

Beef up without meat

This four-week menu plan will help you gain muscle mass in the healthiest way possible.

The Vegetarian and Vegan Foundation (VVF) have devised a muscle-building meal plan that provides all the nutrients you require (complex carbohydrates, 'good' polyunsaturated fats, protein, vitamins and minerals). It also contains disease-busting antioxidants and healthy fibre that helps protect against illness and disease. So if you want to bulk up for the beach this summer, here's your chance to treat your body to the delights of a plant-based diet that avoids saturated animal fats, animal protein and cholesterol, all linked to a heart disease, diabetes, obesity and some cancers. Don't forget though, eating well is only part of the equation; you have to exercise regularly too!

If, on the other hand, you're on a serious mission to fight flab then the VVF can help. Research shows that a low fat veggie diet can produce greater weight loss than Atkins, Weight Watchers or the Zone diet – and with this in mind the VVF have recently launched their V-plan diet, a 40-page guide loaded with simple advice and inspiring recipes to keep hunger at bay.

If you would like more information on the Vegetarian & Vegan Foundation – or to order your copy of the V-plan diet at just £2.50 inc p&p – visit www.vegetarian.org.uk

Recipes

Apricot and Cashew Smoothie

Serves 1

Small handful of raw cashew nuts
4 fresh apricots or 6 dried apricots (soaked in water overnight)
1 banana, peeled, cut into chunks and frozen (freeze a few beforehand and blend with fresh fruit or frozen berries and/or soya yogurt to make fruit smoothies.)
120 ml soya milk

Grind the cashews to a fine powder in a blender. Add the apricots, banana and soya milk and blend till smooth.

Baked Hash Browns

Serves 1

2 or 3 medium new potatoes
1 small onion grated
Small handful of parsley finely chopped
Sea salt and black pepper to taste
Olive oil

Boil the new potatoes until beginning to soften then cool. Grate the potatoes and combine with the onion and parsley. Season lightly then shape into little flat cakes. Brush with a little olive oil and bake for 20 minutes at 190C/375F/Gas Mark 5 turning once.

Easy Nut Roast

Serves 2 with leftovers –great cold in sandwiches with mustard!

1 tbsp olive oil
2 sticks celery, finely chopped
1 medium leek, finely chopped
1 onion finely chopped
1½ cups boiling water
1 tsp yeast extract or vegetable stock
200g ground cashews or almond
350 g chopped mixed nuts
2 tbsp soya flour (available from health stores)
2 tsp dried mixed herbs or small handful of fresh thyme, parsley and/or marjoram.
160 g breadcrumbs
Sea salt and black pepper to taste

Gently heat the olive oil in a large pan then add the celery, leek and onion and sweat over a medium heat for a few minutes. Dissolve the yeast extract or stock in the water and add. Stir in the nuts, soya flour, herbs and breadcrumbs. Season and mix well. Allow to cool slightly while you grease a loaf tin. Transfer the nut roast mixture to the tin and press down well. Bake in the oven for about 40 - 60 minutes at 180°C/360°F/Gas Mark 4 then turn out of the tin; let it rest for 5 minutes then slice and serve.

Onion Gravy

Serves 2

10g vegan margarine such as Pure
1 small red onion, finely chopped
2 tbsp plain wholemeal flour
Vegetable stock
1 tsp yeast extract and/or vegetable stock dissolved in 220 ml hot water
Sea salt and black pepper

Melt the margarine in a medium pan and cook onions until brown. Stir in the flour and cook for a couple of minutes, stirring so flour doesn't burn. Add the stock a little at a time and stir until thickened – if it goes a bit lumpy, use a balloon whisk to get rid of lumps! Reduce the heat; add the rest of the stock and season. Cook for 10-15 minutes, stirring occasionally to prevent it sticking.

Portabella Mushroom Stroganoff

Serves 4-6

40-50 minutes: 10 minutes preparation, 30-40 minutes cooking time

2tbsp olive oil
1 onion, chopped
2 garlic cloves, crushed

1.5 kg mushrooms, sliced into chunks – use a mixture of Portabella (field), chestnut and button mushrooms.
½ tsp paprika
½ tsp dill
150 ml white wine
1 level tbsp cornflour
300 ml pt soya cream
1 tbsp lemon juice
Black pepper

Heat the oil in a heavy-bottomed saucepan and sauté onion and garlic for a few minutes until soft. Add the mushrooms and sweat for 20 minutes until liquid has evaporated. Add paprika and dill and stir, cook for another 5 minutes. Mix cornflour with wine and stir into pan. Cook for another 5 minutes, stirring continuously. Add soya cream taking care not to boil, add lemon juice and seasoning. Serve hot with pasta, rice or baked potato.

Chick Pea Balti

Serves 2

For the sauce:

1 large onion
1 inch of root ginger
1 clove garlic
Large spoon of curry paste
1 tin of chopped tomatoes
Large handful of coriander finely chopped

Vegetables:

A handful of the following:
Cauliflower, split into individual florets
Onion, chopped into chunks
Sweet potato, chopped into 1½ inch cubes
Courgette, sliced
Red pepper, chopped into 1½ inch chunks
Peas, fresh or frozen
½ tin chick peas
Fresh coriander roughly chopped

To make the sauce, sweat the onion, ginger and garlic in a large heavy pan over a medium heat for a few minutes. Add the curry paste, tomatoes and coriander and simmer for a further 10 minutes. Meanwhile, steam the cauliflower, onion, sweet potato, courgettes and peppers until soft; this should only take a few minutes. Tip the steamed vegetables into the pan containing the sauce and mix in the peas, chick peas and coriander. Cook gently for a further 5 minutes till piping hot then serve.

You can make double the sauce and freeze some for another day.

Hearty Vegetable Hot Pot

Serves 4

225g frozen veggie mince (or half that quantity of dried, soaked in a little hot water and stock).

1 large onion, thinly sliced
1 large clove garlic, crushed
2 large carrots, chopped
1 large potato, cut in to small chunks
2 sticks celery, chopped
100 g mushrooms, sliced
1 tbsp tomato puree
1 tbsp olive oil
1 tin chopped tomatoes
50-100 ml vegetable stock
1 tsp mixed herbs
1 bay leaf
Salt and black pepper

Heat the oil in a large pan and gently sauté onion and garlic for 5 minutes until soft. Add the rest of the vegetables and cook, stirring for another 5 minutes. Stir in veggie mince, chopped tomatoes, tomato purée, stock, herbs. Season to taste then simmer, uncovered, for about 15 minutes, or until potatoes and carrot are cooked.

Quick 'n' Easy Dumplings

Makes about 8 dumplings

110 g self-raising flour
60 g vegetable margarine
Cold water
Sea salt and black pepper
1 sprig of rosemary

Rub the flour and margarine together until breadcrumbs form. Add a little water bit by bit until you can form 8 non-sticky dough balls. The less you handle the dough mixture the fluffier the dumplings will be. Float on top of the Hot Pot like ice-bergs; about three-quarters immersed. Cook for at least 1 hour either gently simmering on the hob or in the oven on a low heat.