**The Vegan Athlete**

In recent years, a growing trend towards vegetarianism (not consuming animal flesh) and veganism (not consuming flesh or products) has been taking the world by storm. This new generation of plant eaters includes fitness professionals, bodybuilders, powerlifters and professional athletes. Incorporating a plant-based diet, whether you eat meat or not, is the purest form of sports performance supplementation that an athlete needs to burn fat, put on quality muscle and increase energy.

**Can you build a body without animal meat?**

In a world of carnivores, it seems impossible because nutrition is heavily focused on animal protein. Especially in the bodybuilding and fitness world, it seems like eating animal meat or products five to six times a day is the standard diet. One would think that you could not achieve the same results as you would consuming animal meat. I thought it was impossible until many world-class plant-based athletes proved me wrong.

A main topic of conversation for many people is that vegetarians and vegans “don’t get enough protein” on a plant-based diet. But that could not be further from the truth. According to the World Health Organization and the American Dietetic Association, a vegan or vegetarian on a well-planned, balanced diet has no trouble meeting their protein requirements. And if you really think about it, how many people do you know with a protein deficiency?

**Where do no-meat athletes get their protein?**

Protein is one of the three macronutrients the body needs for cellular repair. Very important for muscle building! Protein is made up of smaller components called amino acids. Our bodies do not synthesize nine essential amino acids, so we need to consume it from a plant or animal source to build and repair the body. So when consuming a diet low in animal products, a variety of plant-based nutrition is key. It is important to mix and match plant proteins to be able to form a complete protein. A complete protein is a protein that has all the essential amino acids. A good example of a plant-based complete protein combo is brown rice and beans.

**Vegan proteins:**

Beans

Lentils

Legumes

Quinoa

Amaranth

Brown rice

Oatmeal

Nuts

Seeds

Nut Butters

Spirulina

Vegetables— especially leafy greens

Non-GMO soy or tofu

Tempeh

Seitan

Plant-based protein powders such as hemp, pea or a mixed plant blend

**Vegetarian proteins:**

All the proteins listed on the vegan list, plus:

Eggs

Dairy

Fish

Whey protein power

**How much protein should you eat?**

In the bodybuilding and fitness world, the standard amount of protein is one gram per pound of bodyweight. You need to divide that number up according to how many meals you are eating a day. Taking in the proper nutrients every two to three hours ensures that your muscles will always be fueled and nourished, providing the best opportunity for growth and achieving desired results.

Remember not to exceed too much protein per meal. Your body can only assimilate what it needs at that time. Like any of the macronutrients, if you eat too much of it, it will store as fat. So be careful on your food portions.

It is good to change up your protein sources to give your body different quality nutrition. Never underestimate the power of plants!

\*Taken from Fitness RX for Women

***Do you have a question about health, fitness or nutrition? Send it to Ask Laura, at*** futurist@shockertrackclub.com

***Laura Markuly, MSE, ACSM HFS, NASM CES/PES/GFS, is the owner of Bodyology Sports Performance, LLC. She also serves as the Fundraising Chair for Shocker Track Club.***