

# Compassion In Action: Veg Athletes

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When I was in the second grade I won 3<sup>rd</sup> place for running backwards. I got a yellow ribbon carefully cut out of construction paper by my teacher, Mrs. Timm. I think I still have it somewhere. Considering it took me till the second grade to learn how to tie my shoes and seeing how I was almost as wide as I was tall, this was an occasion for celebration. That was about the height of my athletic career. What can I say, some of us peak early.

Since then I've had minor sporting victories... succeeding mostly due to my being a big farm kid. And even though I'm getting older (40 is only a year a way), I can still hang with the guys on the basketball court; I can put in a 12 mile hike up Bear Peak and back; I can toddle around Boulder on my cruiser bike. But I am left in the dust of my friends who can bike up and down mountains, run 50 miles, scamper up a sheer thousand-foot rock face and still have time to whip up a dish for an evening Vegan potluck.

I am constantly amazed by the endurance of weekend athletes and their dedication to their chosen sports. I get a little winded just thinking about what athletes do to relax. The passion, the drive, the dedication and the pure stubborn will to do whatever it takes to reach their goals are remarkable. There is something beyond the blood, sweat and tears that separates these people from the herd... their fierce state of mind.

In fact many elite coaches and athletes are convinced that besides being physically fit, 80-90% of success is mental. Sports psychology is a huge business. Watching the recent Winter Olympics one could see the athletes visualizing their runs and psyching themselves up. Some pro basketball coaches even hire motivational gurus like Tony Robbins to give their players that extra edge. Dedicated athletes train the body, but they also train for mental toughness.

So while recently chatting over tea with some dedicated athletes about the many reasons to go Vegan (health, human rights, the environment, and for the animals), I was struck by their sudden acquiescence to and defense of their Western animal-based diets. They lost a bit of eye contact, shifted in their chairs and I heard it once again, "It's just too hard to be Vegan."

Run 100 miles on a broken ankle – they'll do it. Climb to heights that would make a mountain goat nervous – no sweat. But choose a cruelty-free Vegan alternative to what they've become used to? That's just too scary.

Sure change can be scary, but where does that strength and mental toughness go when athletes are asked to choose between habit and potential? Why is this so scary? Is this the one hill an athlete won't climb?

## Triathlete Dave Scott's Pre-Triathlon-Shake *Makes 1 serving*

1 tbs peanut butter, smooth  
½ cup plain soy yogurt (or soy/rice milk)  
1 banana  
4 fresh large strawberries  
½ cup orange juice

Nutrients per serving: 363 calories, 13 grams protein, 62 grams carbohydrates, 9 grams fat, 2 grams saturated fat, 4 grams monounsaturated fat, 2.5 grams linoleic fat, 42 grams sugar, 7 grams fiber

Dietary composition: 14% protein, 64% carbohydrates, 22% fat

Recipe Source: *The Vegetarian Sports Nutrition Guide* by Lisa Dorfman, M.S., R.D.

*"All change requires strength, even when the new path is noble."*

Going Veg evidently is not scary for many top athletes. It's not unheard of. It's not even a new thing. When I started thinking about writing this article, I stopped by my favorite used book store down the street. Thumbing through a dusty old sports photo book, it was heartening to see so many Veg athletes -- Hank Aaron, Billie Jean King, Joe Namath, Martina Navratilova, and Carl Lewis (who attributes his Vegan diet to his winning nine Olympic gold medals in Track and Field).

But you don't have to flashback to the 1970s and '80s to find Vegetarian athletic icons. It's a growing movement. Elite athletes, like many in the general public, are becoming aware of the health and performance benefits of a Vegan diet. Other athletes are happily stumbling upon increased performance when they happen to switch to a Vegan diet because of their ethical stand for the environment and human rights and against the horrors involved in raising animals as food.

The Jan/Feb 2006 issue of "VegNews" features today's prominent Vegan athletes. The issue highlights an Olympic skier, triathletes, cyclists, bodybuilders, marathoners and Strongman competitor, Ryan Wilson, co-owner of VeganEssentials.com, who pulls trucks around as part of his training. There is also an in-depth interview with Scott Jurek, a Vegan

Ultramarathoner who has won the Western States Endurance Run, a course that covers 100 miles and over 18,090 feet of vertical climb, an amazing seven years in a row.

These elite athletes credit their success to their Vegan diets and give kudos to some of their athletic Veg heroes like Bradley Saul, founder of OrganicAthlete.org, and Steph Davis, one of the top female rock climbers.

These powerful athletes learned that you don't have to hurt and kill animals in order to compete. It took strength to make the switch. All change requires strength, even when the new path is noble. They swam against the tide of industry lies and malevolent tradition to break free of their ties to environmental destruction, wasting of resources and cruelty to animals. The athletes benefit, the planet benefits, the human family benefits and the animals benefit.

These top athletes and millions of other Vegan weekend athletes around the world serve as ample evidence that a compassionate lifestyle does not mean sacrificing athletic performance. In fact, they are proof of just the opposite.

A Vegan diet is better for our hearts, our bones, our bodies and our minds. A Vegan diet is a truer expression of our respect for the planet. A Vegan diet is more consistent with our caring about people who are starving yet could be fed on the resources wasted on the inefficiencies of animal agribusiness. A Vegan diet is a direct stand more in line with our inner strength and noble call to do what's right -- to be kind to the helpless animals whose very lives depend upon our next food choice.

Athletes have the strength to climb mountains. They have the mental toughness to redefine human limitations. They also have the strength to change what they believe. We all have the strength to show compassion. And we all have the power to do what's right. Please choose compassion over killing. Choose Vegan.

## Ending the Protein Myth

Billions of advertising dollars fuel the myth that we need lots of protein and that it's hard to come by except in animal products. The animal agribusiness industry also steers the USDA on how to educate the public on nutrition. The USDA even pays for much of the teaching materials used in our schools.

Let's set the record straight. Every nutrient essential for human health is available in plant-based foods without the animal fat, cholesterol and animal suffering involved in animal-based foods. Plant-based foods supply more than enough protein for the body's needs. In fact, calorie for calorie, broccoli contains more protein than beef. If you want to supplement your diet with even more vitamins, minerals, protein or other nutrients, there are plenty of plant-based, cruelty-free choices.

## Protein Q&A

### "If I'm Vegan, how will I get enough protein?"

A better question might be, "If you're not Vegan, how will you keep from getting too much protein?" Eating too much animal protein, as most Americans do, is bad for your kidneys, liver, bones, and cardiovascular system. It causes vitamin and mineral deficiencies, dehydration, and is linked to osteoporosis, hypertension, and many forms of cancer.

### "My body is telling me I need more protein."

What exactly do you hear? That craving is more likely dehydration, a craving for fat, or it may be a fix you're jonesing for -- addictive opiates released in your brain in response to animal fats and dairy. Read Dr. Neal Barnard's "Breaking the Food Seduction" for more information and details on how to end these harmful addictions.

If you really had a protein deficiency, you would be one for the record books. There are no recorded cases of protein deficiency in the U.S. for anyone getting enough calories. Zero. If you are getting enough calories (yes, even from plant sources), you are getting enough protein. The exception, of course, would be if you consume entirely empty calories like sugar or alcohol.

### "I feel tired when I don't eat animal protein."

It's possible to feel tired and run down, but not from a lack of protein. Protein deficiencies lead to hair falling out, nails not growing, loose teeth -- things like that. Carbohydrates provide most of the energy you need for body functions like heartbeat, breathing and digestion and for exercise such as biking, running and climbing. Complex carbohydrates take longer to digest and are usually packed with fiber, vitamins and minerals. Examples include vegetables, breads, cereals, legumes and pasta.

"Well, then I must need more iron" or "I must be anemic," is an unsound conclusion. First, you'll want to get a blood test to verify that assumption. The fact is the rate of anemia is no higher in Vegans than in non-Vegans. If you truly are anemic (Vegan or not), you can easily obtain iron from plant sources like peas, beans, nuts, dried fruits, green leafy vegetables like spinach, enriched pastas and breads, and fortified cereals. There are also other issues to consider like increasing your Vitamin C intake which helps in iron absorption and avoiding dairy products because they contain virtually no iron and can inhibit iron absorption.

### Beef

30% Protein  
0% Complex Carbs  
70% Fat  
Cholesterol  
No Fiber  
No Calcium  
No Vitamin A  
No Vitamin C  
No Vitamin E



### Broccoli

45% Protein  
55% Complex Carbs  
0% Fat  
No Cholesterol  
Fiber  
Calcium  
Vitamin A  
Vitamin C  
Vitamin E



## Resources

OrganicAthlete.org  
VeganFitness.net  
VegNews.com  
VeganEssentials.com  
VeganFuture.org  
PCRM.org  
SuperVegan.com  
BrendanBrazier.com

Join your local chapter  
Vegan athletes' forum  
See the Jan/Feb 2006 issue  
Online Vegan store  
Ethical reasons to go Vegan  
Health questions answered  
Vegan resources and fun  
*Thrive: Performance Guide*