An introduction to vegan fitness & health
Preface

I cannot claim that this booklet is my own work! All of the information you’ll find in here is the accumulation of knowledge I’ve gathered from the people that have helped me in my quest to find the very best training and dietary information for athletes wanting to achieve their very best in performance. The journey started with one page I added on an animal rights website. I had no idea there were any other vegans actually training, so the page was as much a search for others as a resource for people to use. This grew into the website www.veganbodybuilding.org as I met friends & mentors who helped me on my journey to finding greater fitness & health. Robbie Hazeley (the original ‘Vegan Bodybuilder’) taught me a lot about training and programming, Pat Reeves (World Record holding powerlifter) taught me much about nutrition and overcoming adversity; Joni Purmonen was my first ‘virtual training partner’ as we both met on the old vegan power yahoo group (now defunct) and we went on to grow first the Vegan Bodybuilding yahoo group, then launch the Vegan Fitness forum from that. Over the years we’ve seen the strength & fitness community change.

In the beginning it was frowned upon to even consider dropping meat, nowadays we have many of the top athletes moving towards a vegan diet to improve their performance! With the increase in research backing up the vegan diet as both being super for health and great for maximum performance we are now in position to say that any athlete, in any sport, can benefit from moving towards a plant-based eating programme if they are after the best results for their effort and a healthier life generally.

Special thanks must go to Paul Crouch of the Vegan Society and Jay Sherman for proof-reading. Also Kay Johns for both reading this and taking many of the photographs used in this publication, as well as everyone else who has helped me learn about training, diet and recovery, or helped on this booklet by allowing their photos to be included - thanks everyone!

Pete
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Getting started

No, not the monolith from 2001 – it’s the dawn of the fitter you!

So, you are one of four things right now: a meat-eater or vegetarian considering moving more plant-based, a vegan considering starting to train, a vegan trainee who wants to improve your results in the gym or a combination of some of the above. Really, it doesn’t matter which as whatever your goals, this book should be of some help in you finding the right plan.

So, let’s get on with the outline of how I structure your training, eating and recovery. This is not the only way, there are many plans out there. A common saying is, “The perfect plan is the one you’ll stick to!” That is very much the case with this programme. If you stick to it you will get better results than if you don’t. It may not be the perfect plan for you, over time you’ll probably try out various eating, training and recovery options, but I’m confident that many
of the ideas outlined here will give you amazing results providing you stick to them.

**What this Programme isn’t**

This programme is not a diet, nor is it a training plan. It will provide you with both, but its real strength is the fact that it is a lifestyle change. You are moving from what you are doing now to a new way of eating, training and recovering. It is not a quick fix or a short term thing; to achieve and keep getting results you have to stay with the programme. You don’t do it for June, then it is done. The work is never truly done. In life you have two choices, to move forward or to stagnate. Those are the options before you. In reading this I am hoping you are beginning a journey of change that will strengthen you both physically and mentally. A voyage to a better you!

**Who is the Captain?**

First off we have one very important decision to make before we can embark on our journey. I have a question, “Who is the Captain?” You don’t understand the question quite yet, but let me explain a little. You have a goal, right? It could be fat loss, muscle gain, or dietary change. It doesn’t matter really, the one question you must answer is, WHY are you doing it? Are you deciding to gain muscle or is someone else deciding that you should have more muscle, are you deciding to lose fat or is it the people at your office talking fat and sniggering, that are making you want to lose fat? Your first job, before we start is to decide it is YOU wanting to make any change, not some peer pressure, or what you ought to do, or for a partner, or some other reason. These are NOT answers. If these are your reasons for getting this product, then you are not the commander of your own body. You must consider now exactly what you want. Forget the partner. Forget the peers. What do you want? This is vital to know. If you start towards a goal that you do not really want, then you are unlikely to reach that goal. Pick a goal that you truly desire, then aim yourself at that goal and you will be much more likely to succeed. If you want to be lean, then aim at
leanness. If you want to look like a freaky large muscle type, then aim at that. If you just want to tone-up for the beach, then aim at that goal. I can guarantee that any goal you are after will be much more easily reached if it is something you truly desire and not something others wish you could achieve.

**Simple, not Easy**

*Mike shows you a simple movement that is certainly not easy to do*

In this book you will find a lot of the information will be simple. That is because much of the research into diet, training and recovery is simple. Do not be deceived though. ‘Simple’ does not mean ‘easy’! For those overweight people who wish to diet, the advice will be hard to follow at times. For people beginning to train, it can be tough. Not because the advice itself is complex to do, but that the actions are actually hard as your habits are still telling you to eat the cake, or go to the pub, or just forget the gym for tonight. So, although many of the actions will look simple, and are in fact not complex, actually doing them will be a tough at times. So be prepared for some hard times, especially if you have friends who aren’t travelling a similar path. So simple does not translate to easy at all.
Beginning the Journey

Cerys shows you that it is never too early for a vegan to start training

The first task in any journey is to find out where you are right now. This will be the least pleasant part of this programme, but it is important! Find yourself a digital camera and take a few snaps of yourself. Front, side and back is good. This gives you a starting point. Whether you are too thin, carrying too much fat or just lacking in tone, don’t try to disguise your flaws. You never need to show these pictures to anyone. As the weeks progress you may not notice a change yourself, but looking back at the photos can sometimes be a revelation. If you are really concerned, cut off the head of the picture so you just see your body, if that helps. But get the shots done, then pack them away for a later date. Scales don’t matter, but as a record it might be a good idea to weigh yourself and measure your waist. If you have any goals like certain size biceps in your arms or bigger leg muscles, then measure those as well.
Now that that is out of the way, let us get down to getting on the programme.

Goal Choices

We’re going to start by splitting your goals into three so you can make more sense and jump to the one you’re interested in right now. So, you’ll have a choice of “Going plant-based”, “Losing fat”, or “Gaining muscle”. We’ll also have a bonus section on women lifting later on. I suggest you read them all as a vegan may still need to tweak their diet and someone considering fat loss may still need to add muscle.

So, without further ado, let’s get started.

Going Healthy Plant-Based

Fractal cauliflower looks awesome!

This will actually be the hardest of the choices. It could be harder depending upon where you actually live. If you are surrounded by eateries that sell vegan foods, then the transition could be easier. But if you live in a place where people do not even know what the word ‘vegan’ means, then you could be in for a more difficult transition.

There is also another group who could benefit from this method of dietary change: that is the vegan who has decided to make the change to a healthier lifestyle. You will find that they too experience many of the problems and temptations that meat-
eaters go through. There is something of a parallel between the meat-eaters feeling of loss of some foods they enjoyed and the junk-food vegans loss at the removal of foods they enjoyed. So either person can follow the method below & get results. The approach I tend to employ the most is the “Gradual Transition” model. Some people can happily dump every animal product in the bin and start from scratch on day one. But for most they have no idea what to eat and so dumping every animal product would mean you had nothing but a few wilted cabbage leaves for tea! So, the first goal is to replace. To do this I would suggest you start with breakfast as that is easiest. Find a plant-based breakfast. This can be porridge, or a protein shake, or whole grain toast, or even follow some other cultures breakfast ideas like rice (or quinoa), sushi made with tofu ‘scrambled egg’ (see page 35 for that recipe). Pick whatever you like as long as it is plant-based and fits in with your goals. While you are becoming accustomed to this, begin to look into getting some cookery books. In this booklet we are including some recipes, but they are only a sample. You have foods from every culture and every continent to choose from; from pear and watercress soup (page 34) to protein muffins (page 31). You may be considering going raw food or some similar sub-set of plant-based eating (see our list of vegan dietary variations page 37), but if you are coming from a meat-eating background I would suggest you first take some time and discover the wonders of whole food vegan cookery. From there if you wish to continue to another sub-group, you can always make that choice once you have transitioned safely into a 100% plant-based lifestyle. So find a few cookbooks with some recipes you may enjoy and put aside an evening or two a week as ‘experimental night’. Pick a day that isn’t normally overly stressful and you have a little time to play in the kitchen. At first you may take some time to find recipes you like. This is normal as you have to accustom your taste buds to new flavours and new textures. But you’ll get there.

There is one issue that can occur, especially if you are moving from a diet that is radically different, with more fibre and more nutritious foods. Vegans have different intestinal bacteria to those on other diets. There are actual studies looking into what is living in your gut and while vegans have one type of bacteria living there,
meat-eaters have totally different strains of bacteria colonising their alimentary canal! So, if you suddenly hit the gut with a massive increase in beans, fibrous leafy vegetables and whole grains, then the possibilities may not be that pleasant! The way around this is to transition slowly, and if you need to, take in probiotics and digestive enzymes. For some people the transition will take longer than others, but eventually anyone can make the change from even the worst diet to a healthy one without too much hassle. Of course if you have any questions there are many resources where you can ask questions and get advice (See page 57 for a list of online resources). But remember if you have serious issues always seek out a nutritional expert for advice.

Top athletes Dave & Matt enjoying the Olympics

Hypothetical Jim

So, as an example, let's look at a hypothetical person called Jim. Jim has lifted some weights for a while and has decided to make the transition to a vegan diet. At the moment he consumes around
3,500 Kcal per day split into five 'feeds' (three meals & two snacks). He also consumes a post-workout shake.

Jim's First Changes

Jim really isn't that sure where to begin, as he hasn't even really eaten meat-free before and most of his present meals revolve around meat and dairy. So his first changes will have to be gradual. The easiest changes can be made to the post-workout shake and breakfast. So a simple change can have his whey protein swapped with pea or rice protein. And for breakfast Jim removes his eggs and bacon, and adds in porridge, toast or scrambled tofu. So, we already have both breakfast and post-workout sorted for Jim!

Now Jim, give that a little time and see how you do. With these changes Jim will have to see if he is heading towards his goal. As Jim's goal is to lift well and look fit he will keep an eye on his lifts and his fat levels. If the fat starts creeping up or the lifts start dropping he knows that he only has to tweak a bit more or less of the breakfast or post-workout shake and he'll be back on track. So it's easy to control. Assuming Jim's lifting and body composition is doing great, he may now begin to include even more plant-based foodstuffs. Jim invested in a couple of cookery books and spends a night or two every week experimenting with new meal ideas. He has also been busy on the internet searching out eateries that serve vegan food locally. As he discovers meals he adds them to a growing list of meals he likes and he is also checking out the places locally that serve vegan food. Again, the transition is slow and he monitors the changes as he does not want to lose strength or his physical condition while he changes his diet. The other thing he has done is begin to check out the online support structures that are out there. Especially if he is making the transition alone, this can be a lonely time so having some online support is fantastic. It is also good to know that people have done this before and have probably been through every issue you have as they have made the change from meat-eater to vegan. Jim may come across other issues if he is an ethical vegan (suppose he didn't change his diet for health reasons, but because he became concerned about animals being killed or exploited by humans). He suddenly may find that his lifting shoes, powerlifting belt, gloves and other equipment are made from animal products. Thankfully, everything
from weightlifting shoes to belts and beyond have vegan alternatives available (another reason for going online as people have already found these things for you!) So, now Jim has made the changes and his lifts have improved and so has his body composition. It's a win/win for Jim. He is not only caring for animals, but he has also moved a step closer to his goals. Obviously Jim does not exist and you may not find the dietary change quite as easy. I have left out all the issues, like when you eat out it can be hard to find suitable food or when you go for a meal with a meat eating friend or family member. There are 101 ways in which small problems can crop up, so let's look at a few ways in which we can prepare for them.

Vegan Planning (don't get caught short!)

Austin with friends ready to hit the stage. He manages to compete in both bodybuilding & ultra-endurance eating only plants!

Some people will have to pre-prepare food. This can be annoying, but is vital if you do not have places locally you can eat out at or are
travelling to strange places. Even if you have got places lined-up, I would still make sure you carry something with you in case of delay, for example, a small bar, a few nuts, that kind of thing. It is just there if you get stuck somewhere or the place you are going is unexpectedly closed, or some similar disaster. The second tip is pre-planning: go on the internet, phone up places, find places that do the food you want. If you are invited out to a meal, phone the place and explain that you are a vegan and ask what options they have. Most places will have simple things like salad and tofu if you ask in advance. So it pays to check before you turn up at their door.

Next up, let's look at things you should have to make sure you are 100% healthy.

Getting your nutrition right is one of the three things you have to achieve if you want to reach your strength goals (the other two being recovery & training). The fundamentals are really simple and most people already know the basics:

✓ Don’t eat junk
✓ Eat plenty of fresh fruit & vegetables
✓ Drink plenty of water
✓ If you want to gain weight, eat slightly more than you need to maintain your present weight
✓ If you want to lose weight, eat slightly less than you need to maintain your present weight
The Big Three Dietary Systems

There are three distinct types of diet that are used when training. Each, of course, can be sub-divided, but for our purposes these three basic systems will be looked at.

What are the three basic systems?
Your diet will vary if you are trying to diet, trying to grow or trying to maintain your body weight.

What do they have in common?

All three systems rely on eating regular meals and consuming a large quantity of water, eating mainly healthy food (not junk) and monitoring your weight and your body-fat levels (remember you can weigh MORE, but have less fat).
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## Growth

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## Veganism & protein

*Rob has become one of the best arm-wrestlers on earth while eating a vegan diet*
Protein: - now there is a word you hear occasionally in the bodybuilding world! There are three main types of protein sources for a vegan this is usually called the vegan protein pyramid:

There are also specialist sources like yeast, algae and other lesser known sources, but the bulk of your protein intake will probably be made up of the three food types listed in the diagram above.

Vitamin B12 (cobalamins): - It is not necessary to eat B12 every day as the liver can store many years worth of the vitamin. Also the body can to a great extent recycle the stores of the vitamin and increase absorption when supplies are low. Although many people show no signs of deficiency after years, this does not mean that the body has adequate levels of B12. You could still be suffering from elevated homocysteine levels. Of course, you cannot 'see' or feel homocysteine levels, but this is a sign of possible deficiency nonetheless and may do significant harm to vegans. I recommend that everyone eat fortified foods or take a supplement to insure adequate levels of B12. My views on B12 have changed due to ongoing research. I used to believe that B12 could be obtained from yeast products, edible seaweed, tempeh, miso, but now I have doubts, as the research is unclear whether these contain true B12 or similar products called 'analogues' that chemically look like to B12, but do not function as B12. Until more is known I suggest taking B12 pills or eating fortified foods.

Iodine: - Edible seaweed is the most reliable source of iodine. There is also iodine in vegetables and grains (the amount depends on
where the crop was grown). On this note the reason that most meat and dairy products have iodine in them is the fact that they supplement the animals. So you could say that you are eating iodine pills one step removed.

**EFAs (Essential Fatty Acids):** Vegans tend to eat more omega-6 EFAs than omega-3 EFAs. To combat this I suggest that every morning you include a tablespoon or two of flax seeds, chia seeds, walnuts or hemp. With flax seeds you will have to grind them before use (I use a cheap coffee grinder), but the others can be eaten without anything being done to them first. I would also lower my intake of omega-6 fatty acids. That is usually the oil found in most processed foods. Often cutting down on processed food will automatically cut your intake of omega-6 EFAs. If you are concerned because you have to give up fish oil, then you are in luck. These days there are DHA and EPA oils (the helpful oils in fish) that come from algae. As an extra benefit, as this oil is lower down the food-chain, it is much less likely to be contaminated with heavy metals, PCBs and other toxins when compared to fish oil. Also, fish oil actually contains a considerable amount of saturated fat along with the DHA/EPA oils. These are not beneficial at all. So, you are actually paying for fats you do not wish to consume. With the algae versions you get no saturated fats, just DHA/EPA oil, so it is actually a superior product.

![Veganicity VegVit](image)

*A multi is a good ‘insurance’ especially if you are dieting hard*

**Vitamins and Minerals:** I get every athlete I train onto a basic multi-vitamin. It is probably not vital, but as insurance I believe it is
something most of us should do. You also cover your B12 that way and a multi-vitamin costs very little more than B12 alone, so why not? There could be a few occasions when taking supplements may be of significant benefit. One is if you are suffering intestinal distress. If you are having trouble digesting food, then it makes sense just to get some nutritional help. The second is when you are transitioning from one diet to another. As your diet changes and the bacteria in your gut rushes to catch up with those changes, you may have things like sudden increases in phytate or oxalate intake, for example. For people accustomed to eating these foods the bacteria in the gut evolves to render these things harmless, but for people new to this diet you could suffer a temporary dip in certain vitamins and minerals as the gut bacteria changes to suit the diet. The last common case for extra vitamins and minerals is during illness, disease or injury. These are times where you may not be able to get enough through food alone.

**Other foods:** You must remember to eat plenty of fresh vegetables and fruit everyday to get all your trace elements to allow growth. Of special significance is vitamin C due to the form of iron that vegans consume as compared to meat eaters. Meat eaters get a source of iron called heme iron from meat. This form of iron is much easier to absorb than the non-heme iron found in vegetables. Eating a diet that is high in vitamin C increases the absorption of non-heme iron, as does citric acid and other fruit acids.

**When to Eat**

I used to believe that you needed to eat six-eight ‘feeds’ a day (three or four meals & three or four snacks), but having worked with smaller athletes you soon find that creating meals that are 200 Kcal or so is way too limiting and research has come out recently that it is probably total daily intake that matters more than how often you consume food. The old idea of ‘stoking the furnace’ by eating more often seems to be less likely than it was several years ago. So eat towards your goals. This could be three times a day or as many as eight. The amount of total calories you need in a day will determine how often you eat. Be sure to eat nutritious food,
not junk. Always think the day before or that morning, "Do I need to make anything to take with me". One thing I once read was when you are preparing food always make a big pot full and freeze some in individual portions for later. When you haven't got time to cook this can be a lifesaver!

One important point is to eat (or drink a shake) within 60-90 minutes after exercise as your body needs nutrients at that time and will grow much better if it is fed at that time.

While we are on the subject: WATER. Water is so important that it can't be over stressed. Drink a lot (I mean A LOT!) of it. We all do it, we go out and get thirsty half way to somewhere. Take some water wherever you go. I used to set minimum intakes, but have since found that water needs vary greatly. The idea of drinking until the urine is fairly clear seems to be the best guideline when it comes to water consumption.

**Important Points when Beginning Plant-Based Eating**

With a little planning and forethought it is easy to meet your dietary needs as a vegan strength athlete. If you follow the basic system outlined above, train hard and organise your recovery plan correctly, you can achieve fantastic gains in strength and/or size.

**Losing Fat**

*Mike uses kettlebells & bodyweight training to achieve an amazing level of health*
So, let’s look more closely at each of the three phases talked about previously. To start off let’s look at losing fat. Losing fat seems very, very simple at first glance. You just eat less and you will lose weight. Rather like $1+1=2$, you would expect that eating less $=$ less fat. But as it turns out it can be somewhat harder than that for the person trying to lose fat. People are very complex organisms and with some people food plays more of a role than simply a source of nutrients. For many people with fat issues food has an emotional content that can cause the act of dieting to be much more traumatic than it is for the average person. During their lifetime some people link food to happiness, contentment and reward. So depriving them of those foods is seen as punishment or unhappiness. On top of this, consistent under eating also sets up hormonal responses that fairly quickly slow the metabolism. So you have both physical and mental depression which can be a combination that very few people can fight. To overcome this issue the best way to diet is to add in what I like to call “strategic re-feeds”. Some people call these “cheat meals”. But I do not see them as ‘cheating’, but as a planned part of any dietary plan. Once or twice a week, on a planned day (that is important!), you have a meal of your choice. The only rules are that it has to be a high calorie meal and it has to be something you actually have a desire to eat. Let’s take pizza as an example, there are now many vegan pizzas available to buy. So let’s say that it’s Monday and you feel that awesome looking pizza calling to you across the room from the freezer. Now, if you knew pizza was never on the menu while you were on this diet you might just crack and maybe not just eat the pizza, but the cookies, the vegan ice cream and everything else (well you failed, so you might as well fail big time!). So, in this case you then have to suffer not just the binge, but also the aftermath of guilt and regret that often follows a failure of epic proportions. Thankfully, we have an alternative to this catastrophe. In the second scenario you hear the call of the pizza, but you know you have a strategic re-feed planned for Thursday. Now, you know you will be having pizza, but it will be on Thursday. Not only that, but it is actually part of the plan and eating pizza will help you achieve your fat loss goals! So you can look that pizza square in the eyes
and say, “Maybe not now, but on Thursday you will be mine!” Most people can do that if they have healthy options at hand to distract them while the urge for less healthy food is upon them. In the second scenario you still get pizza, but you get no guilt and no regrets. Eating the pizza is still leading you directly towards your goal. You can feel good about consuming a yummy vegan pizza!

Obviously you mustn’t forget training as to look good you need to develop muscle tone as well as lose fat. But if you can manage those two things, you’ll be looking great fairly quickly.

Let’s talk about a simple plan you can use everyday that will give you some idea of how your dinner plate should look. These versions of ‘the vegan plate’ were taught to me by World Record holding powerlifting Pat Reeves as a way to simply organise a dinner plate to get approximately the right amount of nutrients to achieve healthy fat loss.

Below you’ll see a diagram of a plate. You will see a light grey portion that is a protein source, the dark grey portion is a carbohydrate source and the white portion is vegetables (focused on green leafy vegetables).

Notice that: one quarter of your meal should be a protein source (tofu, beans, seitan, fake meat or similar); one quarter of your meal should be a carbohydrate source (quinoa, brown rice, potato, squash etc); half the plate should be made up of vegetables (mainly green leafy vegetables).

The average dieter’s meal plate should be a quarter of a protein food, a quarter carbohydrate & half full of mainly green leafy vegetables.
Assuming you are consuming the right amount of calories for you, then that will be about the right amount of every nutrient when you are dieting. The good thing about this is, if you find you are not losing weight it is simple to tweak the intake if necessary and lower the amounts by simply shrinking the carbohydrate or protein portions and increasing the green leafy vegetables. Also, for most people, they find that eating the leafy vegetables first, fills them up more quickly. So they are less likely to want a calorie dense dessert after the meal.

**Gaining Muscle**

![Robbie achieved international fame as the original Vegan Bodybuilder](image)

Actually gaining muscle should be the aim of people losing fat. You often do not gain muscle as much as someone eating above maintenance. But often you gain a tighter firmer physique, even if you do not actually gain too much in the way of muscle mass increases due to the lower calorific intake. For those looking to add maximum size though, you need to think about eating big and lifting big. When you are trying to gain muscle, food is like the supplies for building a house. You have the bricks, mortar,
floorboards, while the training is like the construction crew. It actually creates the structure, the shape, the form of the final construction. The brain is like the foreman and the architect. It directs the crew, plans the building process, oversees that the construction is going as it should and makes changes to see that the job is done right. We will look at training later, let us first look at diet. You need to eat. If you are a large individual, you need to eat a lot. I suggest you plan your eating somewhat or there could be consequences. I have known a few bodybuilders, strongmen and powerlifters who have fully embraced the “see-food” diet (if you see food, you eat it). Often these people do make gains in size and strength, but they also make huge gains in fat. The people focused on just strength often do not care about fat though, so where is the harm? Well many of these people develop high levels of cholesterol and soaring blood pressure. They also begin to suffer sleep apnoea (where you stop breathing while you sleep). So, our goal is to add quality weight to your frame. If you are a larger powerlifter, weightlifter, strongman or highland games athlete then maybe there will still be some fat, but the aim must be to try to add as much muscle and as little extra fat as possible to your frame. The method I suggest is to go for the wholefood versions of food as much as is feasible while still achieving your goals. So think whole grain pasta, brown rice, and add a green powder to any shake you consume. If your goal is maximum size or strength then I’m guessing you already know about progressive overload in your training (the need to lift heavier loads to obtain increases in size and strength). Well eating is similar, to achieve your goals you have to slowly increase the amount you eat little by little; a method I call “Progressive Eating”. So if you eat 3,000 Kcal right now, in six months you may be eating 3,500 Kcal, in a year 4,000 Kcal and so on (these numbers are not actual aims, just figures used as an example – the actual amounts will depend on your present size, your goals and how you cope with the increasing calories). Do not take eating too lightly. For many people wanting maximum size and strength, eating becomes harder than training as it is a never ending battle with the plate. After each feed, you know the next one is only a few hours away! For maximum gains you do need to
seriously eat, remember food is the biggest anabolic on earth, to reach a size or strength goal eating enough is vital. You can slightly tweak “the vegan plate” idea to work just as well with the size/strength athlete. For them the plate will have a slight bias towards the more calorie dense foods. So it will look like: A third of the plate will be a protein source (tofu, seitan, beans, fake meat etc); a third of the plate will be a carbohydrate source (quinoa, brown rice, potato, squash etc); a third of the plate will be vegetables (mainly green leafy vegetables).

![Pie chart showing the distribution of a vegan plate](chart.png)

*This food plate has a third of each so most of your meals should contain a third of a higher protein food, a third of a carbohydrate source & a third of mainly green leafy vegetables*

Your main issue will be increasing the quantities of calories as time goes on. It can sometimes be hard to estimate as gains are not linear. You gain, you plateau, then you gain again, as your body can only grow so fast. So you shouldn’t rush to increase calories if you are sustaining weight for a while, but the need to increase calories is something you should always consider when your aim is adding size or strength to your frame.

Now seems a good time to talk a little bit about **homeostasis**. Homeostasis is the bodies desire to stay the same. The body is designed to prefer to be exactly as it is right now. The further you push it, the harder it fights to resist change. The same thing happens in reverse for those who are trying to lose fat. There are ways to force the body to grow. One is through the choice of training with heavy weights. The dietary method is to eat with enough excess that the body is forced to pack on size (ideally you
should be doing both). So, the more you gain, the slower the gains come, hence people begin to try shortcuts like steroids to increase gains beyond what is normal for people to achieve. Unless you are thinking of becoming a pro-bodybuilder, strongman or similar then you do not need steroids to achieve your goals. For most people it will take decades to truly peak in size or strength. But that is ok. You can achieve outstanding results in a remarkably short time and then expect slow steady gains to keep coming all the way to mid-life or beyond. So, it is your chance to tap into a virtual fountain of youth that will keep you looking awesome into old age.

Maintaining

Whatever your goal size is, you can maintain it easily on a vegan diet
As shown by bodybuilder James & runner Peter who are both vegan

Maintaining is probably the easiest... and the hardest thing to do. It can be really hard to sustain things when your only goal is to stay the same. The goal is certainly a good one, especially for the older athlete or for those trying to maintain a certain level of condition. But for most people staying the same just becomes so uninspiring that they can fail. There isn’t really a decent fix for this that I’ve managed to create quite yet (feel free to email me if you have any mind-blowing ideas in that direction). The ideal would be to find a
quantity of food that will keep your fat and muscle levels stable, then stick with that. I would still include the odd strategic re-feed once a week – technically it will not be a ‘re-feed’ as you won’t be depleted in you same way you will get when dieting, but you should have the option to have foods you wouldn’t normally eat now and again just to end the monotony. The vegan plate will look identical to the dieter’s plate. The main difference being that you would eat slightly more of everything than if you were trying to lose fat.

For maintenance most of your meals should follow this basic template. Half mainly green, leafy vegetables, a quarter of a higher protein food & a quarter of a higher carbohydrate source

Planning Your Meals

Now whatever your goals, you need to actually plan your meals to achieve your goals. A lot depends on what those goals are and where you are right now. As I said, years ago I went along with the whole six-eight meals a day for everyone. But having gained more experience, you soon find that smaller people cannot sustain the tiny meals and newer research seems to indicate that daily calorific intake might be more important than frequent feeding. So, with that I suggest breaking down meals to around the 500-750 Kcal mark and see how you do with that. That kind of intake will cause satiation (so you aren’t hungry) and you are less likely to cheat knowing a big meal is coming soon enough. Consider the two ends of this spectrum (as those are the most difficult): the very small
person who is dieting may have to consume 1,000-1,500 Kcal per
day so you could be eating only twice a day, while a very large
person intent on gaining may be eating eight times a day! So,
consider both of these, each would be fairly hard. But for the vast
majority of people of more average size, they will sit perfectly in
the three-four feeds a day, which fits nicely with current eating
habits. So this should be easily doable by the majority whether they
are gaining, maintaining or dieting.
Meal planning has several connotations, so we’ll examine them all.
The first is planning your feeding while you travel or are out and
about. For this you may sometimes have to investigate places via
the internet, or find vegans in that area to point you towards the
better eateries. It can also mean pre-preparing meals. These can
be as simple as oatmeal and fruit in Tupperware, rice & salad, a
protein shake, or you can make it as complex as you desire. The
final example we’ll look at is meal choices and meal timing. A lot
will depend on what your goals are, your present size and other
factors in your life. As an example, a 6’ 3” male strongman would
need a very different diet then a 5’ 1” female who is dieting for the
beach. There are way too many factors to cover every possibility
you may encounter so it is up to you to use some common sense.
I’ll give you a few basic guidelines below:

- If you are eating ≤1,500 Kcal, then you will be better
  having three meals (or even two meals & snack).
- If you are eating ≥2,000 Kcal, but <3,000 Kcal, then four
  meals might be a better option.
- If you are eating ≥3,000 Kcal, then five+ meals are the best
  option.

You can go as high as eight or more meals a day if you are a big
person or need a huge calorie intake. But for most people that isn’t
really necessary.
Food choices can be tricky. One rule is ‘do not go without’. If you
are out or caught short without food, then do the best you can.
You may not be able to find a rice and bean salad, so you may have
to settle for something less than perfect. Do not fret it. In an ideal
world you’d be 100% on the ball about your nutrition and never
make a blunder, but in the real world things happen that throw the best laid plans out the window. You may have an emergency and have to get somewhere quickly, you might lose your food, or maybe you are stuck away from home longer than expected. Any of these things can leave your plans in chaos. So allow some flexibility in your planning. Work towards the perfect diet, but accept that some ‘wiggle room’ will happen. It will not upset your plans, as long as you are keeping these things to a minimum.

What to Eat

What to eat is another subject that is way too large to cover here. You have a whole world of cuisine to explore. So all we’ll do here is offer a few pointers and leave it to you to find the dishes you actually like.

Beans

Samy shows you what you can achieve if you are willing to train & take note of what you eat
Beans are an amazing food. For most people they offer a decent amount of protein and a host of health benefits. The longest lived humans on earth have in common that they consume beans. So, beans should be a part of your diet – a very few people of African descent may have issues with beans, so be aware of that. In the 1950’s, in the early days of bodybuilding, the greatest bodybuilders and weightlifters used beans as a staple part of their diet; something that became lost when steroids became common. In the short term if you are new to beans you might want to consider digestive enzymes and probiotics as you have to grow the bacteria that can deal with beans. The short term effects can be gas, but virtually everyone adapts to beans and any issues subside.

**Frying and Oil**

It is worth considering ways to reduce frying, roasting and similar ways of cooking. You can learn to ‘water fry’, in which you use water (in some cases soya milk) to cook instead of frying. There are some well known vegan eating plans that advocate very low fat eating. These plans are certainly excellent for those at risk of cardiovascular disease, but for some people in training, very low fat eating impairs performance. I am not suggesting high fat, but having moderate fat in the diet could be a benefit for some. Obviously humans vary a lot, so try out various eating plans and find out which works best for you. Also remember that not all diets work for life. So do not become fixated with one style of eating. Allow the possibility that there are several ways to achieve the same goals and many factors are important for a diet to succeed.

**A Few Meals**

There are dozens of cook books and eating plans out there, from the “Chipbutty vegan” to the “Engine2 diet”. We are not trying to replicate anything, but I thought a few meal examples might be a good idea just to get you started.
Protein muffins

Although these are a muffin mix, I tend to make them like a cake as I don’t have muffin moulds, it works just as well.

Ingredients
250 grams oat bran
1 teaspoon baking powder
1 large apple, grated
6 bananas, lightly mashed (leave some chunks if you like)
30 grams of walnuts
30 grams raisins
235 grams of water

Method
Preheat oven to 190°C (375°F, gas mark 5). Combine and mix the dry ingredients in a large bowl. Combine and mix the grated apple, mashed bananas and water. Pour into sprayed muffin tins and bake for 45 minutes or until golden brown on top.

Variations
Bake the batter in a loaf pan, and enjoy hearty slices instead of muffins. You can add things like dates for variation instead of raisins, or even leave out the dry fruit entirely (you still need the apple and banana). You can even add a scoop or two of the protein powder of your choice to bump up the total protein intake.

**Millet Slice**

The well known whole food wholesaler and shop, Infinity food, also has a cafe. It used to make a variation of this dish. When they stopped making it I managed to wangle the recipe from the chef, so here it is.

**Ingredients**

1 cup of millet  
2 cups of water

Suggested seasoning -  
marigold liquid aminos (soya sauce or similar)  
pinch of sage  
pinch of parsley  
pinch of oregano  
half a teaspoon of curry powder
pinch or 2 of cayenne pepper
half a teaspoon of turmeric
1 tablespoon of tomato paste
a small piece of finely chopped ginger
(or any seasoning you prefer)

Veggies of your choice (in this one I used peas, carrots, sweetcorn
and some greens)
1 teaspoon of coconut oil

Method
Add the millet, water and all the seasoning into a pot and simmer
on a low heat until the millet has absorbed the excess fluid. You can
vary the seasoning to any that you have in and like.
While the millet is cooking steam any mix of veggies you like. Just
make sure there is more millet than veggies and cut the veggies
small.
Once that is all done put the millet and the veggies into a greased
Pyrex or similar bowl, then coat the top with a touch of coconut oil
and put in the oven at about 120-150°C (250-300°F or gas mark ½ -
2) cook for 30-40 minutes (or until the top browns slightly).
You're done! Serve with any veggies you like.
Another variation I've discovered later is to add 1 cup red lentils. 
Cook 1 cup of lentils to 2 cups of water for 30 minutes first, rinse a
lot, then add to the mix before it goes in the oven. I just liked the
idea of getting a bit more protein from my slice. So it would now be
a millet and lentil slice. This one does not hold together quite as
well as millet on its own.

According to the people at Infinity, the millet slice can be left in the
fridge for a few days. You can reheat once (more than once and it
goes too dry). So only reheat the bit you intend to eat or you'll dry
out the food too much.
Pear and Watercress Soup

This is good as a starter. Calorie-wise it is not really enough unless you are seriously trying to cut calories, but as a snack or a starter it works. This is based on a traditional English meal.

Ingredients
125g watercress
1 pear
3 medium potatoes,
small onion
soya sauce
black pepper to taste
½ a cup (118ml) of unsweetened soya milk

Method
Put everything except pepper and soya milk into a pot and just cover with water. Simmer for 20-30 minutes. Whiz up into a smooth liquid, then add soya milk & pepper to taste. You can garnish with parsley or a sprig of watercress if you like.

Variations
You could add other things if you like. I would imagine garlic would work as would swapping leeks for onions.

**Scrambled Tofu**

![Scrambled Tofu](image)

Great for breakfasts, you could also add it to a main meal.

**Ingredients**
- 200g tofu
- Splash of soya milk
- Sage
- Parsley
- Black pepper
- Liquid Aminos (or soya sauce)

**Method**
Drain the tofu. Put the tofu and splash of soya milk into a pot. Mash the tofu, add the parsley and sage to taste. Heat the tofu until thoroughly heated, drain any excess liquid, then add liquid aminos to taste and serve on toast, or with a salad.

**Variations**

This can be served with rice. It can also be in a sushi wrap or any other way you can think of to serve it.
Tempeh Wraps

In this case I had it with celery, cucumber, broccoli, red pepper & avocado chunks

Ingredients
200g Tempeh
Pack of nori sheets
100ml Soya milk
Curry powder
Cayenne pepper
Mixed herbs
5g Fresh ginger (small chunk finely chopped)
Black pepper

Optional extras
Peas
Thinly chopped carrot
Sweet corn
Any other small bits of vegetable you desire

Method
First pop the diced tempeh, the soya milk and ginger into a pot. Also add the curry powder, cayenne pepper, black pepper and mixed herbs to taste. Keep an eye on this and stir constantly. Add more soya milk only if you need to, as the idea is get a thick ‘sauce’
from the herbs and soya milk. Simmer for 20-25 minutes, or until the food is heated and the soya sauce has thickened. Put into nori wraps and serve with salad or vegetables of your choice.

There you have a few ideas. This is by no means a complete dietary plan, just a few random recipes I have used in the past. Some other ideas which you can play with are “Bean shakes” (yes make a shake using blended beans as the protein source!), tofu cubes, quinoa and anything, buckwheat pasta and seitan. The list goes on. I’m not a chef. I’m guessing you can do even better than me at dreaming up tasty recipes. Do not be shy. Give it a go and surprise yourself with a tasty, healthy vegan treat!

Different Eating Options

Once you get into the whole “healthy vegan eating” thing, you will see there are many variations. I personally advocate what you would call a “whole food” vegan diet. The idea would be to keep refined food to a minimum and using mainly whole foods. Using this diet you get a lot of nutritional bang for your buck. Whether you decide to tweak your diet more than that is up to you. I would hope though that you always keep an open mind and if you find a style of eating you enjoy, remember that it is not the ‘only’ way to eat to succeed. Also remember that a diet may be perfect for you for a while, then as your body changes it may no longer suit you. So you may need to modify your diet as the years go on. I stick to recommending a mainly whole food vegan diet as it encompasses all of the following and allows you to switch between them as you test out different ways of eating. It allows high fruit, high raw, living food, low fat, high vegetable, high protein and every other common variation in dietary eating and doesn’t pigeon-hole you into such a small dietary box that you are almost building in failure. Even if you find a pigeon-hole that fits you exactly now, bear in mind that it may not suit you forever and it may not suit someone else at all! I’ll run through a few popular vegan dietary options now. If I have missed out your particular flavour then I apologise.
Whole food vegan – basically anything made from whole foods. I do allow some wiggle room, so strategic refeeds can be refined if you need them (some people are stricter & that’s ok too).

Living food – Powerlifting wonder Pat Reeves is the strongest advocate for this diet (in more ways than one!). It is eating a high percentage of living food. So think of things still alive when you eat them: yoghurts (soya, oat or other plant-based yoghurt), tempeh, sauerkraut, sprouted foods and things like juices from freshly cut wheat grass and similar. So, think non-alcoholic fermented foods and sprout diet.

80:10:10 diet - This could be called the fruit diet I guess as it focuses on fruit. It’s 80% carbohydrates, 10% Protein and 10% fat. That’s about the intake if you eat mainly fruit. It focuses on raw fruit, so no cooked purees, no grains, very little seeds, and no beans.

Forks over knives/Engine2 diet - This is a mainly wholefood, low fat diet. It is the diet followed by Bill Clinton and espoused by the author of the “China Study” book. There have been impressive results when used on people who are suffering from serious cardiovascular disease. It isn’t totally clear if people without cardiovascular disease need to go that low fat and very low fat can impair physical performance in some people.

Ornish diet – This diet splits food into five food groups (group one being the best foods, down to group five which are the least healthy options). Nothing is banned, but you are supposed to eat mainly from the first groups and only occasionally from the groups with higher numbers. This is not a vegan diet, but it is easier to do as a vegan as we do not eat much of the higher number foods. It is a low fat diet that includes whole grains.

Fuhrman diet - Again this is not a vegan diet as such, but is common amongst vegans. This diet is based on a very high intake of vegetables, some beans and fruits, with smaller amounts of grains and seeds.

Eco-Atkins diet – This is not really a whole food diet as you’d need some processed food. The eco-Atkins diet was an experiment to see how a plant-based version of the Atkins diet would work. As it turns out it works a whole lot better than the original in studies. As I said this is not a whole food diet, but I included it as some well
known vegan bodybuilders have had some success dieting for contest using this diet. So if that is your thing it may be something you’ll want to experiment with.

**Raw food** – Do not eat anything that is heated above 40-46°C (104-115°F). This can include things that are dehydrated and other methods. It can include processed foods like syrups and raw chocolate bars.

I could go on as the list of diets never ends. My view is to keep things simple, do not overly restrict. It can be hard enough without cutting out too much. Even if you find a restrictive style of eating that suits you, remember that just because it works for you right now, that does not mean it works for everyone, everywhere, in every situation. I’ve seen too many people fall into that trap to realise that it is better to keep your options open. If something works for you, that is great, enjoy the success, but do not expect everyone to be identical to you and if that method begins to fail do not be concerned about experimenting with other whole food vegan variations.

I believe that virtually everyone on earth can live healthily on a totally vegan diet (there may be the very rare genetic or metabolic disease that prevents a few people right now, but for everyone else I believe it is certainly possible). It’s just a matter of finding out what suits you best. For most, having the widest variety of foods possible is the best insurance that they are getting everything they need. So I suggest that you do that and only limit yourself by sticking to mainly vegan whole foods, with the odd splurge into the refined food now and again if you need to.
One of my pet peeves is the whole ‘bulky women’ idea. Can a woman get bulky? Sure, some of them can. Is it easy to get bulky... if only! Most males will train for years trying to achieve a bulky physique (and many fail). For the vast majority of females they will not develop bulk without some serious lifting over decades (when I say ‘serious lifting’ I mean national calibre lifting may get you there). For many women, even at the top of their game, they still are unable to develop bulk even when they lift World Record weights!
The thing to watch for a female concerned about bulk is the amount of food consumed, a second line of defence is to include some steady state cardio. If you utilise these two things you would have to be a true genetic freak to add bulk to your frame while lifting weights. Still, if you are fearful, then start light, you can still do steady state cardio on the treadmill or whatever, but spend the first part of every session doing some lifting. Squats and hip thrusts will build the butt, while training the shoulders will give the illusion of a smaller waist. Working the arms will tighten and tone them. One thing to keep an eye on is weight training can increase appetite. Make sure you do not increase your calorie intake if the goal isn’t to add size to your frame. So, give it a try, at worst you could be that rare breed that does add bulk, but as soon as it starts you simply increase the steady state cardio, lower the calorie intake or rein back on the training a little bit.

**Warming-up, Recovery and Other Factors**

Warming-up should be considered a vital part of training. There are 1001 ways to warm-up. From five minutes light cardio and jump rope to the more recent dynamic warm-up protocols used by many coaches. I’ll give you an outline of how I usually programme a full workout for a client.

- Myofasical release (using foam rolling & tennis ball) 5 minutes
- Dynamic warm-up 5 minutes
- Workout
- Stretching

The details change based on any issues or dysfunction they may have but a basic example of rolling out can be found at [http://www.scribd.com/doc/57272762/Myofascial-Leaflet](http://www.scribd.com/doc/57272762/Myofascial-Leaflet)

Training

Now let’s move onto a few training ideas. There is no way to cover every type of training, for every goal. Assuming you are new I will give you a bodyweight routine that needs minimal equipment and a basic starter routine (the starter routine is written by Joni Purmonen the vegan strongman).

Bodyweight Training

First we’ll look at the bodyweight training routine. For this you will need some loose clothing, some space, a couple of strong, high backed chairs and a sturdy broom handle.

Push-ups

Kneel on all fours and then straighten out your legs. Lower yourself down until you nearly touch the floor, then rise again. Do a few less repetitions than you can actually do at first, then increase the number once a week for four weeks, then back off a little and start again. For example:

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<tr>
<th>Cycle 1</th>
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If you cannot do a full push-up quite yet, start off by doing them on your knees for a few weeks. Once you have 10-12 reps, begin to lower yourself in the full push-up position, then put your knees down to raise yourself back up. Once you reach 10-12 reps you should be capable of doing a full push-up.
Inverted Row

Start & finish positions of an inverted row

Lie flat on the floor reaching up to the broom handle. Pull yourself up in a controlled manner and then slowly lower yourself. Keep your body stiff so your body remains straight as you rise and lower. Use a similar loading pattern to the push-up. If you cannot manage a full inverted row bend your knees to 90° then slowly begin to straighten the knees as your strength increases.

Wall Squat

Start & finish positions of the wall squat

This will teach you good body mechanics and get you ready to try out the weighted version when its time. Stand facing a wall, a few centimetres away. Your feet should be slightly turned out and about shoulder width apart. Your face should be looking straight ahead. Now keeping your heels down, your chest high and your
face forward, slowly lower yourself until you can’t get any lower. A good trick is to start to the lower by pushing your butt back. Again slowly progress, adding repetitions the same as in the push-up, or you could hold for time.

**Plank**

![Plank position](image)

Start on your knees and then straighten out your legs behind you. Hold your body stiff like you are a plank. Don’t move! Work up to 90 second hold.

**Side Plank**

![Position of the side plank](image)

While lying on your side, raise yourself up onto your elbow. Like the plank this is a hold, so stay in position for 60 seconds.
Shoulder Bridge

Lie on your back with your feet flat on the floor. Push through your heels and raise up your body. Again raise your body as one unit, stiff like a board. Hold for 90 seconds.

These are six exercises that you should do at least three times a week (more if you want to). Always use a similar system of four weeks of increasing repetitions, then back-off a bit and work up again to a new high. This won’t take long, it’s just a quick session, so you have no excuse not to go and do it right now!

From there you can progress to harder variations, buy some weights or join a gym to help you continue to make progress.

Beginners Training with Weights *(written by strongman Joni Purmonen)*

The Big 3 of Getting Big

The basics of putting on muscle can be divided into three core rules: hard training, big eating and rest.

Train Hard

When describing hard training it is best to start by stating what it is NOT. Hard training doesn't mean spending hours on end at the gym. Hard training does not mean going to the gym every day. Hard training definitely does not mean doing incredible amounts of biceps preacher curls super-setted with cable curls. Leave that type of training to the steroid users.
Hard work for natural trainers means intense and abbreviated training sessions, lifting heavy weights (relative to your strength of course) and basic, compound exercises.

Training Routine
You can start going to the gym doing whatever you feel like, but before long that becomes boring, counterproductive or both. Too many people at the gym only train the "mirror muscles", the ones you can see from a mirror: chest and biceps. Remember that two thirds of your muscle mass is in your legs and back.
A few basic rules should be remembered when devising a training program:

1. You grow when you rest, not at the gym. As a rule, have more rest days than lifting days in a week. Read more about this in the rest section.

2. Start your sessions moving from compound to isolation movement. Put exercises like squats, deadlifts, chins, barbell rows, bench presses, dips, barbell shoulder presses and so on before isolation movements like barbell curls, skull crushers, grip training and so on.

3. No matter what you do, keep your training sessions under 60 minutes. This usually means that you have maximum of 20 working sets, usually less. You can either work long or hard. You’ll need to make a choice.

4. Your body doesn’t want to grow. You need to trick it into growth. The only way you can do this is by progression, so make sure that every week you do more than in the previous session be it a slight weight increase, one extra rep, better range of motion and so on. Progress to progress.

5. As a warm up, do the exercise you are going to do with light weights, progress to heavier weights until you get to your working weight.
Sample Programmes

Back to Basics Routine
This routine involves no machines, no fancy equipment; no shiny new scientific gadget designed to take all the effort out of the exercise. It's just plain hard work with compound movements. Never do this two days in a row.

DAY 1: PULL
Deadlifts
Pullups/chins
Barbell Rows

DAY 2: PUSH
Incline or Flat Dumbbell Bench Press
Dips
Standing shoulder presses with dumbbells or barbell

DAY 3: LEGS
Squat
Stiff Leg Deadlifts
Weighted Crunches or Weighted Hanging Leg Raises (around 12 reps)

Pick a rep range, 3 sets of 8 reps if you are a beginner, 5 sets of 5 reps if you are more experienced. Pick a weight that you can manage for 3x8 (or 5x5) and on the following week add a bit more weight (the minimum increment you can find at your gym). If you fail to get all the reps, keep on that weight until you nail it.

What? No bicep curls? True, no need for them as they get plenty of attention on the pulling day. If you feel that this is not the case, why not add a set or two of them in.

Whole Body Workouts
Doing your whole body in one session can be a great way to jump start growth. Train maybe every 4th day - always listen to your body and never train until you have fully recovered from your
previous session. Have two whole body routines and alternate between them, for example:

Day A:
Squat
Stiff-legged deadlifts
Wide chin
Dips
Barbell row
Close grip bench
Shrug
Dumbbell Curls
Calf Raise
Crunches

Day B:
Deadlifts
Leg Press
Lat pulldown
Dumbbell incline press
Dumbbell row
Dumbbell shoulder press
Hammer curl
Dips (elbows in)
Calf raises
Leg raises

Do one, yes, just one working set to absolute failure on every movement. That is, do one set so far that you cannot do any more reps if your life depended on it. Aim somewhere between 8-12 reps, if you get 12 reps, up the weight in the next session. Be sure to be well warmed up before doing your working set and to be on the safe side. So one warm up set for each pulling, pushing and leg movement.
Another 3 Day Split

Back and Biceps
Chins/pullups or lat pulldowns
Dumbbell or barbell row, or some other rowing movement
Bicep curl, like barbell curl or alternating dumbbell curls
Abdominal exercises

Chest and triceps
Bench press
Incline dumbbell flyes or incline dumbbell presses
Skull crushers or some other triceps extension movement

Legs and shoulders
Squats or leg press
Stiff-legged deadlift or leg curl
Dumbbell or barbell press, standing
Shrugs
Calf raises

Do 3 sets of 8-10 reps for each. You have plenty of good exercises to choose from depending on your gym and what you like doing. So, there you have it! You can begin training at home or in the gym. It doesn’t matter. Just get going and good things will happen!

You can download a full pdf version of the above training as written by Joni Purmonen from http://www.veganbodybuilding.org/guides/Basic-bbing.pdf

John shows that even as we age we can still maintain a ripped physique using a vegan diet
Cardio Training

Most people who actually lift do not enjoy cardio as much. Conversely, most people who enjoy cardio do not enjoy lifting quite as much. Tough! For virtually everyone some form of cardio is vital to achieve maximum health. Cardio can be split onto three general styles: steady state, HIIT and what you could call ‘cardio weight training’. We’ll take a bit of time to look at all three below. Before we can even look at cardio though, let’s have look at heart rates. There are many different types of heart rate measurements:

**Resting Heart Rate (RHR)** – Generally taken in bed before you rise. Take for three days in a row to get an average. The average should be 50-60 beats per minute (BPM). But an athlete into cardiovascular training might be as low as 30-40BPM (also a severely depleted dieters heart rate can drop due to metabolic slowing).

**Ambient Heart Rate (AHR)** – Is your general heart rate when active during the day. Think of sitting in a chair reading, watching TV, etc. Again taken for three days and arriving at an average is the best way to estimate your AHR. The average is 70, but cardiovascular athletes can be 30-40’s.
Delta Heart Rate (DHR) – Is the difference between how hard your heart has to work when you are lying down compared to standing up. To find this score lie down for two minutes and take your heart rate. Now slowly stand up and take it again. There should be a difference. A difference of 0-10BPM is excellent. 10-20BPM is normal. Over 20BPM is cautionary. Over 20 and you should reduce training intensity or take the day off if necessary. If you are commonly over 20 due to obesity or illness then get the all-clear before starting unsupervised training.

Rather like weight training, cardio should be a progressive system of training. To learn the current level of training you should be working at you will need a couple of new terms.

Maximum Heart Rate (MHR) – To actually calculate this you’d need to be tested at a medical centre. So people have devised ways to estimate this number based on your age, bodyweight and other factors. Remember that this is an estimation. A very fit person can surpass their estimated MHR.

Target Heart Rate (THR) – This is a percentage of your MHR. By keeping at a specified THR you control the intensity of the cardio workout. There are various ways to estimate THR, but simple techniques like the “Talk test” for someone wanting moderate intensity is a good guide.

Recovery Heart Rate (ReHR) – This is how quickly your heart rate lowers after your training. The less the change after training the less fit you are. You simply compare your heart rate during exercise to two minutes after exercise. For example, when working out in the ‘aerobic zone’ (moderate intensity training like jogging), a drop of 10-20 BPM two minutes after completion is considered normal.

Virtually all cardiovascular exercise levels are based on a percentage of Maximum Heart Rate, but how do you know what your MHR is? You could go to a medical centre and they could test you, but that is unfeasible for most people. So there are various calculations available for you to estimate.
Consider these as guidelines, not set in stone, as for some people their heart rate can vary from this average.

**Edwards Age and Weight Predicted Method of Finding MHR**

For women 210 – ½ your age – 5% of your bodyweight (in pounds)
For men 210 – ½ your age – 5% of your bodyweight (in pounds) +4

**Robergs and Landwehr Age Predicted Method of Finding MHR**

205.8 - 0.685 \* age (so first calculate your age multiplied by 0.685, then subtract that number from 205.8)

**Age Predicted Method of Finding MHR**

Women 226 - age
Men 220 - age

There are many other ways to calculate your MHR, but those are the most common. In one study, Robergs’ predictor was the most accurate on average, but any can be used as a guideline.

Now let’s look at ‘Workout zones’. These will depend on your current fitness levels and goals. Also take into account that the rates could be affected by medication, altitude, caffeine intake, even water vapour percentage in the air. So they are just guidelines.

**Zone 1 (healthy heart zone)** – 50-60% of your MHR. This would be typically walking. The example often used is you should be able to sing a song while doing this intensity of workout.

**Zone 2 (fat burning zone)** – 60-70% of your MHR. You should be about to talk without gasping while in this zone. Light jogging is a common example of this zone.

**Zone 3 (aerobic zone)** – 70-80% of your MHR. You should be able to say part of a sentence, catch your breath, then continue. Hard jogging is an example of this zone.
Zone 4 (anaerobic threshold) – 80-90% of your MHR. You are generally unable to speak a sentence and are gasping for air. Fast running, or short dashes are examples of this zone.

Zone 5 (Red line zone) – 90-100% of you MHR. Get clearance from a physician before training like this. Think of maximal sprinting (running, biking or swimming for example) as red line activities.

So now that you know how to calculate what your heart rate should be doing various activities, it is time to look at some of these activities. We will be looking at steady state cardio, HIIT-style cardio and cardio weight training. First we’ll look at Steady State cardio.

Steady State Cardio

Steady state cardio is getting your heart rate into the desired zone and staying there for a set amount of time. For example you may choose to jog for 30 minutes. So, you jog while keeping your heart rate in zone 2 or 3 (in this example depending on your goals & present fitness levels).

But let’s look at the overall picture. Let’s suppose you have decided to include steady state cardio into your training. How do
you know how much to do and what level to start at? A lot depends on your present health and fitness. If you have any health issues first check that it is ok for you to begin unsupervised training. At the start you may need a physical therapist or personal trainer to help you plan the start of your training life. Take any help offered as they have experience in this field. If in doubt, start slow. For most people a brisk walk is the ideal starting point. Work up to a 30 minute walk at a brisk pace. Once you can do that comfortably, then you can consider jogging. Other options are cycling, swimming or a selection of cardio machines at many gyms.

**HIIT (High Intensity Interval Training)**

I do not recommend you start doing HIIT until you have built a base of steady state training. You should be able to jog, swim or bike at a reasonable pace before you increase the intensity of your training unless you already have experience in a sport. The most famous HIIT protocol is called the ‘tabata’. You use this protocol on a stationary bike and it takes 4 minutes in total. You do 8 rounds of maximum pedalling each lasting 20 seconds, between these rounds you rest for 10 seconds. This may not sound hard, but it is. You have to give 100% effort for 20 seconds, then before you are recovered do it again and again. Many people can vomit after they first try this protocol as they are not used to producing so much effort in such a short time. Also you have to be in tip-top health to do it. If you have already built a decent aerobic base using steady state cardio and are ready to try out HIIT, you probably would be better to ease into the higher intensity levels as the training is tough. 30 seconds on, 60 off, on a bike or rowing machine is a good start. This will not be quite as flat out as a tabata, but will still be intense enough to get you used to the intense workout. From there work down to 30 on, 30 off, then 30 on, 15 off. From there you can drop the times and increase the intensity of the workouts. You monitor these with a heart rate monitor (you should use a heart rate monitor with all your cardiovascular activity if possible) and also with the measuring instruments on the machine you are using (such as watts, miles covered, speed achieved etc). The goal is to increase your output rate as the time gets shorter until you
can produce huge amounts of output in a short time (for example, sprinting really fast). Generally most people never need go to the extremes of tabata. They can happily get results from 30 second bouts of exercise with suitable rest, repeated an appropriate amount of times.

Some common HIIT protocols are:

- 30 seconds on, 30 seconds off for 10 rounds on the bike
- 60 seconds on, 30 seconds off for 10 rounds on the rowing machine
- 10 seconds on, 30 seconds off for 10 rounds sprints
- 20 seconds on, 10 seconds off for 8 sessions on a bike (tabata protocol)

This is not the definitive guide to HIIT style cardio training. Many other protocols exist such as not timing rest but using heart rate to decide when to start the next set (say waiting until the heart rate drops to 70-75% MHR). This means the exercises are self controlling. As fitness improves, so the rest intervals naturally shrink. Be somewhat cautious using HIIT and do not advance too quickly. Always warm-up before doing HIIT.

**Cardio Weight Training**

*Samy shows us cardio weight training using a kettlebell.*
Cardio weight training has been around since the dawn of the adjustable barbell and dumbbell. The very early pioneers of ‘scientific lifting’ noted that when you lifted weights with very little rest you actually tended to be leaner. The modern twist on this idea has been the creation of ‘complexes’. These are routines done with a barbell or dumbbell with no rest between movements. So imagine you do a press, then a squat without a break. That would be a simple complex. But you can get as complex as you like. You can also use bodyweight or other tools or machines in a complex.

Some Examples of Complexes Might Be:

- 10 Push-ups, 10 pull-ups, 10 bodyweight squat jump. Rest 30 sec-1min & repeat several times
- 12 Front squats, 12 push-presses. Rest 60 seconds & repeat 5 times.
- 6 Lunges (each leg), 12 pulldowns, 6 Hand clap push-ups. Rest for 90 seconds & repeat 4 times.

There are other ways to do cardio weight training that does not involve complexes. One way is using a moderate weight and doing an exercise for time. Common examples of these are doing kettlebell swings for time. If you can swing a 16Kg Kettlebell (female), 24Kg kettlebell (male) for a reasonable time then you are getting very decent cardiovascular benefits and fat loss!

The last way we will mention is commonly called ‘density training’. You simply pick an exercise and a time. So for an example we’ll say squatting with your own bodyweight on a barbell on your back. Now pick a time, say 60 seconds. Now you do as many reps as you can in that time. Write that number down. Now next time you repeat that exercise in a few days, you try to beat the number of repetitions you do in the same time. Sounds simple, but it ends up being a really heart pounder! Also consider you are doing the whole workout in this fashion and you soon see you will end up with some seriously effective cardio! Be aware that your ability to lift your maximum weights may be compromised by cardiovascular fatigue.
These are certainly not the only options available to you in terms of cardio weight training, but they should be enough to keep you interested for several years.

**Resources**

Here are a few places you may want to check out. These will be especially important if you do not have a support structure in place, as they will offer advice if you hit a snag, encouragement when you feel vulnerable, or want a pat on the back when you hit a milestone!


Vegan Bodybuilding Facebook group [https://www.facebook.com/groups/23353662623/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/23353662623/)


Vegan Bodybuilding Blog [http://veganbodybuilding.blogspot.co.uk/](http://veganbodybuilding.blogspot.co.uk/)

Vegan Bodybuilding Twitter [https://twitter.com/veganbodybuild](https://twitter.com/veganbodybuild)

**Wrapping Up**

Hopefully, all the above has given you the incentive you need to give it a go. Remember you can start small and grow from there (or shrink depending on your goals!) Training once a week at home is better than not training at all. Eating one healthy meal a day is better than eating none. So if you do not feel like jumping in with both feet, just dip in your toe and see how the water feels. Once you begin to feel the benefits of exercise and healthy eating, the transition will become much easier. So like an acorn, start small and before you know it, you’ll be a mighty oak!