount of protein, iron and some amino acids that are essential for the body. However, quite a lot of lentil products are high in oil and sodium content owing to deep-frying and seasoning in the process of production, so be careful when choosing them.



Healthier choices	Choices of high oil and sodium content (not recommended)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Lentils, such as soybeans, chickpeas, red kidney beans, adzuki beans and black-eyed peas. ♦ Soybean products, such as wrapped bean curd, dried bean curd, <i>baiye</i> [several layers of bean curd pressed together], fresh soybean sheets, non-deep fried soybean sticks, and soy pulp (<i>okara</i>) ♦ Eggs ♦ Seeds and nuts, such as sesame seeds, peanuts, walnuts and cashew nuts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Deep-fried soybean products, such as deep-fried tofu, ‘vegetarian goose’, deep-fried tofu puffs, and deep-fried soybean sticks ♦ Stinky tofu ♦ Salted duck eggs ♦ Deep-fried nuts

Moreover, processed foods like vegetarian meats (vegetarian chicken and vegetarian ham, for example) and egg bean curd, even though non-deep fried, contain quite a high level of sodium content, so don’t eat them too often.

Peas, string beans: are they proper meat substitutes?

Green peas, snow peas, snap beans (kidney beans), bean sprouts and green string beans are all vegetables. **They are not proper meat substitutes**, because their protein content is far inferior to that of lentils.

What about gluten/baked spongy gluten and low-fat cheese?

Gluten and baked spongy gluten contain mostly strong flour [bread flour]. Their protein content may be high, but the quality of the protein may not be comparable with that of other lentils, so vegetarians seek protein from gluten only very occasionally.

Low-fat cheese has rich protein, but is **low in iron**. Ovo-lacto vegetarians [i.e. vegetarians who consume dairy products and eggs as well] may **supplement their protein intake with cheese** (e.g. ‘penne with cheese and assorted vegetables’) **occasionally**.

To know more about ...

- ✧ healthy eating, please visit ‘Health Zone’ website at <http://www.cheu.gov.hk>
- ✧ ‘Health@work.hk Project’, please visit <http://www.healthatwork.gov.hk>