

# Iron & Calcium from Plants

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## IRON

You can find a rich plant source of iron in beans and legumes, as well as the leafy greens and molasses. The iron intake of most vegans and vegetarians is actually pretty high, since iron per calorie is higher in plant foods than animal foods.

Studies haven't found that vegans or vegetarians have any trouble with iron deficiency. Levels of iron deficiency or anemia are on par with non-vegetarians, and our daily intake meets or exceeds the RDA on average.

### IRON RDA

|               |          |
|---------------|----------|
| Adult Males   | 8mg/day  |
| Adult Females | 18mg/day |
| 51 years+     | 8mg/day  |
| Pregnancy     | 27mg/day |

### IRON DEFICIENCY SYMPTOMS:

- Extreme fatigue.
- Weakness.
- Pale skin.
- Chest pain, fast heartbeat or shortness of breath.
- Headache, dizziness or lightheadedness.
- Cold hands and feet.
- Inflammation or soreness of your tongue.
- Brittle nails.

Unless you've had blood tests done to measure the iron levels, and have been told you're deficient by a doctor, there shouldn't be any need to take iron supplements. Even if you do find yourself with an iron deficiency, you may be able to correct it by eating lots of legumes and vitamin-c-rich fruits and vegetables. Many vegan multivitamins include iron, but if you don't need to take iron then I'd suggest getting the iron-free version because iron supplements can accrue excess iron in your system. The main side effects are constipation, nausea and headaches.

### FURTHER READING:

Iron, VeganHealth.org by Jack Norris, RD: [veganhealth.org/articles/iron](http://veganhealth.org/articles/iron)  
Iron, NutritionFacts.org, by Dr. Michael Greger: [nutritionfacts.org/topics/iron](http://nutritionfacts.org/topics/iron)

## CALCIUM

For so long, cow's milk was considered the only good source of calcium. But it turns out that the best way to get useable calcium is to eat a variety of plant foods, like quinoa, chickpeas, sesame seeds and broccoli. The dark green leafy vegetables are particularly good sources.

Plant sources of calcium, unlike milk, also have magnesium, potassium and vitamin K, which is essential along with vitamin D for your body to absorb and use the calcium.

### CALCIUM RDA

|                 |            |
|-----------------|------------|
| Adults up to 50 | 1000mg/day |
| 51 years+       | 1200mg/day |

### CALCIUM DEFICIENCY SYMPTOMS:

- confusion or memory loss.
- muscle spasms or cramps.
- numbness & tingling in the hands, feet, and face.
- depression.
- hallucinations.
- weak and brittle nails.
- easy fracturing of the bones.

The average vegan is getting 500-600mg. My meal plans usually have 700mg/day. Calcium is a large molecule, and in foods it usually comes in calorie-rich foods like nuts and seeds. So if we aren't eating 2000 or more calories a day, we aren't going to get quite enough calcium to meet the RDA.

The RDA is based on a 25% absorption rate, so you only need to absorb 250mg/day, which makes it possible to get enough from lower amounts.

However, there's no downside in taking a small calcium supplement of 300mg, to add to your food intake to meet 1000mg, and be a back up.

The bonus of taking an extra calcium supplement is that if you take it before bed, it can help with sleep and muscle cramps.

### FURTHER READING:

Calcium & Vitamin D, VeganHealth.org by Jack Norris, RD: [veganhealth.org/articles/bones](http://veganhealth.org/articles/bones)  
Calcium, NutritionFacts.org, by Dr. Michael Greger: [nutritionfacts.org/topics/calcium](http://nutritionfacts.org/topics/calcium)