

7 SUPERFOODS FOR VEGAN ATHLETES



Introduction

Veganism is a concept that deals with abstaining from the consumption of animal-based products such as milk, eggs and meat. Vegans follow a strict vegetarian diet minus dairy products. Vegans are only allowed to consume vegetables, fruits, grains, legumes, nuts and seeds.

Now you might think that this does not sound like an ideal diet for athletes to follow, as most of them rely on animal protein like meats and eggs to develop a strong body. However, the world of veganism can offer several superfoods that are not only great to develop a strong body but also capable of increasing an athlete's vitality.

If you are a vegan athlete, then you have come to the right place, as we will look at 7 such superfoods that can be incorporated into your daily diet.

Let's begin!

Chapter 1: Berries



Kick-starting the list of vegan superfoods are berries! Berries happen to be one of the most recommended foods for athletes and for good reason. Berries can offer the body several benefits that are highlighted as shown below:

Muscle recovery

Berries are credited for increasing muscle recovery. This means that they help in reducing the time taken by your body to recover from muscle tears and soreness. According to an experiment conducted on athletes, where they were given blueberry smoothies

before their workout, they were able to recover better from muscle soreness 60 hours after their session.

Oxidative stress

The same experiment also found that berries greatly reduced oxidative stress as blood samples drawn 60 hours post workout showed less cell damage. An athlete releases more free radicals into the body after a workout session. Berries, being rich in antioxidants, have the power of reversing oxidative damage to a large extent. This is quite important when it comes to maintaining not just muscle health but overall wellness.

Fat cell development

Berries help in inhibiting fat cell development. Fat cells need to be controlled in order to prevent fat deposits from accumulating in the body. As per studies conducted on mice, those that chewed on polyphenols- a nutrient present in berries- saw a 73% decrease in their lipids. This goes to show that berries can truly help in curbing fat deposits in the body.

Metabolic syndrome

Berries are said to help in the fight against metabolic syndrome. This syndrome can induce reduced metabolism, inflammation, glucose intolerance, insulin resistance etc. Those who are unable to exercise long hours will see a marked improvement in their stamina after consuming berries.

Here are some berries to add to your daily diet.

- **Acai berry**

Being rich in antioxidant properties, Acai berries are great for athletes. Most athletes suffer from immense pain after a workout session owing to the buildup of lactic acid. Berries help in cutting down on this acid thereby reducing the pain.

- **Blueberries**

Blueberries are said to be the king of berries and are a must for all athletes to include in their diet. Blueberries come with extreme anti-oxidant content and a chemical known as Lactate dehydrogenase that helps in reducing oxidative damage. This, in turn, helps in enhancing muscle health and help athletes' recover faster from muscle tears and soreness.

- **Goji berries**

Goji berries help in increasing cellular respiration. This means that your cells will have more oxygen before and after a workout thereby enabling better performance. These berries also contain Lactate dehydrogenase, thereby making them a must have in your diet.

As you can see, nibbling on a few berries before and after your workout can help in increasing your athletic performance to a large extent.

Chapter 2: Oatmeal



It is no secret that oatmeal is considered to be a favorite breakfast all over the world. It keeps you full and provides your body with lots of fiber. However, these are just minor benefits compared to the ones that they are capable of providing athletes.

Oatmeal is quite a popular ingredient in a body builder's diet and makes for an important component of daily meals. It need not always be consumed for breakfast and can be eaten as a pre/post workout snack. Here are some of the reasons that make oatmeal ideal for athletes.

B vitamins

One important vitamin that is essential for the upkeep of muscle health and metabolism are B vitamins. B vitamins include vitamin B6, B7, B3 and B5, all of which are required to improve muscle function. A single cup of oats is capable of providing your body with the requisite amount of B vitamins and increasing muscle recovery. You will also feel energetic for several hours without having to snack in between.

Magnesium

An important component of an athlete's diet is magnesium. Magnesium is required to relieve sore muscles, enhance cell repair and cut down on the stress hormone known as cortisol. Magnesium also helps in maintaining a healthy nervous system. A single cup of cooked oats can leave you with 275 milligrams of magnesium, much more than what several vegan foods combined can offer.

Proteins

It's a no-brainer that athletes require proteins to build stronger muscles. Proteins help in building leaner muscles that are not easily burned away during the performance. People might wonder as to how vegans can meet this protein requirement without the

addition of meats and eggs to their diet. The answer lies in oatmeal, as they can easily replace these ingredients and increase body proteins by a large margin. Just ½ a cup of cooked oats can contain 7 to 9 grams of proteins, which is ideal for athletes. Dry oats are often added to pre-post workout shakes in order to capitalize on their protein content.

Iron

An athlete's body requires a good dose of iron, as it binds with oxygen and circulates throughout the body. A cup of cooked oats is capable of providing you with 18% of the minimum requirement thereby making it a must have in the mornings.

Beta glucans

No athlete's diet will be complete without the addition of foods that are rich in beta glucans. These help in draining cholesterol from the bloodstream and provide the body with ample soluble fibers. You will have the chance to develop a leaner waistline through the consumption of oatmeal on a regular basis.

As a vegan, you can prepare oats using water or substitute milk with almond or soymilk.

Chapter 3: Leafy greens (Kale and spinach)



Leafy green vegetables are loaded with multiple vitamins that are required to maintain a healthy body. There are several types of leafy green vegetables that one can choose from, but kale and spinach take top billing for the amazing health benefits that they provide. Some of these benefits are as follows.

- **Kale**

Nutrients

Kale is rich in many essential nutrients including iron, Vitamins A, C and K. All of these help in increasing your body's capacity in recovering from muscle soreness. It also contains the highest amount of lutein, which is a potent antioxidant. Kale assists in enhancing cell repair and ensures that your body has the chance to fully recover after each session.

Cholesterol

It is obvious that no athlete will be able to resist the temptation of digging into some of their favorite snacks. This includes potato chips and wafers that athletes tend to eat, feeling guilty. However, one great substitute for this can be baked kale chips. They taste great and ensure that you do not subject yourself to unnecessary calories and cholesterol. In fact, kale is known to cut down on the level of cholesterol in your blood stream thereby making it the best snacking option for vegan athletes.

• **Spinach**

Calories

Spinach is low in calorie content. Spinach can be quite filling without the addition of unwanted calories. Just a quick blitz in the blender and you are left with a healthy juice sure to increase your nutrition through several folds.

Energy

Spinach is said to contain nitrates that contribute toward increasing cellular efficiency. You will feel energetic before and after a workout and have enough energy to carry on without feeling too tired.

Bones

It is crucial for athletes, especially women athletes, to pay keen attention to their bone health. Excessive pressure on bones during workout and performance can weaken them and lead to bone deficiencies. One good way of dealing with this is through the incorporation of spinach in your day-to-day diet. Spinach contains vitamin K in abundance, which is required to maintain strong bones. It also contains calcium that can further improve bone

health.

Fiber

Fiber is required to digest food and maintain a clean stomach. Spinach can provide you with a good dose of fiber. Just a cup of spinach juice will leave you with 3 to 4 grams of fiber.

Apart from kale and spinach, you can also consume arugula, chard, collard greens, curly endive and tatsoi.

Chapter 4: Nuts (Walnuts and Almonds)



Walnuts are nutritional powerhouses designed to keep your body strong and healthy. Just a handful of walnuts are enough to increase your overall health and make you a better athlete.

- **Walnuts**

Here is why walnuts make for an athlete's best friend.

Amino acid

Amino acids are required for the upkeep of cells and muscles. In fact, it forms a large part of our body's cell structure. Walnuts contain an amino acid known as L-arginine, which is required to maintain muscle health. This amino acid converts to nitric oxide, a compound that causes blood vessels to dilate. This improves blood flow to the various muscles and reduces the risk of tearing.

Omega 3 fatty acids

Walnuts consist of omega 3 fatty acids that are required to maintain heart health. It reduces inflammation and helps with the conversion of fat to energy. In fact, walnuts are regarded as the number 1 vegan substitute for fish oils, as they can contain just as much fatty acids. Omega 3 acids are also said to enhance exercise performance. You will be able to exercise for longer hours.

Nutrients

Walnuts are rich in multiple nutrients including B vitamins and zinc. These aid in keeping the immune system healthy. You will fall sick less often and be able to perform better.

• **Almonds**

Almonds are the second best nuts to add to your diet. They are just as nutritious as walnuts, if not more.

Here is what makes almonds good for your body.

Calcium

Almonds contain a high dose of calcium that is required to maintain strong bones. Just by nibbling on a few almonds you will be able to increase the calcium content in your bones and prevent them from drawing from your bloodstream.

Fiber

The fiber content in almonds is extremely high, making it ideal for athletes. Fiber is not digested by the body and tricks it into working hard to digest it. This causes the body to up its metabolism and assists with improving digestion.

Protein

Almonds have a fair amount of proteins that can contribute to your daily requirement. Munching on a few before and after your

workout session can leave you energetic and help your muscles recover faster.

Magnesium

Magnesium is an important component of the body and especially required by athletes to remain healthy. It helps in enhancing the release of testosterone and controlling cortisol thereby enabling better performance.

Both walnuts and almonds can be added to smoothies or toasted and sprinkled over salads.

Chapter 5: Sweet potatoes



The next vegan super food to add to your diet is sweet potatoes. Here is why you should make it a big part of your daily diet.

Energy

Sweet potatoes provide you with truckloads of energy. Regardless of the sport you play, you are sure to experience a marked difference in your energy levels through the consumption of sweet potatoes. The energy will be consistent and last throughout the day.

Vitamin A

Sweet potatoes are loaded with vitamin A and in fact, can meet 100% of your daily requirement. Vitamin A is an essential antioxidant that is needed to boost your immune system. It checks infections and keeps you healthy from the inside out.

Inflammation

Sweet potatoes control inflammation to a large extent. Athletes run the risk of suffering from muscle inflammation. The best way to deal with this is through the consumption of sweet potatoes. Not only do they control inflammation but also help in reducing non-contact injuries.

Glycemic index

High glycemic foods are those that spike up blood sugar levels in your body. Although this might seem ideal for an athlete, it is important to avoid such foods as much as possible as it can lead to the development of diabetes type 2. Sweet potatoes happen to curb the release of sugars and control insulin levels in the bloodstream.

Complex carbs

Sweet potatoes consist of a set of complex carbs that are not easily digested by the body. This makes it an ideal food to consume post workout, as the body will continue to burn fat. It also helps in adding back some of the lost energy, so that you have enough left to carry out the remaining chores.

Magnesium and potassium

Sweet potatoes contain magnesium and potassium, both of which help in controlling muscle spasms. They also help in controlling cramps and improve muscle function. Any injured muscles will recover faster thereby enhancing your performance drive.

Chapter 6: Seeds (Chia and Sesame Seeds)



- **Chia seeds**

Chia seeds are very nutritious and can provide athletes with sustained energy. They are favorites among runners and gym goers. Here are some of its health benefits.

Dehydration

Chia seeds have the capacity of holding almost 30 times their weight in water and can, therefore, provide the body with consistent hydration. They are ideal for athletes and exercisers who work out in humid climates and require more hydration than others.

Joint aches

Rich in omega 3 fatty acids, Chia seeds help in creating a lubricating barrier between joints. This helps in reducing inflammation and facilitates movement. These oils also help in controlling hyperactivity and hypertension.

Weight loss

Since these seeds absorb far more water than their capacity, they can be consumed to feel fuller for longer. Just a handful will do the job and you do not have to worry about feeling puckish in between meals.

Recovery

The amino acids found in Chia seeds can help in accelerating recovery time. It can decrease the time taken by your muscles to recover from soreness. They are therefore best eaten as soon as you step out of the gym, or finish your exercise routine. A cup of Chia seeds can leave you with 10 grams of fiber.

- **Sesame seeds**

Sesame seeds are the next best seeds to add to your diet. They might be tiny but are loaded with nutrition. Here are some of the health benefits provided by sesame seeds.

Calcium

Sesame seeds are a storehouse of calcium. Calcium is important for all athletes as it can easily deplete during workouts. 30 grams of sesame seeds can provide the body with 350 grams of calcium. This makes for nearly 40% of the daily requirement.

Iron

Iron is required by the body to produce hemoglobin that transports oxygen to the different muscle tissues. 30 grams of sesame seeds can provide you with 5 grams of iron, which happens to be 60% of the daily requirement for men.

Zinc

As per studies, athletes and bodybuilders have a high risk of developing zinc deficiency. This can lead to fatigue, reduced endurance and brain fog. Sesame seeds, being rich in zinc content, can solve this problem once and for all. You will feel energetic and experience enhanced performance.

As you can see, chewing on a few chia and sesame seeds on a day-to-day basis can help you enhance your athletic performance.

Chapter 7: Banana



Rounding up the list of superfoods is the humble banana. Bananas are an athlete's ideal food as they are loaded with vital nutrients. They are as follows.

Potassium

Bananas are rich in potassium content. A single banana has 450 mg of potassium, which makes for 14% of your daily requirement. Potassium helps in controlling blood sugar levels and can enhance heart function. Potassium can protect your heart by curbing high blood pressure. Athletes have the tendency of feeling dehydrated quite often. The best solution is to consume a banana as it acts as

an electrolyte and balances body fluids. Potassium can also greatly reduce the occurrence of muscle cramps and contribute towards the development of stronger, leaner muscles.

Carbohydrates

A single banana can contain 30 grams of carbohydrates, thereby making it ideal for athletes. Consuming half a banana before a workout session will ensure that you have enough energy to last you through the day. You can follow up your workout with another half in order to add back some of the lost energy. As per experiments conducted on gymnasts, bananas helped in improving their reflexes. Those who consumed a banana before their balance beam routines were able to stave off falls.

Vitamin C

A single banana can provide you with 15% of your daily vitamin C requirement. Vitamin C is an important component required to strengthen muscles, ligaments and tendons. It is also responsible for increasing immunity and providing fast relief from wounds-acquired while working out. It is also responsible for synthesizing adrenaline required to carry out day-to-day exercise routines.

Bananas are easily available and quite cheap. You can consume half a large banana before your workout, and one after.

Conclusion

Superfoods are great for your body because of their nutrition content. It will do wonders for your health and energy. Not just that, it will also speed up your workout recovery time! At the same time, you can strengthen your mind as well as build lean muscle. When it comes to working out, endurance, strength and recovery are the most important parts of the puzzle. I hope you develop the body of your dream and excel in your sport. Good luck!