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# 6 Ways Your Vegetarian Diet Might Be Sabotaging Your Weight Loss

Yes, you can put on pounds while eating a plant-based diet.

BY [MARESSA BROWN](#) PUBLISHED: SEP 11, 2017



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Whether you're trying to reduce your cancer risk, slash your carbon footprint, or you just want to take a stand as an animal lover, there are tons of [benefits associated with going vegetarian](#). And one of those benefits could be weight loss. In fact, a study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* concluded that people who ate about 250 grams of meat a day—roughly the size of one half-pound steak, piece of poultry, or processed meat—packed on more pounds over the course of five years compared to other study participants who ate less animal protein. And this was true even when they had the same amount of calories overall. But slimming down as the result of going plant-based is definitely not guaranteed. In fact, certain missteps could lead to weight

gain.

Will Balsiewicz, M.D., a board-certified gastroenterologist with [@HappyGutMD](#), notes that vegetarians often sabotage their weight-loss efforts by eating more processed foods when they cut out animal protein. "When it comes to avoiding weight gain on a vegetarian diet, it's important to make sure that the majority of your calories are coming from high quality, fresh whole foods," he says.

If you're trying to steer clear of eating meat without skewing the scale, here are the specific, weight-loss saboteurs you'll want to tackle head-on. (Then, find out how you can hit the reset button—and burn fat like crazy—with [The Body Clock Diet!](#))

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When you axe meat from your diet, you may be swapping that chicken stir-fry for a falafel pita—and paying for it on the scale. "Don't be a French fry vegetarian! Just because it fits your criteria of being fit for a vegetarian diet doesn't mean it's healthy for you," says Esther Blum, R.D., author of *Cavewomen Don't Get Fat*. "Keep your carbs whole food-based. [They] should not come in a package with more than five ingredients—unless they're herbs and spices." Reach for sweet potatoes, butternut squash, any winter squash, plantains, yucca, beans, or lentils versus white-flour carbs like bread, muffins, bagels, Blum says. If you want tortillas, she likes the kind made with cassava and coconut flours.

Whole-food carbs are best because they don't provoke an insulin response in the body, like white flour, or processed carbs, Blum explains. "They don't spike your blood sugar, they keep it stable for hours, and they're also the richest in nutrition," she says. "Once something has been ground and turned into a flour, and then baked, it doesn't retain the nutrition [and] it spikes your blood sugar, which can lead to weight gain [or] make it very hard to lose weight."

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"A lot of people try to stay away from fruit, because they're worried about the sugar content," Blum notes. "But fruit sugars are very healing for the body, combat inflammation, and clean up liver and hormonal imbalances that contribute to weight gain." But she recommends avoiding juices that have been sitting on the shelf at your local grocery store, as they lose their nutritional value just a day after being processed. You're better off juicing fresh fruits—and, ideally, even more veggies than fruits—at home.

"Have 16 ounces of fresh celery juice," Blum recommends. "It will build hydrochloric acid in the stomach, so you can digest your food and avoid bloating, gas, reflux, and absorb nutrients better." Healthy digestion will only aid your weight-loss efforts.

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"In one study, when vegetarian dieters added more protein to their diet so that 30 percent of their daily calories came from protein, they automatically ate 450 fewer calories a day and lost about 11 pounds in 12 weeks, even without adding more exercise," says Partha Nandi, M.D., gastroenterologist and author of the forthcoming book Ask Dr. Nandi.

The best sources of plant-based protein, which also offer satiating fiber, include beans, legumes, lentils, quinoa, and heart-healthy nuts, Nandi notes.

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It may be tempting to grab a tofu- or pea protein-based meat substitute when you're in a pinch, or even on the regular, but these products are often highly processed and filled with fattening, chemical-laden ingredients, such as sugars, hydrolyzed starch, or the additive disodium guanylate. Plus, many options are just as high if not higher in fat, sodium, and calories than the real thing, says Nandi.

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When you make yourself an omelet or simple salad, you generally assume you're consuming a healthy vegetarian meal. Unfortunately, eating protein sources (like eggs and dairy) that aren't pastured and certain vegetables that aren't organic might be working against your weight-loss efforts.

Pesticides sprayed on food may disrupt your hormones and endocrine system, which could work against your efforts to stay fit, Blum explains. For that reason, she recommends trying to stick with animal products that come from pasture-raised animals (because they're able to graze on grass and worms, as opposed to being fed pesticide-ridden corn and soy) and avoiding the "dirty dozen"—the Environmental Working Group's top 12 most pesticide-laden fruits and vegetables.

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You don't necessarily need protein to feel satisfied and keep your blood sugar stable. Instead, you can go for certain healing, satiating fruit and veg combos, which will balance your potassium and sodium and natural sugar and support your adrenal glands, Blum notes. When the adrenals are compromised by chronic stress, they can prevent your metabolism from firing at full capacity and facilitating weight loss.

So, when you're tempted to snack on a piece of toast with almond butter (a popular vegetarian go-to), reach for something like half an avocado with sea salt and some orange slices, Blum advises. Alternate options: A salad made from orange, avocado or spinach—or sweet potato, kale, and lemon juice.

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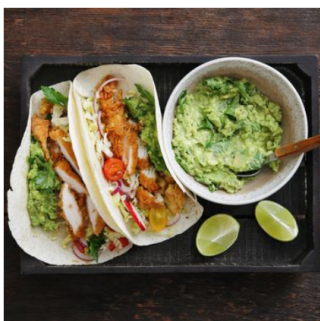
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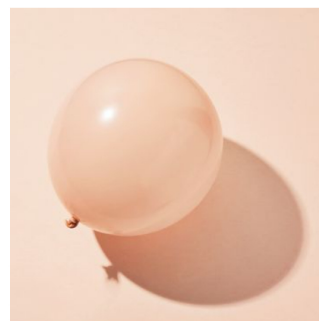
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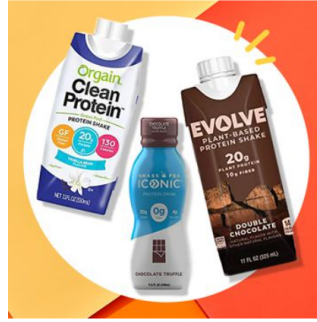
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