Plant Foods Dictionary

Each entry covers what the food is, what it's strong on, what to watch for, and the chapter that says more. A label applies only to the claim directly before it. Packaged products vary by brand and country; read the label.

Algal oil capsules (DHA). Long-chain omega-3 made from algae. Algal DHA supplements to improve health in healthy vegetarians are unproven **(Unproven)**. If you're planning a pregnancy, ask your doctor. Chapter 8.

Beans: chickpeas, lentils, black beans, white beans. The main sources of protein, iron, zinc and fibre on a plant plate. Eat with vitamin C-rich foods for better iron absorption. Build up gradually if your gut isn't used to them. Chapters 3, 5, 6, 13.

Brown rice. A whole grain with more fibre than white rice, but it also takes up more arsenic. Vary your grains; cooking in plenty of water and draining removes some of the arsenic. Chapter 9.

Cabbage-family greens (bok choy, kale, broccoli, gai lan). Calcium from bok choy, kale and broccoli is well absorbed; calcium-set tofu comes close to milk; spinach provides very little **(Moderate evidence)**. Chapter 7.

Chia and flaxseed. Contain plant omega-3 (ALA). Use ground flaxseed so the body can absorb it. ALA is converted to EPA and DHA slowly and inefficiently. Chapter 8.

Dried red kidney beans. Rich in protein, iron and fibre. Lectins in beans are destroyed by soaking and thorough boiling;

raw or undercooked dried kidney beans can cause poisoning **(Moderate evidence)**. Canned beans are already cooked. Chapter 9.

Edamame. Young green soybeans, boiled in the pod. Rich in protein; a quick snack. See the kitchen section at the back of the book.

Iodised salt. Salt with added iodine; for many vegetarians, the simplest way to get iodine. Sea salt, pink salt and many speciality salts usually have no iodine; read the label. Chapter 8.

Millet. A small-grained cereal widely eaten in South Asia and Africa; can replace some white rice. Chapter 11.

Miso. Fermented soybean paste. Salty; not a source of B12. Chapter 4.

Mock meat. Plant foods made to resemble meat or fish: vegetarian sausages, plant-based burgers, mock chicken. Convenient, but many are very salty and ultra-processed. Only a small share of plant-based meats are fortified with B12 and iron; mock meat does not cover the B12 blind spot on its own **(Debated)**. Use it as convenience food, not as the foundation of a meal. Chapters 3, 10.

Mushrooms. Mushrooms exposed to sunlight or UV light contain vitamin D; ordinary mushrooms contain very little. Chapter 7.

Nutritional yeast. Inactivated yeast with a cheesy, nutty taste, sprinkled on food. Only versions labelled as fortified with B12 are a B12 source. Chapter 4.

Plant milks (soy, oat, almond, rice). Soy has the most protein. Many aren't fortified with iodine, and not all contain calcium or B12; read the label. Chapters 2, 3, 8.

Plant protein powder. Powders made from soy, pea, rice or seeds. Convenient but unnecessary for most vegetarians. Plant protein powders tend to contain more lead than dairy-based ones **(Debated)**. Chapters 5, 9.

Seaweed and kelp. Seaweed contains iodine, but amounts vary widely. Eating a lot of kelp or taking kelp tablets can cause iodine excess and thyroid problems **(Moderate evidence)**. Not a source of B12. Chapters 4, 8.

Seitan. Wheat gluten, chewy like meat and rich in protein. Not suitable for people with coeliac disease or a wheat allergy. Chapter 10.

Soy and soy milk. Eating soy at usual amounts does not raise breast cancer risk **(Moderate evidence)**. Soy does not change testosterone or oestrogen in men **(Moderate evidence)**. Soy milk fortified with calcium and B12 makes a good shield. Chapter 9.

Soy yogurt. Fermented soy milk. Versions fortified with calcium and B12 are part of the shield. Chapter 3.

Spirulina. Algae sold as a powder or tablets. Spirulina, seaweed, fermented foods and mushrooms should not be relied on as B12 sources **(Moderate evidence)**. Chapter 4.

Tahini. Finely ground sesame, used in hummus and dressings; contains calcium and good fats. Chapter 7.

Tempeh. Whole soybeans fermented and pressed into a cake. Rich in protein and, for many people, easier to digest than whole beans. Not a reliable B12 source. Chapters 4, 5.

Tofu. Made by curdling soy milk. Rich in protein. Calcium-set tofu (calcium sulphate or calcium chloride on the label) is a good calcium source; tofu set with other agents has less. Chapters 3, 5, 7.

Walnuts. Contain plant omega-3 (ALA) and good fats. Chapter 8.