Health Benefits
Whether you’re considering becoming vegetarian for an environmental, health or other reason, there are plenty of potential benefits to embracing a balanced plant-based diet, including lower cholesterol, blood pressure and body mass index.

Research also shows that vegetarians tend to have a lower risk of chronic illnesses, including heart disease, colorectal cancer and type 2 diabetes.

Watch How You Replace
However, you won’t see the benefits of a vegetarian diet if you replace meat with high-calorie, high-fat options, such as soda, cookies and french fries. You will need to get nutrients from fruits, vegetables and whole grains, and healthy fats, which are in nuts, olive oil and avocado.

If your goal is weight loss, be aware that taking in too many calories, even of healthier food, can contribute to weight gain.

You also will need to get vitamin B in your diet to prevent anemia and even blindness. This vitamin only occurs naturally in animal products. Children younger than five, including those in utero, require sufficient vitamin B for neurological development.

You can get vitamin B through supplements and foods fortified with it, as tofu usually is. If you’re concerned about getting enough necessary nutrients, talk with a nutritionist.

Getting Started
If you’re interested in a vegetarian diet, but aren’t sure that it’s right for you, you can start by:

• Choosing a meatless option when dining out
• Replacing meat with meat substitutes to create a comparable meal, such as using black bean burgers instead of hamburgers
• Replacing meat-based dishes with new and different fruit- and vegetable-based ones

Always talk with your doctor before making any changes to your diet.

Sources: Harvard Health, WebMD®

NJVell is an incentive-based wellness program offered to active employees and their covered spouses who participate in the SHBP/SEHBP. More detail can be found on http://www.nj.gov/njwell/.

Preventive care services and screenings are only covered when rendered by an in-network doctor or other health care professional. Immunizations received for travel outside the country or for work-related reasons are not covered. Well-child immunizations for children less than 12 months of age are the only immunizations allowed out-of-network.

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