Being a Vegetarian in College

Coming to college is a huge step towards independence and a time during which many things in life are changing. There is so much to worry about, making new friends, picking classes, moving to a new environment, being away from family and high school friends, it is nice to know that at least you have a warm meal waiting for you at the dining hall. That is of course unless you have a dietary restriction. Being a college student on a restricted diet can be tricky, but what many don’t realize is that there are valuable resources in place to help students find a variety of menu choices that fit their diet and still satisfy their pallet. This article will focus on different types of vegetarian diets, reasons why people follow these diets, key nutrients that could potentially be of concern and finally some of the options available to vegetarians at The Rock Café. At the end of this article you will also find the contact information for Brenda Walton, a registered dietitian working at Ferris State University, who will be able to help you with any more questions or concerns you may have regarding vegetarian diets or restricted diets in general.

Types of Vegetarian Diets
While vegetarianism may seem pretty simple and straight forward, in fact it is not so black and white. When it comes to being vegetarian, it is really about shades of grey. There are many different types of vegetarianism ranging in extremes from raw veganism to flexitarian (also called semi-vegetarian). I have listed all the different recognized types of vegetarianism here, to give you an idea of what is out there:

Flexitarian/Semi-Vegetarian → An individual who eats a mostly vegetarian diet, but occasionally eats poultry, but no red meat
Pescatarian → An individual who abstains from eating all meats except fish
Vegetarian (Lacto-Ovo-Vegetarian) → An individual who consumes plant foods, dairy products and eggs
Lacto-Vegetarian → A vegetarian as described above who doesn’t eat eggs
Ovo-Vegetarian → A vegetarian as described above who doesn’t eat dairy products
Vegan → An individual who doesn’t eat any animal products or animal-derived ingredients
Raw Vegan → An individual that consumes only plant foods that haven’t been heated above 115 degrees Fahrenheit

(Hackett)

Reasons for following a Vegetarian Diet
There are many reasons why someone would choose to follow a vegetarian diet. Some of the more common ones include parental preference, religious beliefs, health issues and concerns about animal rights and/or the environment. What ever the reason may be, it is important to be respectful and open minded in regards to people's personal eating.
Nutrients to be aware of
There are a few key nutrients that most individuals get from eating meat products that need to be addressed when starting a vegetarian diet. These nutrients are: iron, calcium, protein, vitamin D, vitamin B12, and zinc. In a varied lacto-ovo-vegetarian diet, all of these nutrients can be consumed in adequate amounts (Gavin). To ensure that you eat enough, you can always check nutrition labels on the food that you are eating, research good dietary sources of these nutrients, or talk to a dietician about developing a list of foods high in these nutrients. The contact information for the Ferris State University dietician can be found at the end of this article.

Vegetarian Food Options at The Rock Café
There are many choices when it comes to vegetarian food at The Rock Café. There is of course the salad bar, the deli station, cheese pizza and always at least one vegetarian soup option. Beyond that, you can always put together a vegetarian mango grill meal, just let the student workers know that you are vegetarian and to use a different set of swords to cook your food. You can also always ask for veggie burgers at Woody’s Grill and don’t be afraid to mix and match sides from different stations to create your own meal.

Words of Advice
If you are coming to college and considering starting on a vegetarian diet, please make sure to educate yourself first. Vegetarian diets can be a healthy lifestyle, but if you don’t know a lot about how much nutrients your body needs to function properly, you can actually do more harm than good. There are numerous websites out there that are geared to individuals who want to start a vegetarian diet and don’t hesitate to contact Brenda Walton, the registered dietician on campus, or talk to your family doctor about starting a vegetarian diet.

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