



Ideas for Teaching Students and Interns about Vegetarian and Vegan Diets

Many DPD and CP programs incorporate information about vegetarian and vegan diets into various courses including introductory nutrition, life-cycle nutrition, medical nutrition therapy, sports nutrition, community nutrition/public health, food science/food principles, advanced nutrition.

Dietetic internships may offer opportunities including working with individual vegetarians and vegans in in-patient and out-patient settings, working with or observing non-profit vegetarian or vegan organizations, developing materials for vegetarians or vegans, and working with dining facilities that provide vegetarian and vegan meals (e. g. senior meals, schools, colleges and universities, employee cafeterias, hospital cafeterias).

In classroom settings case studies can be developed with vegetarian or vegan individuals. While it may be tempting to use these case studies to illustrate nutrient deficiencies, they should also be used to demonstrate the benefits of a vegetarian or vegan diet. For example, provide a case study of someone pre- and post-bypass surgery who has a high fat, high saturated fat, high cholesterol diet prior to surgery and then decides to eat a much healthier vegan diet.

When discussing food sources of nutrients, be sure to include vegetarian and vegan foods. These foods are often the dried beans, whole grains, vegetables and fruits we'd like to see everyone eating more of!

Challenge students to develop menus for vegetarians or vegans that are nutritionally adequate. They may need to include some less familiar foods or use more mixed or international dishes.

Bring in examples of vegan and vegetarian foods. Discuss taste, nutritional quality, cost, audience. Not every food marketed to vegetarians is a healthy food. Encourage your students to use critical thinking skills. Compare some of these foods to similar non-vegetarian foods. For example, how does fortified soymilk or pea protein milk compare to cow's milk?

Students in foods or food science classes can modify recipes that contain meat, fish, poultry, dairy products or eggs to make the recipes vegan. Try different replacements for eggs in muffins or use plant-based milks to make cream soups.

Include discussions of recent research related to vegetarian and vegan nutrition in courses such as advanced nutrition, medical nutrition therapy, and life-cycle nutrition as well as during clinical rotations in dietetic internships. *Vegetarian Journal* and *Vegetarian Nutrition Update* (see resource list) both feature updates on recent research related to vegetarian nutrition.

Encourage students and interns to seek out answers to their questions about vegetarian and vegan nutrition. This provides an opportunity to discuss reliable sources of information. Are they using evidence-based materials or relying on questionable websites and texts?

Upper level or graduate students or dietetic interns can read popular books, websites or consumer articles related to vegetarian and vegan diets and then critically evaluate the content of these resources. Which ones provide sound nutritional information? Which ones are selling products? Which ones are making unsubstantiated claims?

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