



# Flexitarian Diet

*Kathryn Berger RDN*



# Flexitarian Diet Benefits



Flexible

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Weight Control

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Longer Life Expectancy

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Reduced Risk for Heart  
Disease, Diabetes, Cancer

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May be good for the  
environment

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Rated as one of the most  
Family Friendly Eating  
Plans

# What is the Flexitarian Diet

The flexitarian diet is a play on two words: flexible and vegetarian. While no single definition has been adopted, the flexitarian diet can be generally defined as a semi-vegetarian, plant-forward diet that incorporates dairy and eggs and allows room for meat from time to time. The Flexitarian Diet was created by dietitian Dawn Jackson Blatner to help people reap the benefits of vegetarian eating while still enjoying animal products, such as meat, fish, and dairy, in moderation.





KATE PATTON MED, RD, CSSD, LD

“If you’re looking for a healthy diet that doesn’t involve counting calories, super strict rules and allows you to enjoy meat from time to time – look no further than the flexitarian diet.”

# What to Know About the Flexitarian Diet

- The flexitarian diet is essentially a flexible alternative to being a vegetarian. You will still focus on fruits, veggies, whole grains, legumes and nuts, but you occasionally still enjoy meat.
- So, if vegetarianism never fully appealed to you because you love a good burger, the flexitarian diet might just be for you. (Still, it's worth noting that this diet does focus on decreasing your overall meat consumption.)

# What are the Meat Intake Guidelines ?

## **STAGE 1**

When someone is first starting out on the flexitarian diet, it's recommended to forgo meat two days a week. In the beginning stage you should keep your overall meat consumption to no more than 28 ounces a week for the five days you do consume it.

As a reminder, a card-deck sized portion of chicken or steak is about 3 ounces.

## **STAGE 2**

As you move through the diet and get used to eating more fruits and vegetables, focus on following a full vegetarian diet three to four days a week. Don't consume more than 18 ounces of meat during the rest of the week.

## **STAGE 3**

Follow a vegetarian diet for five of the seven days in a week. On the two days you do consume meat, do not eat more than 9 total ounces.

# Types of meat to Eat

- Remember, the overall goal of the flexitarian diet is to eat more nutritious plant foods and less meat. When you do incorporate meat into your diet, it is suggested that you choose organic, free-range, pasture-raised or grass-fed beef, chicken or turkey. And always choose leaner cuts to minimize extra animal fat.
- Since the flexitarian diet isn't truly vegan or vegetarian, you can decide yourself if you want to incorporate fish. It is recommended you choose sustainable wild-caught varieties.



# Benefits

There are several **benefits** to this eating style, including:

- Decreased risk of heart disease.
- Weight loss.
- Decreased risk of Diabetes or management of pre-diabetes.
- It may help prevent cancer.
- It may also be good for the environment since you are decreasing your meat consumption and reducing your carbon footprint.





# Risks

Even with all the benefits of this eating pattern, there are still **risks** for certain people. Cutting back on meat consumption can lead to some nutrient deficiencies:

- vitamin B12
- zinc
- iron
- calcium
- omega-3 fatty acids

Also, some people who suffer from Irritable Bowel Syndrome might not do well with a heavily plant-based diet



# Risks

Vitamin B12 occurs naturally only in animal products. Still, B12-fortified foods can also be part of a healthy diet. You can also speak with a healthcare professional, who can help you to decide whether a B12 supplement may be needed.





# Risks

Flexitarians may also have lower stores of zinc and iron because these minerals are best absorbed from animal foods. It is possible to get enough of these nutrients from plant foods alone with a carefully planned diet.

Most nuts, seeds, whole grains, and legumes contain both iron and zinc.

Adding a source of vitamin C is a good way to increase iron absorption from plant-based foods.



# Risks

Some flexitarians may limit dairy and need to eat plant-based sources of calcium to get adequate amounts of this nutrient. Plant foods rich in calcium include bok choy, kale, chard, and sesame seeds.

Finally, flexitarians, vegetarians, and vegans should be mindful of getting enough omega-3 fatty acids, which are usually found in fatty fish. Individuals following those diets should consider supplementing with algal oil or fish oil to ensure they maintain optimal EPA/DHA levels.

Keep in mind that eating flexitarian gives you flexibility to consume varying amounts of meat and animal products. If the diet is planned well and includes a variety of whole foods, nutritional deficiencies may not be a concern.





# Foods to Eat



## LOAD UP ON:

- Fruits.
- Vegetables.
- Plant proteins (beans such as black, kidney or navy, edamame, chickpeas, lentils, tofu).
- Whole grains (brown rice, oats, barley , quinoa).
- Plant-based milk (although dairy milk is OK in moderation).
- Eggs.
- Dairy (cheese, yogurt or dairy alternatives).
- Nuts, nut butters, seeds and healthy fats.
- Oils, herbs and spices.

# Foods to Minimize



- Meat and poultry (lean cuts of beef, chicken breast, turkey breast).
- Fish (salmon, tilapia, cod, shrimp).
- Processed meats: bacon, sausage, bologna
- Refined carbs: white bread, white rice, bagels, croissants, pastries
- Added sugar and sweets: soda, doughnuts, cakes, cookies, candy
- Fast food: fries, burgers, chicken nuggets, milkshakes
- Commercially fried foods: donuts, egg rolls, French fries, fried pies, deep fried veggies like okra.



# Vegetable Based Protein Sources

- Beans: Kidney, black, pinto, great northern, Garbanzo or chickpeas, edamame are among the wide variety of beans available which are excellent sources of protein and fiber.
- Lentils and split peas
- Tofu and tempeh are soy-based protein options that can often be substituted for chicken or other proteins in recipes.
- Nuts and seeds Including peanuts, almonds, walnuts, cashews as well as seeds such as chia, pumpkin, sunflower etc.

# THE FLEXITARIAN DIET

*The flexible vegetarian way to eat*

## THREE DAY SAMPLE PLAN

### DAY 1

#### **BREAKFAST: AVOCADO TOAST**

sprouted whole grain toast + avocado + spinach + egg

#### **LUNCH: KALE RANCH BOWL**

chicken or chickpeas + chopped kale/tomatoes + roasted sweet potato cubes + ranch

#### **DINNER: TACOS**

seasoned white fish or lentils + corn tortillas + cabbage slaw + guacamole + salsa

**SNACK:** apple + pecans and/or cucumber + hummus

# DAY 2

## **BREAKFAST: PEANUT BUTTER OATMEAL**

oatmeal + natural peanut butter + chopped apple

## **LUNCH: BURRITO BOWL**

chicken or black beans + chopped romaine/peppers + brown rice + guac + salsa

## **DINNER: MEDITERRANEAN PLATE**

chicken or chickpeas + cucumber/tomato/feta + lemon-dill brown rice

**SNACK:** grape tomatoes + mozzarella stick and/or clementine + pistachios

# DAY 3

## **BREAKFAST: GREEN BELLY SMOOTHIE**

2% plain kefir + rolled oats + banana + spinach

## **LUNCH: SESAME GINGER BOWL**

chicken or edamame + coleslaw mix + quinoa + sesame ginger dressing

## **DINNER: BURGER NIGHT**

beef or bean burger + sweet potato fries + veggie dippers w/ ranch

**SNACK:** carrots + almond butter and/or dark chocolate + berries

[www.dawnjacksonblatner.com](http://www.dawnjacksonblatner.com)

# Resources to Learn More

- Book: The Flexitarian Diet by Dawn Jackson Blatner RDN, LDN
- <https://www.dawnjacksonblatner.com>
- <https://health.clevelandclinic.org/what-is-the-flexitarian-diet>
- <https://www.eatingwell.com/article/2058290/health-benefits-of-the-flexitarian-diet-and-how-to-get-started/>
- <https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/flexitarian-diet-guide>
- <https://foodinsight.org/what-is-the-flexitarian-diet>

# Recipes from 'The Flexitarian Diet'

by Dawn Jackson Blatner RD LDN

## Fig and Flax Oatmeal

1/2 cup skim milk or soy milk

1/2 cup water 1/2 cup rolled oats

2 dried figs chopped

1 tablespoon ground flax seeds

1 teaspoon honey

Bring milk water and oats to a boil. Simmer and stir for 5 minutes.

Add figs, flax and honey



# Apricot Almond Brown Rice Breakfast

1/4 cup cooked brown rice (precooked microwaveable or left over)

3 dried Apricots chopped

2 tablespoons sliced almonds

1 teaspoon maple syrup

Top warm brown rice with apricots, almonds and maple syrup.

# Typical Breakfast with Refried Black Beans

1 whole egg plus 2 egg whites

Cooking spray

1/3 cup canned low fat refried black beans

1 small (6-inch) whole grain tortilla

2 Tablespoons shredded part skim mozzarella cheese

Dash of hot sauce

Scramble egg and egg whites in pan sprayed with cooking spray.

Heat beans separately in microwave for 30-45 seconds.

Spread beans into the tortilla and fill with eggs cheese and hot sauce.

(Vegan Option: swap eggs for 1/2 cup sauteed chopped firm tofu)

# BLT (Balsamic, Lettuce and Tomato)

- 4 Tablespoons hummus
- 2 Slices whole grain bread, toasted
- 1/4 avocado, mashed
- 2 pieces Romaine lettuce
- 2 thick slices of tomato
- 1 Tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- 1/2 cup grapes

Spread hummus on 1 slice of toast and avocado on the other.  
Top Hummus with lettuce and tomato, and drizzle with vinegar.  
Close sandwich and serve with grapes.

# Spicy Peanut and Edamame Wrap

- 1 Tablespoon peanut butter
- 1 teaspoon sesame oil
- 2 Tablespoons rice vinegar
- Dash of crushed red pepper flakes
- ½ cup shelled frozen edamame, thawed (also called mukimame)
- ½ cup shredded carrots
- 2 small (6-inch) whole grain tortillas

Mix together peanut butter, oil, vinegar and red pepper flakes.  
Toss with edamame and carrots Wrap mixture in tortillas.  
Heat in microwave for 30-45 seconds.

# White Bean and Pesto Pita

$\frac{3}{4}$  cup canned great northern beans, rinsed and drained

$\frac{1}{2}$  cup cherry tomatoes, halved

1 Tablespoons prepared pesto

1 Whole grain Pita pocket split in half

Mix beans, tomatoes and pesto. Stuff into Pita halves.

(Swap  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of the beans for 2 ounces cooked, diced chicken breast)

# Black Bean Taco Salad

1 Lime, juiced  
1 Tablespoon Olive oil  
1 teaspoon cumin  
1 clove garlic, Minced  
Dash of salt  
¾ cup black beans rinsed and drained  
3 cups shredded romaine lettuce  
1 tomato chopped  
10 whole grain tortilla chips, crushed  
¼ avocado

Wisk together lime juice , oil, cumin, garlic and salt. Toss all ingredients together..

(Swap ½ cup of the beans for 2 ounces cooked, diced chicken breast)



# Fettuccini Florentine with Lemon –Garlic ‘Butter’

2 ounces (dimes circumference) whole grain fettuccini, uncooked

2 Tablespoon Trans-fat-free margarine

1 lemon, juiced

2 cloves garlic, Minced

¼ cup chopped fresh basil

3 cups chopped baby spinach, wilted

3 Tablespoons pine nuts (or chopped walnuts) toasted

Cook pasta al dente according to package directions.

Heat margarine, lemon juice, and garlic in a nonstick skillet over low heat.

Take off the heat, and toss together with the hot noodles, fresh basil, spinach and nuts.

# Caribbean Black Bean Couscous

½ cup uncooked whole wheat couscous

½ cup water

¾ cup canned black beans, rinsed and drained

½ mango, diced

½ red bell pepper, diced

3 green onions, diced

1 jalapeño pepper, minced without the veins or seeds 2 cloves garlic,

1 lime, juiced

1 teaspoon olive oil

Bring couscous and water to a boil. Take off heat, cover for 15 minutes, and then fluff with a fork. Warm beans in the microwave for 1 to 2 minutes.

Toss all ingredients with the warm couscous.



QUESTIONS?

Thank you for attending!