

Even Vegetarians Need To Count Calories

by Kathy Duncan

People choose to become vegetarians for a variety of reasons. Some, because they love animals and don't want to eat them, some for the environment, and others for health reasons. No matter the reason, there is one common misunderstanding about vegetarianism. That meatless meals are lower in calories. This depends on what your meatless meals are made from, and if you are adequately consuming proteins.

Calories, and how they fuel and nourish the body should be the focus of every diet. There are many vegetarians with high cholesterol and excess weight because they assume that they are allowed to eat larger amounts of protein in any form available.

The average adult should consume 45-55 grams of protein a day depending on gender and condition. A 3 oz. Top Sirloin steak, or three ounces of most meats contain about 26 grams (around 175 calories in the beef example.) That makes it easy for a carnivore to consume enough protein at one meal if you include the sour cream on the potato, and the walnuts on the dessert. For the vegetarian, even an ovo-lacto vegetarian (eats eggs and dairy,) it takes a larger number of calories to consume that same 26 grams of protein.

One slice of cheese pizza containing only 7.5 grams of protein, can contain up to 300+ calories. For an adult who is trying to maintain 1,600 to 2,000 calories and 55 grams of protein per day, this takes vigilance.

Also, if you choose not to eat meat, you will have to combine incomplete vegetable proteins like beans and rice, or bread and peanut butter in order to maintain a balanced intake of complete proteins in your diet. Calories and carbohydrates can add up really quickly this way!

A great way for a vegetarian to stay slim while maintaining a balanced diet is to be aware of protein without going out of your way to make it the main course in every meal. By adding a few nuts to your cereal in the morning, adding tofu to your vegetable and rice dishes, and allowing a generous amount of Parmesan cheese to your pasta and marinara, you can easily consume 55 grams of protein per day. You can even have a big meal of pasta, crunchy slivered almonds, broccoli, a double shot of tofu, smothered in Parmesan cheese and soy sauce for a high protein, low calorie meal.

Here are a few examples of basic foods that show protein and calorie content that I have rounded from various sources to show how you might balance enough protein throughout the day without over consuming calories. By adding fruits and vegetables in abundance, you can mix and match for low calorie, adequate protein intake for good health. This is a balancing act that should be a part of every meal, every day.

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| Brown Rice, 1 c | 5 grams protein | 220 calories |
| Cheddar Cheese 1/4 c | 7 grams protein | 115 calories |
| Egg-1 | 6 grams protein | 75 calories |
| Pasta, 1 c | 7 grams protein | 100 calories |
| Peanut Butter-2 tbsp | 8 grams protein | 190 calories |
| Tofu, 1/2 c | 10-20 grams protein | 190 calories |
| Walnuts-2 tbsp | 3 grams protein | 80 calories |
| Whole Wheat Bread-2 | 6 grams protein | 140 calories |
| Yogurt, 1 c | 10 grams protein | 150-250 calories |

No matter how healthy the food is that you're eating, you have got to monitor your caloric intake and output in order to achieve your goals, whether it be to gain, lose, or maintain your desired weight. Calories in – calories out is the balance to find while filling your day with perfect nutrition. A great book for the average person to dig deeper is *The Complete Idiot's Guide To Total Nutrition* by Joy Bauer.