10 Best Vegetarian Bodybuilding Foods for Muscle Growth
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Muscle building and vegetarian foods don't go quite hand in hand because protein is the foundation of muscle building and some of the richest sources of protein are non-vegetarian such as lean beef, pork, turkey and fish. So, does that mean vegans and vegetarian don't stand any chance of building muscles? The answer is “Yes they do”. Consider some of the most powerful and muscular animals like horses, oxen and gorillas; they are all herbivorous. The diet for muscle building should be planned in such a way that there is always a calorie surplus even after calories are burned through exercise and resistance training. Vegetarians and vegans can get the required nutrients from whole grains, nuts, seeds, fruits and vegetables.

3 Most Important Nutrients for Muscle Building

Developing a chiseled and muscular body requires a disciplined life, commitment and consistency. It should be a combination of hard training and a well-planned diet. The 3 most important nutrients that should be derived from muscle building foods are as follows:
Proteins

**Bodybuilding foods** should provide a constant supply of protein throughout the day for promoting muscle growth. Proteins are formed by amino acids and amino acids are the building blocks of muscles and tissues. Muscle growth and repair of muscle tissues is impossible without amino acids.

There are 22 amino acids in all, of which 9 are essential and 12 are non-essential. The amino acids are taken in by the small intestine and again released into the blood stream after being rearranged. The nine essential amino acids cannot be produced by the body itself and have to be supplemented through the diet. Proteins are utilized by the body to produce energy and carry out vital functions. It also helps in building muscles and replaces damaged and old cells.

**Carbohydrates**

Carbohydrates are a crucial source of energy for the body and the best muscle building foods must be rich in carbohydrates. **Complex carbohydrates** like whole grain breads, pasta and cereals are slowly digested to provide a continuous, slow release of energy for a long time.
Carbohydrates are broken down into glucose and all the cell functions depend on glucose. Therefore, complex carbohydrates should make up at least 50 to 60% of your daily calorie intake.

**Fats**

Although, fats are misunderstood by most people, healthy fats have many beneficial effects on health. Lipids (fats) are the best source of energy with over twice as many calories per gram compared to proteins and carbohydrates.

Unsaturated fats found in plants and oils contain linoleic acid, an *essential fatty acid* important for the human body. Fats supply energy, protect vital organs, increase satiety and balance hormonal functions. Healthy foods for muscle building should contain fats and it should make up 30% of the daily calories.

**Best Vegetarian Foods for Muscle Building**

Building muscles by following a vegetarian diet is not as difficult as it sounds. There is a wide range of plant-based foods rich in complex carbohydrates, protein and healthy fats.
Nuts

These crunchy and delicious snacks are packed with protein and healthy calories which make them one of the best body building foods. Nuts such as almonds and cashews are loaded with protein, fats and fibers, which help you in getting those surplus calories even after sweating it out in the gym.

One cup of almonds contains 30 grams of protein, and 71 grams of healthy fats and an ounce of cashew contains 150 calories. Nuts for health are extremely portable, which makes them one of the most easy munching foods that you can enjoy any time during the day.

Quinoa

Quinoa is a complete food for muscle growth which contains all the 9 essential amino acids that the body cannot produce by itself. It is also rich in proteins and complex carbohydrates, which work as a steady source of energy through strenuous workout sessions. Quinoa can be cooked just like rice but are actually the seeds of a leafy plant.

One cup of cooked quinoa has 8 grams of protein. Research shows that quinoa promotes the production of growth hormone factor-1 (IGF-1), which is important for gaining muscle mass and strength. It is also laden with iron, calcium and magnesium that are essential for regulating muscle tone.

Beans and Legumes

Beans and legumes such as chickpeas are some of the most effective protein-rich foods that can be incorporated in the vegetarian diet for muscle building. Just a cup of chickpeas contains 40 grams of protein, 121 grams of carbs and 7.7 grams of unsaturated fat.
Beans such as kidney beans, pinto beans, etc. are loaded with proteins and fibers that not only improve bowel movement, but also boost up insulin response, that is essential for muscle growth as it increases the absorption of nutrients by the body. You can consume beans combined with brown rice or enjoy a cup of rich chickpea hummus.

Seeds

The diet for muscle building is incomplete without the inclusion of seeds in it. Seeds such as flax seeds, chia seeds, sesame seeds and sunflower seeds are packed with essential fatty acids, proteins and fiber. The essential fatty acids existing in seeds reduce inflammation and promote recovery of tissues post workout. A nourishing smoothie sprinkled with flax seeds or chia seeds make the perfect post workout food. You can also include the seeds in salads and curries.
Fruits

Fruits are often avoided by fitness enthusiasts because of their high fructose content that can cause fat gain. But certain fruits such as bananas, cantaloupes and apples are extremely beneficial for muscle building.

These fruits are loaded with carbohydrates, fiber, minerals and vitamins which are vital for increasing lean muscle mass. Having a banana, an apple or a small bowl of cantaloupes during breakfast after a night of fasting can keep you going throughout the day.

Tofu

Tofu, a popular soy product is a healthy alternative source of high-quality protein other than meat. It contains all the essential nutrients required for body building and is a rich source of isoflavones and amino acids that boost muscle growth.

Tofu also helps in speedy recovery of sore muscles and tissues after a strenuous workout session. It can be used to prepare a delicious scramble that tastes as good as scrambled eggs.

Full-Fat Cottage Cheese

Full fat cottage cheese is one of the best muscle building foods that you can enjoy without compromising on the taste. Cottage cheese has two fold benefits in improving lean muscle mass. Firstly, full fat cottage cheese is rich in casein, a slow digesting dairy protein that causes a slow and steady rise in the level of amino acid in the blood that continues to remain at an elevated level for a long time.
Secondly, cottage cheese is loaded with live cultures and healthy bacteria that promote the breakdown and absorption of the nutrients that are required for building bigger and stronger muscles.

Fermented Dairy Products

Fermented dairy products such as yogurt, buttermilk and kefir work as magic foods for muscle building. Fermented dairy products work better than regular milk because they are higher in calories and the presence of probiotics in these foods improve digestion of other foods, so that maximum amount of nutrients and calories can be absorbed by the body through efficient breakdown of foods. You can enjoy a cup of yogurt or a glass of buttermilk or kefir as a healthy muscle building snack.
Leafy Greens

Although, most of us concentrate on proteins for building muscles; vegetables also play an equally important role when it comes to bodybuilding. Leafy green vegetables such as kale, spinach, romaine lettuce along with beet, avocado and squash are rich in calcium, folic acid, vitamins A, B, C, D and E – all of which are vital for improving muscle concentration, reducing inflammation and neutralizing the harmful effects of oxidative stress. The antioxidants present in vegetables speed up muscle and tissue recovery, which is an integral part of bodybuilding.

Protein Shakes

A healthy shake rich in carbohydrates and protein such as a whey protein shake is important to speed up the results of any muscle building program. A protein shake works as an effective pre-workout food which promotes optimal nutrient usage and effective muscle growth.

The combination of carbohydrates and protein in bodybuilding shakes reduce excessive muscle breakdown, improve protein synthesis in the body, boost up blood flow to the muscles and act a steady supply of energy.

Include these vegetarian muscle building foods in your bodybuilding diet and combine it with a daily schedule of resistance training in order to achieve your dream figure.
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