

# Flex Your Appetite

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Vegetarianism is not just for vegetarians anymore. These days the growing health movement called flexitarianism is taking root and converting carnivores into veggie-loving folks.

A flexitarian is someone who eats vegetarian food without quitting meat cold turkey. This plant-based eating style is rich in whole grains, fruits, vegetables, beans and nuts that can help you lose weight, reduce the risk of diabetes, heart disease and cancer and add years to your life.

In addition to health benefits, eating this way is environmentally friendly because it results in less carbon emissions than a standard meat-heavy meal plan. Since meat and poultry tend to be the most expensive things on a grocery bill, cutting down will also help you save some cash.

Is there enough protein in a semi-vegetarian plan to keep you in top physical shape help you achieve optimum athletic performance? Absolutely. When preparing veggie meals, just be sure to include protein-rich beans, lentils, nuts and seeds such as edamame, white beans, black beans, lentils, tofu, almonds, walnuts, sunflower seeds, etc. Here are five fast and flavorful vegetarian meals that make meat-free easy, any day of the week:

## **Pesto Tofu Scramble with Toast**

1 teaspoon olive oil

3 ounces (~1/4 package) firm tofu, drained & crumbled

1/8 teaspoon turmeric

1 Tablespoon prepared pesto

2 cups baby spinach

1 slice whole grain bread (such as Ezekiel™)

Sea salt & pepper, to taste

Sauté oil, turmeric, and crumbled tofu for 1 minute. Add pesto and spinach for an additional 5 minutes. Serve mixture on toast and sprinkle with salt & pepper.

290 calories, 16g fat, 3g saturated fat, 0g trans fat, 5mg cholesterol, 430mg sodium, 22g carbohydrate, 6g fiber, 0g sugar, 16g protein.

## **Garden Lentil Salad Pita**

1/4 cup canned lentils, rinsed and drained

2 medium stalks celery, diced

1/2 cup baby carrots, diced

1 lemon, juiced

1 teaspoon olive oil

Sea salt & pepper to taste

1 whole grain pita, cut in half

Toss lentils, celery, carrots, lemon juice, oil, salt & pepper. Serve in pita when ready to eat.

310 calories, 6g fat, 1g saturated fat, 0g trans fat, 0mg cholesterol, 500mg sodium, 58g carbohydrate, 13g fiber, 8g sugar, 11g protein.

### **Avocado & Zucchini Burrito**

1/4 cup low-fat refried canned beans

1/2 avocado, chopped

1/4 cup zucchini, chopped

2 Tablespoons salsa

1 whole grain tortilla

Wrap beans, avocado, zucchini and salsa in tortilla. Serve room temperature or heat in microwave.

320 calories, 17g fat, 2.5g saturated fat, 0g trans fat, 0mg cholesterol, 600mg sodium, 36g carbohydrate, 11g fiber, 3g sugar, 8g protein.

### **White Bean & Basil Penne**

2 oz (3/4 cup) whole wheat penne, uncooked

1/4 cup canned white beans, rinsed and drained

1.5 cups cherry tomatoes, halved

1 teaspoon olive oil

1/4 cup fresh basil, chopped

1 clove garlic, minced

2 Tablespoons parmesan cheese, grated

Cook pasta according to directions. Toss remaining ingredients in pot (except for parmesan) and

warm for about 5 minutes. Top with parmesan.

408 calories, 9g fat, 3g saturated fat, 0g trans fat, 7mg cholesterol, 200mg sodium, 69g carbohydrate, 7g fiber, 0g sugar, 19g protein.

### **Edamame Stir Fry**

1 teaspoon olive oil

1 Tablespoon fresh grated ginger

2 cloves garlic, minced

1/4 cup pineapple (fresh or canned in own juice), finely chopped

1/2 cup frozen edamame (shelled)

1 red bell pepper, chopped

1/2 cup pea pods

1/2 cup cooked brown rice (use pre-cooked microwavable such as Birds Eye™)

2 Tablespoons chopped almonds

Saute oil, ginger, garlic and pineapple for 3 minutes. Add remaining ingredients for an additional 10 minutes. Serve with almonds on top.

390 calories, 15g fat, 1.5g saturated fat, 0g trans fat, 0mg cholesterol, 20mg sodium, 53g carbohydrate, 11g fiber, 13g sugar, 14g protein.



*Dawn Jackson Blatner, RD is a spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association and author of The Flexitarian Diet. For more information visit her website: [www.dawnjacksonblatner.com](http://www.dawnjacksonblatner.com)*

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