

## Make Mine Vegetarian!

What's for dinner is an age-old dilemma. Will it be meat, fish, poultry, or take-out? Why not go vegetarian three times a week. Health professionals have long recognized the health benefits of limiting meat from our diets, and now encourage everyone to include meatless meals at least three times per week. And yes, your mother was right when she told you to eat your vegetables!

Today's vegetarian meals are very different from the straw, grass and seeds era. Vegetarian meals, wonderfully creative and beautifully presented are a staple in many restaurants.

There is no mystery to creating meatless meals that are appetizing, tasty and budget friendly. You probably have everything you need right in your pantry. Only your taste buds and imagination limit you!

Here are a few examples where substituting a vegetarian meal does double duty by giving you important health benefits and making your life a bit easier.

At the end of the workweek, when you are feeling tired and stressed, the last thing you want is to spend time cooking. You can build an attractive appetizing salad in just a few minutes. Place a green salad on a plate, top with broccoli florets, cauliflower, carrot slices, red and yellow pepper strips, black beans, and corn. Top with almonds or walnuts and your favorite low fat dressing. Serve with warm garlic bread and you have a colorful, healthy, delicious meal. Save even more time, by pre-cutting or buying precut vegetables.

Omelets are an excellent meatless choice. Add your favorite cheese, top with salsa and serve with oven fried potatoes and salad. Make a family vegetarian night by letting everyone fill his or her omelets with favorite veggies. Interestingly, this is a great way to let off some steam. Everyone can stake out their own brand of individualism. Make it more fun by having a dueling omelets contest. Bringing the family together for a special night will bring everyone closer, and with fun on the menu, give a glimpse you might not otherwise get into each others lives.

Pasta, besides being nearly everyone's favorite food, lends itself well to vegetarian cooking. Cook the pasta of your choice according to package directions. While pasta is cooking, stir fry onion, broccoli, red pepper, and carrots in 2 tablespoons olive oil. Add a tablespoon of Italian seasoning, and a teaspoon each of cilantro, minced roasted garlic and chives..

Toss Pasta with low fat margarine. Place pasta in dish and top with veggies and walnuts or almonds. You can also top with your favorite low fat sauce or salad dressing to make a very special dish. Serve with garlic bread and you have a healthy colorful feast.

Vegetable lasagna can be prepared, portioned and frozen for a night you simply do not feel like cooking

Hearty vegetable soups with crusty bread are sure to take the chill of a frosty night, as is a deep bowl of vegetarian chili.

Cut spaghetti squash in half and bake until done. Pull the “spaghetti” strands from the side of the vegetable and serve in the shell topped with meatless spaghetti sauce or your favorite stir-fried vegetables.

There are countless vegetarian recipes for you to try and “tweak” to your own taste. Use your imagination and taste buds to guide you to an adventure in vegetarian cooking. Above all, have fun!