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Basic Food Groups in Vegetarian and Vegan Diets

UNIT 5

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Deaf Chefs
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UNIT 5: Basic Food Groups in Vegetarian and Vegan Diets

In recent years, unhealthy eating habits and lifestyles have led to a significant increase in chronic diseases. Obesity, diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular diseases and cancer are considered outcomes of these lifestyle changes. As the relationship between eating habits and chronic diseases becomes clearer, new dietary approaches and models are emerging. In this context, vegetarianism and veganism are increasingly recommended as alternative dietary models for managing certain chronic conditions.

Many international nutrition organizations state that when properly planned, vegan diets can be sufficient for all age groups, including infancy, old age and pregnancy. However, vegan diets present both health benefits and risks. Determining the long-term health effects of a vegan diet is challenging due to various influencing factors. Therefore, ensuring a balanced intake of macro- (especially proteins and essential amino acids) and micro-nutrients (vitamins and minerals) is crucial in vegetarian and vegan diets.

A well-balanced daily diet should include essential food groups such as meat substitutes, dairy alternatives, fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts and seeds.

Vegetables

- Primary sources of vitamins, minerals, fiber and antioxidants.
- Variety is key, including leafy greens (spinach, kale), broccoli, peppers and zucchini.
- Fruits
- Provide natural sugars, vitamins, minerals and fiber.
- Fresh, dried and frozen fruits are all suitable choices.

In vegetarian diets, ensuring sufficient protein intake is essential. Vegetarians who consume eggs and dairy products can meet their protein needs more easily. For vegans, one of the main challenges is obtaining all essential amino acids from plant-based sources. Foods rich in plant-based proteins, such as legumes, soy products, grains (like quinoa and millet), nuts (like almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts, peanuts and cashews) and seeds (like sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds and chia seeds), should be included regularly. To meet essential amino acid needs, a diverse selection of these foods should be incorporated into meals.

Whole Grains

- Provide carbohydrates for energy, B vitamins, fiber and protein.
- Options include oats, brown rice, whole wheat, quinoa, bulgur and barley.
- Legumes
- Rich sources of protein, iron, zinc and fiber.
- Options include lentils, chickpeas, kidney beans, black

beans and soybeans.

- Nuts and Seeds
- Provide healthy fats, protein, omega-3 fatty acids and vitamins/minerals.
- Options include walnuts, almonds, hazelnuts, chia seeds, flaxseeds and sunflower seeds.
- Plant-Based Protein Sources
- Tofu, tempeh, soy milk and plant-based meat alternatives.
- Fortified Plant-Based Milks and Alternatives
- Plant-based milks, such as almond, oat and soy milk, fortified with calcium, B12 and vitamin D.
- Healthy Fats
- Sources include olive oil, coconut oil and avocados.