

# Green energy

*With a growing number of us trying to reduce our meat intake for health and sustainability reasons, **Kate Osborne**, nutritionist at Calmer Clinics, talks about the common pitfalls of a vegetarian diet and how to ensure you're getting all the nutrients you need.*

*Often being vegetarian or vegan is presumed to be a healthier way of eating and indeed it can be. However, I have seen some terrible vegetarian diets and concerning blood test results from patients who have recently turned vegetarian. For example, a teenager who hadn't eaten meat for 10 months and was suffering from depression, low energy and weight gain. After running a nutritional assessment via blood testing, it was no surprise to see that her amino acids and omega 3 status was very low. Amino acids are the building blocks for hormones and neurotransmitters and we also need protein for energy and immune function. Omega-3 fats – in particular DHA are vital for healthy brain function. Here's a beginners guide.*

## Protein

As a nutritionist, I always emphasise the importance of adequate protein each day. Great vegetarian sources of protein are eggs, cheese (organic if possible), natural yoghurt (avoid sugary fruit ones), soy beans (fermented and GMO free), lentils, nuts and seeds. Avocados are also a brilliant protein source, containing all eight essential amino acids.

Soy is an easy alternative to animal protein and we see plenty of soy products on the shelves such as soy milks, meat alternatives and yoghurts. However, soy is often genetically modified and can be heavily sprayed with glyphosates (a herbicide which is toxic to human cells). If you are eating lots, it's better to have it both labelled specifically as non-GMO and in its fermented form. Fermented soy products like tempeh, miso or natto have been enjoyed in traditional Asian societies for thousands of years and pose far fewer health risks.

## Fats

There are many plant foods that are often advertised as being a good source of Omega-3 fatty acids like flaxseeds, walnuts and hempseeds. While these are all great foods, they

don't contain Omega-3 fats in the form that our bodies actually need them in (DHA and EPA). Instead they contain ALA alpha-linolenic acid which our bodies must convert to a more usable form. It's an inefficient process and only about 5-7% of the ALA that you eat will get converted to DHA. You will need to eat 10-20 times the amount of ALA to get the equivalent amount of DHA made for your brain. Some of my vegetarian clients supplement with fish oils and there are plenty of vegan supplements available which are derived from marine algae. Just ask Dr Google.

## Other key nutrients

Most vegetarians know about the need for iron (chickpeas, lentils, leafy greens, nuts), vitamin B12 (cheese, yoghurt and eggs) and vitamin D (egg yolks and the sun). But far fewer are aware that animal products are the only true sources of pre-made vitamin A. Vegetables contain beta-carotene which the body can convert to vitamin A but many of us have weaknesses in the enzymes that enable us to do this. Dairy is a source of vitamin A and there are also supplements available, although these should only be taken under professional guidance as they can be toxic in high quantities.

## Easy as pie

The chilly evenings of autumn are a wonderful time to experiment with squashes. There are plenty to choose from including pumpkin, butternut, spaghetti and pattypan. They are all a great source of beta-carotene and fibre and make a tasty, nutritious alternative to potatoes, while the lentils provide protein and iron.

### Puy lentil and butternut squash cottage pie (serves 3-4)

#### Base:

200g cooked Puy lentils  
2 carrots  
1 small onion  
1 bay leaf  
25 ml organic tamari soy sauce  
A couple of sprigs of thyme leaves  
500ml vegetable stock

#### Topping:

A dash of milk – either dairy or oat milk  
500g butternut squash  
A little feta cheese (optional)

Peel and chop the onions, carrots and butternut squash.

Rinse the lentils and put them into a pan with the onions, carrots, bay leaf, thyme, soy sauce and stock.

Bring to the boil and then simmer until the carrots are soft and most of the liquid is gone.

Meanwhile boil the butternut squash for about 15 mins until soft, then drain and mash with a little milk.

Put the lentil mixture into a small baking dish and top with the mashed squash. Oven cook at 200°C for 20 minutes.

Delicious with a little feta cheese crumbled onto the top.



Calmer Clinics is a dedicated team of experienced healthcare professionals based at Dolphin Square who believe in a holistic 360° approach to wellbeing. To book an appointment with Kate, email [kate@kateosborne.co.uk](mailto:kate@kateosborne.co.uk) or visit the Calmer Clinics website. £85 for one hour initial consultation and £60 per half hour follow up. [calmerclinics.wordpress.com](http://calmerclinics.wordpress.com)