

# Vegetarian and Non-Vegetarian Together ©

## A Guide to Harmonious Co-Existence

---

### Introduction:

You'll notice that this report avoids the question of who's right and who's wrong.

My non-vegetarian relatives, friends and acquaintances often assume that I look down on them for eating meat. I could say that this is their perception and their problem and that their negative attitude doesn't help. Actually, their reaction is completely understandable.

After spending most of the last 30 years as a vegetarian, I don't consider meat as food, I can't pass the meat counter in a grocery store without feeling ill, and I tend to avert my eyes when I see someone eating meat.

On the other hand, people have been hunter/gatherers, and practiced animal husbandry for countless millennium. It appears that the evolutionary trend has changed, but who can say what nature has in mind? Whatever it is, it will take time, and meanwhile, here we are all together on this planet.

I'm for balance and co-existence. Just because I feel the way I do about food doesn't make other people's diet wrong. It's my impression that evil people are in the minority, and that people are mostly good, but that being vegetarian doesn't automatically mean that you're a good person.

It's clear that vegetarians and non-vegetarians need to work together to solve the problems we've created, like global warming, environmental degradation, and poverty. Eating together is a great place to start. To enjoy sharing food, veg and non-veg need to set aside their differences, do their best to provide for each other's needs, and place humanity before ideology. Hopefully, it will then be easier to do the same on a global level.

One in three advice letters to Savvy Veg is about the problem of veg feeding non-veg or vice-versa. These letters come from both vegetarians and non-vegetarians. This means that one in three people have this problem! Obviously, nobody's dying from this, but why should this sad condition continue, when it can be cured by a good will, common sense, and a few ground rules? OK, more than a few, but you don't have to memorize them!

I've pulled together various Savvy Vegetarian articles, reports and advice letters, to bring some clarity and ease to a touchy subject – people with different attitudes and practices, eating together, and learning to co-exist harmoniously.

---

### Here's what you'll find in this report:

- Definitions – what's vegetarian and what's not
- Frequently asked questions
- Advice about attitudes and etiquette
- Practical, detailed, step-by-step advice to vegetarians and non-vegetarians on how, what, when, where and why to feed each other.
- Veg and non-veg cohabiting, working and at social events

### Vegetarian Definitions:

- A vegetarian eats no meat, poultry, or fish
- An ovo-lacto vegetarian eats eggs and milk
- A lacto-vegetarian eats dairy products, but not eggs
- A vegan eats no animal products at all, often including honey
- Raw food devotees are vegan

## Who Isn't Vegetarian?

- Those with a mainly vegetarian diet could say they are semi, or transitional vegetarian
- A pesco-vegetarian (eats fish) isn't vegetarian, because fish is considered an animal product.
- Flexitarian is a fancy term for one who flips back and forth from veg to non-veg

## What foods are classified as animal products?

- All varieties of meat
- Fish including shellfish such as shrimp, lobster and crab
- Insects, frogs, snakes, eels, lizards, turtles
- Eggs, milk and honey, which nevertheless, ovo-lacto or lacto vegetarians may eat.
- Animal by-products such as lard, chicken or beef broth, or gelatin

## The lines easily become blurred:

- Some vegetarians are militant vegans who can't be in the same room with a non-veg
- Others may be ovo-lacto vegetarians who eat a lot or a little eggs and milk.
- Others consider themselves vegetarian, but occasionally eat a little chicken and fish to make life easier, or to avoid offending friends or relatives.
- Some go back and forth between vegetarian and non-vegetarian for many years
- Some go from one diet to another, or from extreme to more extreme.

So, when someone says that she's vegetarian, it's best to find out just exactly what that means

## What Do Vegetarians Eat?

A vegetarian logically eats vegetables, and also grains, legumes, nuts, seeds, with sometimes a little dairy and egg. Or maybe not so logically, since a lot of new vegetarians just say "hold the patty" at McDonalds, or substitute the fake meat for the real, and otherwise carry on with their accustomed diet. A nutritionally well-balanced vegetarian diet has a wide variety of fresh wholesome food, with vegetables and grains as major food groups. Actually, that's a great diet for anybody who wants to be healthy, with or without meat.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. How do vegetarians get enough protein?

Nearly all foods contain protein, even fruit and vegetables. Major sources of vegetarian protein are nuts, seeds, and legumes. Some grains and vegetables have a fair amount of protein.

## **2. Isn't a vegetarian diet deficient in Vitamin B12?**

Vegetarians who eat dairy and/or egg usually get enough B12 in their diet. For Vegans, Vitamin B12 may be scarce in the diet, but it's easy to get B12 enriched foods, or supplements.

## **3. Isn't veganism dangerous for children?**

Not unless the diet is too restricted, and doesn't have enough fat or calories. Responsible vegan parents are knowledgeable about nutrition, and aware of their childrens' dietary needs.

## **4. Isn't animal protein superior to vegetarian protein?**

This idea arose because meat contains all eight essential animal acids (i.e. those which the body can't synthesize). However, the chemical structure of protein is the same in all foods, and a well-balanced vegetarian diet supplies all the protein a person can use and then some.

## **5. How do I provide adequate nutrition for a vegetarian?**

Don't even try. Just giving them something they can eat is good – tasty and filling is a bonus. Nutritious is appreciated, but not required.

## **6. Won't you become anemic if you don't eat red meat?**

It's true that the body more readily absorbs the iron found in red meat. Iron from vegetarian sources is well utilized by the body, and a varied, well-balanced vegetarian diet is so rich in iron that vegetarians have a hard time becoming iron deficient. The danger lies in giving up meat, but otherwise not changing your diet.

## **7. Aren't people who don't eat dairy deficient in calcium?**

Dairy isn't the only or even the best source of calcium. Many vegetables (especially greens), some fruits, nuts, seeds, beans, and grains, all contain calcium. Some contain a lot of calcium, which is readily absorbed by the body.

---

## **Attitude is the key to veg and non-veg sharing food successfully The number one rule of attitude is live and let live**

---

Don't try to convert the other to your point of view, or even think that this would be a Good Thing. It never is.

For instance, if a vegetarian visits a non-vegetarian with the idea that these people are wrong, or inferior for eating meat, that attitude will show.

If a non-vegetarian feels that vegetarians are dangerously misguided, malnourished social misfits who threaten the whole fabric of society, that attitude will show.

And you'd both be wrong. If everyone were exactly like us, life wouldn't be nearly as interesting, would it? But that's what most of us want – the comfortable and familiar.

But it isn't usually what we get.

Different people with different constitutions, customs, and beliefs have different diets. Living as we do in a global age, with all the cultural, racial, and religious diversity, we can't avoid bumping up against people who are different from us.

Maybe tomorrow, those different others will wake up and see the light, but they aren't going to do so because *you* think they're wrong. Conversely, just because you've seen the light, doesn't

mean that everyone else has, or must. If we happen to dine with someone of a different dietary persuasion, we may as well celebrate our differences.

Most of us could afford to be a lot more flexible than we are about nearly everything. Think of this as an opportunity to stretch your boundaries.

---

## **If you can't change your attitude, fall back on etiquette**

---

*"To invite people to dine with us is to make ourselves responsible  
for their well-being for as long as they are under our roofs"  
- Anthelme Brillat-Savarin*

### **Communicate:**

When feeding someone with different dietary habits, you'd think it would be simple to ask that person what they eat, or whether they have allergies, or have strong aversions to certain foods, or tell them what you're planning to make for dinner, and see if that works for them.

But no, we must suffer! I'm convinced that 95% of problems between people are due to poor communication. Part of the reason for that is fear - of being wrong, being embarrassed, and part is lack of flexibility, or energy, or not caring enough to put oneself out.

### **Here are a few conversational topics to avoid in mixed company:**

#### **Vegetarians:**

1. Avoid controversial topics such as animal rights, confined animal feeding operations, industrial agriculture, the environment, organic food, and GE, unless you know for certain your remarks won't be misunderstood, cause hard feelings, or insult anyone. Controversy isn't good for digestion.
2. When people ask about your vegetarian diet, give brief, polite and factual answers, such as personal preference, health reasons, you were raised that way, it's normal in your culture, etc.
3. Never ask people why they eat meat. We already know that it's the cultural norm, and non-vegetarians may take such a question as critical, insulting, or dumb.
4. If someone makes a negative remark about vegetarianism, or vegetarians, deflect it with a light remark. If it gets serious, say "I'm sorry you feel that way"
5. Never hold forth on the benefits of vegetarianism vs. the evils of meat eating, even if you feel encouraged

#### **Non-Vegetarians:**

1. Its better to avoid asking why someone's a vegetarian, unless you're prepared to hear something that may make you feel uncomfortable or defensive.
2. Don't make teasing, or negative remarks about vegetarians, any more than you'd make racist or sexist remarks to your dinner companions
3. Try to avoid talking about how great a meat-based diet is, and how mistaken vegetarians are. It could start a serious argument. If you enjoy a good argument, try a less sensitive subject.

4. If a vegetarian should go on about animal rights, or other topics that make you feel uncomfortable, you can say “You know, as a meat eater, I’d just as soon not discuss this while I’m eating. Let’s talk about (pick a neutral topic)” or “Did anyone see the Met’s game last Sunday?”
  5. If you’re really curious, it’s okay to ask general, polite questions about vegetarian diet, such as “I’ve always wondered how vegetarians get their protein?” (See FAQ on PG 3)
- 

*A girlfriend cooked dinner for her non-vegetarian boyfriend. She made a rice and vegetable dish with chunks of fried tofu. The boyfriend ate, pronounced it good, and then found out he was eating tofu. He spit it out and wouldn’t eat anymore. Indeed, he never again ate anything the girlfriend made, bringing his own meals instead. Leaving aside the issue of whether this relationship has a future:*

The moral of the story is, when feeding non-vegetarians; don’t trick them into eating tofu. The same goes for any other foods which non-vegetarians might find strange or scary, such as lentil loaf, tempeh, fake meat, eggplant, quinoa, etc. Ask first if they like it or would be willing to try it. If they don’t seem genuinely enthusiastic, don’t do it.

---

## **Vegetarians Feeding Non-Vegetarians: The number one rule is to make your guests feel welcome and comfortable.**

### **From The Vegetarian’s Perspective:**

1. Always think about the likely food preferences of those you’re feeding. ***If there are any questions, ask!***
2. Check for food preferences or allergies, as you would with any other guest.
3. Stick with familiar foods, and give a few choices. - here are some suggestions:
  - Egg or cheese based dishes, such as Spinach Quiche, leaving out fake bacon bits, which will arouse suspicion. Good accompanied with baked potato and salad.
  - Chickpeas and kidney beans are familiar enough to be used in small amounts. Add them to dishes that are already known – such as three-bean salad, pasta salad, minestrone soup, vegetarian chili (good recipe for that in the SV resource guide recipe section).
  - Go easy on whole grains with non-vegetarians. The density and chewiness of whole grains tend to confirm all their suspicions about vegetarian food. Use familiar comfort foods such as potatoes, breads, or pasta.
  - Familiar ethnic foods work well: Mexican, Indian, or Italian – if it’s spicy and tasty, they are less likely to notice there’s no meat, especially if there’s cheese or egg involved.
  - Rich desserts like cheesecake are popular and filling but remember those who are watching their cholesterol or calorie intake.
4. If you’re vegan, you’ll have more of a challenge. But, you’ll still be okay if you aim for simple familiar food. If all else fails, order in or take your guests out.

5. If possible, serve chicken or fish to your non-vegetarian guests. This may sound outrageous, but think about it. If you go to the home of a non-vegetarian for dinner, you appreciate getting food that you can eat, and it's disappointing when you don't. The opposite is also true. People don't feel well fed unless they can eat what they are used to eating. One meal isn't going to make much difference, but several days of it, and they'll be suffering.

5. Have a potluck. This is always tricky, because it can only work well for casual occasions with people you know pretty well. Also, people will bring dishes with animal products in them. If you can't tolerate this, then don't offer that option.

6. If non-veg guests stay for a few days or more, talk with them in advance about the food. Compromise depends on flexibility and good will from both sides. If you can't bring yourself to cook animal products or allow others to cook them in your kitchen, your guests need to know, and you need to make other arrangements. Bringing in pre-cooked food is one option. Going out to eat is another. If the weather's nice, you could arrange a barbecue.

7. For long-term guests, stock up on foods they'll enjoy. Take them shopping with you, or send them to shop with a list and some cash, or if they're contributing, let them go buy what they want to eat.

---

## **From the Non-Veg Perspective:**

**If you're a non-vegetarian visiting a vegetarian, it may seem unfair that you have to give up eating meat at a vegetarian's house, but at your house the vegetarian doesn't have to give up anything (you think). And what would it hurt for them to eat a few bites of meat to make everyone else comfortable?**

**Here are a few points on this topic:**

Many vegetarians feel very strongly about not killing or harming animals for food, and can't bring themselves to have meat in their homes, or sometimes any animal products.

That not only can make it impossible to serve meat to you, but it can also make it uncomfortable for them to see others eating meat. Eating meat themselves would be unthinkable.

You could be right in thinking that vegetarians should uphold the principle of harmonious human interaction before that of kindness to animals, but to many vegetarians, there is no difference, because they consider animal souls equal to humans.

**So, when going to break bread with a vegetarian:**

1. Firmly squelch the urge to express your thoughts about the unfairness or absurdity of it all, keeping in mind that it's only one, or even a few meals out of your life.
2. If you haven't done this already, try to loosen up on the idea that you must have meat to be well nourished.
3. There are many sources of protein besides meat, and you're bound to get one or more that you can tolerate - dairy, egg, beans, lentils, nuts or seeds.
4. Always feel free to talk with your host about the food before the event. This is the time to express any worries about what you might be forced to eat, or to let your host know about any food allergies or dietary restrictions you might have.

5. If you're confronted with something that you're really not sure about, you don't have to force yourself to eat it just to be polite, but at least try it. It's right for your host to tell you what you're eating, and if they don't, it's okay to say, "This looks interesting! What is it?"

---

I was very impressed by my Dad when he came to visit, and I served him a tofu burger. It looked like the "real thing" and he bit into it all unsuspecting, then realized it was alien food. His eyes bugged out and he gagged a bit, then chewed and swallowed, and actually managed to eat half the burger, and *never said a word!* (Completely out of character). After that though, no more food surprises!

---

## **Non-Vegetarians Feeding Vegetarians:**

**The number one rule is to see things from the other's point of view.**

---

*A long time ago, I was invited to dinner with friends I hadn't seen for a while. I ostentatiously informed them that I was now vegetarian. My friends were clearly put-upon by my new and inconvenient weirdness, but they cooked a big pot of beans, which were undercooked, not spiced or salted, and swimming in the cooking liquid. I forced myself to eat the beans, but I guess it was obvious I didn't enjoy them. The friendship, already waning, was finished off by this awkward dinner. I wished later that I hadn't told them I was vegetarian, and put them into such a difficult situation. On the other hand, if they had spent hours cooking meat for me, which I didn't eat, it might have been worse.*

If I had just told them I was vegetarian, but would eat whatever they were serving that wasn't meat, or offered to bring a vegetarian dish, that would have been much better, but I was a new vegetarian, and my dishes weren't that great, and I didn't know any of this stuff. Then there was the awkwardness that had already entered the relationship. It's hard to know if my handling the situation differently would have helped, but I like to think so.

Sometimes, it's better not to say anything, or do anything, e.g., when you're invited to Thanksgiving dinner at Grandma's house. And sometimes it's better to let people know, if you can. You have to decide whether it would cause more distress if you tell them than if you don't.

---

## **From the vegetarian's perspective:**

**Here are a few hints toward a pleasant experience for all:**

If you must tell, make it clear that *you just don't want your hosts to be shocked and upset when you arrive and announce your vegetarian state after the meal is prepared.* Try to come across as flexible and considerate, not demanding that they cater to you.

Reassure your host that you'll be perfectly happy eating whatever isn't meat. This is often the easiest and safest route for everyone.

Don't give a list of your likes and dislikes, or say that you will only eat organic food. It's best to be adaptable when dining out.

Always ask first, and if it seems appropriate, offer to bring a gift of food to complement the meal, e.g., a bowl of nuts or a cheese plate, salad or bread or wine.

*When asked, or if necessary,* as in the case of allergies, give information about your vegetarian diet. Be specific – you'd be surprised how many people think that vegetarians eat chicken and fish.

If your host asks, give easy suggestions for what to feed you, rather than be vague and self-effacing. Ask what they're serving, and make your suggestions fit the menu. For example, if they are making a dish that has meat mixed with other ingredients, ask if it might be possible for them to serve a portion without the meat.

If your non-veg hosts are thoughtful and PC enough to try to come up with something for you to eat, it would be rude not to eat some. You should not only eat it, but also praise it to the skies, and ask for seconds!

If you're vegan, and they serve something with egg or cheese or honey in honor of your vegetarian diet, you have two choices. Honor the animals, or honor the humans. (Hint: favor the second choice)

Accept that you will have to sit there and watch people eat meat, and keep quiet about it. If you can't handle that, perhaps you should stay home. But that approach will seriously restrict your social life, and you'll lose the opportunity to exert a quiet influence.

---

## Non-Vegetarians Feeding Vegetarians

**The number one rule is to see things from the other's point of view.**

### From the Non-Vegetarian's Point of View:

- Don't feel guilty or defensive about eating meat. Just because someone doesn't share your beliefs or customs, doesn't make you or them wrong, just different! And besides, this is *your* house.
- Treat your vegetarian guest as you would any guest with a restricted diet. Their diet doesn't affect you personally, but it does affect their health and well being.
- Hospitality requires that you accommodate guests and make them comfortable, not that you have a nervous breakdown or exhaust yourself. Do your best within your comfort zone.
- Don't try to ignore the fact that your guest is a vegetarian, and try in various subtle and not so subtle ways to force them to eat meat. Most vegetarians are strongly committed to their diets for ethical as well as health reasons.
- You shouldn't make something that you don't like, or know how to cook, or that the rest of your guests won't eat, just for the vegetarian. That will be uncomfortable for everybody.
- When you have non-veg and veggie guests, serve chicken or fish to your non-vegetarian guests instead of red meat, whenever possible, because it has less of an impact.
- If you want to know what to feed a vegetarian, the simplest thing is to ask them what kind of vegetarian they are, and what they don't eat. If that's not possible, you're safest in assuming that they're vegan, and eat no animal products.
- **Note:** about vegetarians from India: Most will be lacto-vegetarian, *but will not eat eggs*.
- Whenever possible, tell your guests in advance what you're planning to make, and ask them for suggestions if you feel comfortable with that idea.
- If it feels right, ask the vegetarian to bring a dish to share that everyone will like. Be specific, or you may get a big surprise.

- Vegetarians eat protein and carbohydrates. Veg & vegan protein sources are legumes (aka beans or lentils), nuts, and seeds. If you don't know what to do with these things, put them in a salad, serve a bean dip with chips, or a small bowl of nuts or plate of cheese on the side. Serve some kind of grain - this can be bread, rice, or pasta.
- **Last but not least:**  
Don't commingle animal foods with non-animal foods, and expect the vegetarian to pick the meat out, or eat around it. The taste of the animal food will remain, and will be unappetizing or offensive to a vegetarian, or it may make them sick because they can't digest meat.

Make something that can easily be divided into meat and non-meat versions.

**Watch out for these hidden hazards:**

- Beans cooked with lard, or chunks of pork
- Pizza with pepperoni or sausage in the topping
- "Vegetable" soups or other dishes made with beef or chicken broth
- Stir fry with bits of meat or chicken added
- Bacon bits in the green beans

**For Vegans:**

- Egg in the mayonnaise
- Hard boiled egg or feta cheese in the salad
- Sauces and dressings with dairy, egg or honey
- Frying in butter or other animal fats
- Sweetening with honey

**Menu Suggestions:**

Remember to check with vegetarian guests about what kind of vegetarian they are, and with all your guests about food allergies, or dietary restrictions.

As mentioned, if you have guests for a few days or longer, it's ok to enlist their help with cooking and shopping, to make everyone more comfortable.

Once again, avoid commingling animal products with other foods for vegetarian guests.

**Light Meals: Soups, stews, and/or salads with breads.**

1. Soup: Creamed vegetable or bean based soups. No beef or chicken stocks. Use rice or soy milk for vegan versions. To thicken soups: Remove half the veggies, and blend the rest. Or make a paste with chickpea or amaranth flour and olive oil. Or add a tablespoon of tahini. Or you can thicken with cornstarch. If you have vegan guests (no animal products), go with a vegan version, and offer grated parmesan cheese on the side.
2. Breads: Garlic bread, artisan breads, muffins, quick breads, scones, flat breads (tortillas, pita, or chapatis) with or without fillings. If your guests are vegan, make non-egg, non-dairy versions, using rice or soymilk and egg replacer. Serve cheese, egg, hummus, or bean dip on the side.

3. Stews: Usually bean-based, such as Hoppin' John, with Black Eyed Peas, or Vegetarian Chili, with Kidney Beans, or Spicy Thai or Indian dishes. You can serve these over any rice or pasta for a more substantial meal.
4. Salads: Use a variety of fresh high quality greens. Serve a build-it-yourself salad, with interesting additions on the side. These include toasted pine nuts or sunflower seeds, walnuts, feta cheese, olives, chick peas, chopped boiled eggs, baked flavored Tofu or Seitan chunks, chicken for your non-veg guests, etc.
5. Dressing and condiments should always be on the side, if they contain any animal products, even honey.

### **Breakfast or Brunch:**

These are meals with minimal cooking and cleanup where people will readily fend for themselves, and share the work. Take advantage of that, even make it the official policy, if you like. People have widely varying breakfast customs, and as long as you make sure that the raw materials are available, you can sleep in or be otherwise occupied with a clear conscience:

1. The easy way is Self-Serve. Put out fruit, juice, milk, coffee, tea, cold cereal, bagels, muffins, breads and various spreads.
2. In cold weather, if you or your guests like hot breakfasts, add hot cereals, or stewed fruit.
3. For brunch, add potatoes, eggs, or applesauce, pancakes or waffles, bacon or sausage – available in vegetarian versions.

### **Full Meals:**

It seems to work best if each food is served separately rather than being combined in one dish, as in a pilaf, or paella, or stew. One exception is combinations of grains and vegetables.

Rice and pasta work well for vegetarians and non-vegetarians, with a variety of sauces and toppings, some with meat and some not. Ethnic dishes such as Mexican, Indian, Moroccan or Thai are very easy to make in both meat and meatless versions.

Avoid using butter or other animal fats.

### **Dessert:**

This is tricky, because so many desserts involve dairy and egg. If you know that your guests will eat dairy and egg, you're in luck.

Baking vegan delights appears to be something that only vegans do well. I'd be inclined to cheat and buy a vegan dessert at the nearest health food store.

Fruit salad will work, most of the time, with a choice of vegan and non-vegan cookies. Or fruit sorbets, or soy ice cream (offer dairy ice cream too).

---

## **Veg and Non-Veg Cohabiting**

I don't know many examples of successful cohabitation between vegetarian and non-vegetarian. I'm not trying to be pessimistic or cynical – it can be done, but it's not easy. Looking on the bright side, a veg/nonveg relationship has the same success rate as any other - about 50%.

Mostly the vegetarian gives it up, or the non-vegetarian converts, or the relationship breaks up. That's because the one doing the cooking decides on the menu, or cooks to please the other. If the relationship falters, the other's food preferences become a battleground.

But, when it comes right down to it, living with someone who eats the same as you isn't as important as having a loving, supportive partner.

Veg living with non-veg needs tolerance and compromise to make it work. That means full communication, plenty of patience and good humor, and no angry or passive-aggressive behavior. That's a tall order for any marriage or partnership, let alone one with different diets. Sharing food is a major element in a relationship – just as important as sex, maybe more.

**Here are a few suggestions for minimizing the differences, and increasing the joy of eating together:**

- For every meal that you share, have a dish or two that you both like.
  - The non-vegetarian partner should agree to expand his/her food horizons and try new vegetables, grains and protein sources.
  - The vegetarian shouldn't push, or lecture about diet and nutrition.
  - Find as many dishes as possible that also work for your partner.
  - The vegetarian partner should tolerate having the non-veg cook meat, chicken or fish in the family kitchen. Have pots and dishes just for that, if it's an issue.
  - At the same time, the vegetarian shouldn't be expected to cook meat, unless he/she doesn't mind.
  - Freeze individual portions of each partner's favorite dishes to eat when time is short, or you can't agree.
  - Never make negative remarks about what the other wants to eat. Never let your fights be about food. Look at your differences as enriching your relationship.
- 

## **Veg and Non-Veg in the Workplace**

**Veg and non-veg working together is always --- interesting, because of politics. It's a lot like high school. We get to know our co-workers well, but we don't necessarily become friends. Tolerance and sensitivity aren't always abundant. There is competition, territoriality, power structure, and pecking order. It's a civilized free-for-all.**

Things are a little more PC than in days of yore, and there are laws about discrimination in the workplace, but we all know those don't always apply in daily practice.

The rules for non-vegetarians are almost the same as for vegetarians. So, you can take most of the following points, and apply them to your situation. Both veg and non-veg need to be very PC. You never know when it'll be your turn, or you need a favor, or the person you've offended gets promoted over you.

Keep a low profile. You don't have the right to force your point of view on others. But, you do have the right to become politically adept, and use that to your advantage.

Form alliances with people whose sensibilities match your own – they could be veg or non-veg. They may be people with special dietary needs - allergic, diabetic, lactose or gluten intolerant, those whose religion precludes eating certain foods, or any one who has had to cope with being different from the majority and who could be sympathetic. But don't assume.

### **Business events involving food:**

This could be as simple as going out to eat with co-workers, or getting take-out for a meeting. Use whatever influence you can, to eat at or order from a place where you can get what you need, while upholding the spirit of co-operation and compromise.

### **For vegetarians or those with food allergies:**

For big events such as company parties, sit-down dinners or buffets, go to the person in charge of food, and ask for an alternative meal. If you aren't the only one with special needs, get together with the others, and pick a spokesperson to work with the event coordinator on the menu. Offer practical, workable suggestions. If you are brushed off, there are several options:

- Appeal to the feeling level, as in, "I feel ---when you --- because ---I would like ----so that"
- Go over their heads – risky, as it may mark you as a complainer and a back stabber
- Network with your previously mentioned support group and have them back you up
- Not going will solve the food problem, but will also isolate you and hamper your success
- Attend, be sociable, eat what you can, and leave early so you can get something to eat

---

*When I worked for an agricultural finance organization, I went to a company event. It was a sit down dinner, and the main dish was an enormous medium-rare steak with potato and veg on the side. I pushed my steak onto the bread and butter dish, and laid my napkin over it. There was a shocked silence. I offered my steak to the table at large, but of course they already had far more than enough. The others were clearly offended, even though nothing was said. The waste of food alone would have offended them, although few could eat more than half of their enormous steaks.*

If I had to do it again, I might have come up with a good reason not to go to that dinner, because it hurt my standing in the company. For that event, it wouldn't have been possible to arrange a separate entrée for the lone vegetarian. If I had thought of it sooner, I might have arranged to have a plate brought to me without a steak. Or I could have eaten all but the meat. Or I could have opted not to take the plate when it arrived. None of these alternatives seemed do-able.

The fact is I was the only vegetarian among hundreds of committed meat eaters, working for an organization that supports industrial agriculture and massive consumption of meat. I was in the wrong place, and that's why I found myself in such an uncomfortable situation.

Since then I've learned to better integrate my vegetarian diet with my work and social life.

## **Social Events Involving Food**

These could be company events, seminars, eating with clients, church gatherings, celebrations, potlucks and parties. They aren't as intimate or friendly as dinner with friends or family. The social protocol is tighter. Less choice is possible. You aren't as likely to be well fed.

Planners of social events tend to assume that everyone will be perfectly happy eating the foods that they like. Or they just put together the cheapest, standard fare for the occasion, ensuring that nobody really enjoys the food.

Sometimes, a passionate foodie will volunteer, and create a memorable event. Whether or not you're a foodie, this section will help you navigate the rough seas of social eating.

**Survey the Field:** If you are the event coordinator, first gather a list of alternatives that fit the budget, and take an informal survey of attendees to see what would be the most popular choices of venues and menus. *It's amazing how often this simple but vital step is omitted!*

**The biggest food hazard at public events isn't unattractive, lukewarm, tasteless food. It's food poisoning.** Food that sits around for hours at lukewarm temperatures spoils quickly. Food poisoning is often mistaken for stomach flu, but I've heard that there isn't such a thing as stomach flu – that it's always food poisoning. And it can be fatal.

***Those in charge of the food at social events should always try to prevent food poisoning!*** If you suspect conditions that support food poisoning, stick with the salad and the bread.

Attendees should avoid making remarks about the other guests' food preferences. That could cause public scenes, and spoil the appetite, already compromised by the food.

## **Social Events for Vegetarians:**

If you have a say in the venue or the menu, use that to your advantage, but not to the disadvantage of the other participants. For example, pick a Thai or Indian or Italian restaurant, or one that you know has something vegetarian on the menu. Don't choose a vegetarian restaurant, unless everybody is vegetarian.

For events where the menu is pre-arranged: If it's a buffet, talk to the organizers about your food preferences, and see if they can arrange something for you, but be prepared to just pick out whatever you can eat. If it's a sit down, where everybody eats the same thing, you may be able to get a vegetarian option - ask well ahead of time about possible alternatives.

If you're in charge of the food, it's tempting to make everyone eat what you like. Which is why, to be fair to all, you must Survey the Participants. The final choice is up to you, but if it's unpopular, so will you be!

## **Social Events for Non-Vegetarians:**

If you're the event coordinator, it's tempting to ignore the minority as being too much of a pain in the neck to deal with. That's the great flaw of democracy. Take the survey, but be aware that the outcome will be heavily weighted in favor of the majority. It's up to you to ditch democracy, and exercise your royal prerogative to be sure that everybody gets something they can eat.

## **Conclusion:**

I've covered the main concerns of vegetarians and non-vegetarians eating together. I've given information, ground rules and advice for both to follow. But there are always situations that nobody could predict, and can't imagine how to deal with. For those times, here are a few tips:

1. **Think.** "What's going on here? What if I were on the other side? What would I want?"
2. **Listen.** Hear what the others think, and what they want. Tell them your point of view.

**3. What's the ideal outcome?** Find a solution together that you all can live with.

Does that sound simple and easy?

Well, it can be, with the addition of good will, humor, and flexibility.

**Attitude is the key to veg and non-veg sharing food successfully**

**The number one rule of attitude is live and let live**

**If you can't change your attitude, fall back on etiquette**

Thanks for reading "Veg and Non-Veg Eat Together." Whether you are vegetarian or non-vegetarian, I hope it has helped.

Happy Vegging!  
Judy Kingsbury,  
Savvy Vegetarian

**P.S. Feel free to forward this report to anybody you like!**

---

Your feedback is much appreciated! Send questions or comments about this report to:

[Contact Us](#)

Other free Savvy Vegetarian reports:

[Ten Tips for Beginning Vegetarians](#)   [Veg/NonVeg Eat Together](#)

[Socially Responsible Vegetarian](#)   [Vegetarian Nutrition](#)   [Beans Without Gas](#)

Useful SV Links:

['Organic Food: What Is It and Why Should We Eat It?'](#)

[Vegetarian Protein - Myth and Reality](#)

[Vegetarians, Are You Getting Enough Vitamin B12](#)

[Magnesium is Critically Important to Your Vegetarian Health](#)

[Essential Fatty Acids](#)

['Be Happy, Healthy And Vegetarian While Pregnant Or Breastfeeding'](#)

['Food Revolution' by John Robbins](#)

['Seeds of Deception' By Jeffrey M. Smith, 'Exposing Industry and Government Lies About the Safety of Genetically Engineered Foods'](#)

**Savvy Vegetarian freely supports a sustainable vegetarian lifestyle with**  
[advice](#)   [articles](#)   [recipes](#)   [resources](#)   [reports](#)   [svblog](#)

©Copyright Savvy Vegetarian, Inc. September 2005